

General Church Education



Introduction to the Five Churches

Lesson 1

The Five Churches

For ages 11-13

Introduction to the Five Churches

Teacher Background

The Writings for the New Church provide a record of how, throughout the ages, the Lord has accommodated Himself to changing human needs by establishing successive churches. The first four churches, the Most Ancient Church, the Ancient Church, the Israelitish Church and the Christian Church started with hope, reached their fullness and declined. However, the New Church will last forever.

Focus Points

- The Heavenly Doctrine presents an inner (spiritual) view of human history.
- The Lord continually accommodates His Word to the changing needs of humanity.
- There have been four churches: The Most Ancient Church, the Ancient Church, the Israelitish Church, and the Christian Church. The New Church is the fifth and final church.

Readings from the Writings

“The church is the Lord’s heaven on earth, and the Lord is All in all within the church, just as He is in heaven.” *Arcana Coelestia* 10151.3

“The primary principle of the church is to acknowledge God, to believe in God, and to love Him.” *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 281

The Lord provides that there is always a church on earth where the Word is read, and thereby the Lord is known. See *Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 110

“Since the creation of this earth there have been ... four churches, each succeeding the one before. This can be established from the historical as well as the prophetic books of the Word... The first church, which may be called the Most Ancient Church, came into existence before the flood, and its ending or departure is described by the flood. The second church, which may be called the Ancient Church, was in Asia and in parts of Africa; this came to an end and perished as the result of idolatrous practices. The third was the Israelite Church, begun by the proclamation of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, and continued through the Word written by Moses and the Prophets. This came to an end ... as the result of profaning the Word, a process which reached its full development at the time the Lord came into the world. That was why they crucified Him who was the Word. The fourth is the Christian Church founded by the Lord by means of the Evangelists and the Apostles.” *True Christian Religion* 760

Teacher Activity Overview

The student lesson offers the following activity choices:

Projects and Activities (see back of book for answers)

Revelations for the Five Churches

Match the name of each church with a description of its revelation. Then look at four quotations and identify which revelation they come from. Finally, circle the names of revelations the Lord is using to teach us today.

Cycles of Nature and the Cycle of the Five Churches

Natural cycles illustrate the cycle of the churches which have existed on the earth. Each church started out with promise, progressed, declined, and ended. Draw a cycle such as a day or the seasons in the circles provided. Write the name of one of the Five Churches next to each circle to show how each phase of the cycle illustrates a church.

Additional Project and Activity Choices for Parents and Teachers

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream and the Five Churches

Discover king Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its relation to the Five Churches by cutting out, assembling, and arranging five cubes to illustrate the story. Print on sturdy paper to use throughout these lessons. Online at <https://newchurchvineyard.org/file/project-nebuchadnezzars-dream-and-the-five-churches-daniel-2-true-christian-religion-760.pdf>

Know That I Am the Lord

Knowing and thinking about the Lord is important in bringing Him close to us. Think of things you have heard or read about the Lord and write them down. Available at: <https://newchurchvineyard.org/file/activity-know-that-i-am-the-lord-1-kings-20.pdf>

A Chart of the Five Churches

Complete a chart showing symbols which represent the five churches. Fill in the chart as you finish each lesson. Available at <https://newchurchvineyard.org/file/five-churches-chart-daniel-02.pdf>

Introduction to the Five Churches

Vocabulary

accommodate—to adapt something to meet others’ needs

equilibrium—a state of balance between the forces of heaven and hell

revelation—how the Lord reveals His truths to each church

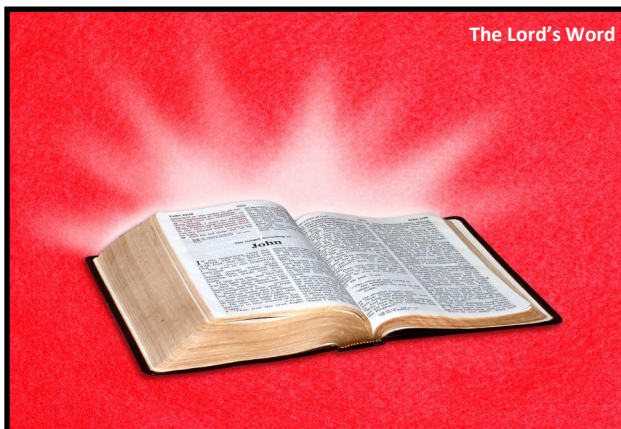
Introduction

Everyone who studies history examines past events from a particular perspective. For instance, a scientist might research the history of medicine by analyzing skeletal remains, while an archaeologist may investigate an ancient community by digging up its foundations. Even so, these methods of exploration can only reveal *outward* signs of human life. In contrast, the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church provides an *inner* view of history by revealing ways in which the Lord has lead the human race towards heaven since its beginning. This is because the Lord has always wanted people to experience the happiness of heaven.

The Lord Provides for Us to Choose the Life of Heaven

The Lord has always given people the ideas they need to choose the life of heaven. Noone can go to heaven without knowing them. However, the Lord also gives people the freedom to choose heaven themselves. So, people do not have to go to heaven, but are in “equilibrium”. As a result, people are also free to reject the Lord’s leading and choose hell. This is important because it means that everyone feels that their life is their own.

The Lord perfectly adapts His truth so that all people can find their way to heaven. He does this by providing a revelation that is perfectly suited to people’s minds. Since human needs change over time, the Lord continually adapts the way He communicates with us. To put it another way, the Lord accommodates Himself to changing human needs. To understand how this



works, think about what would happen if someone looked directly into the sun. It would damage their eyes and may even blind them! The Lord’s Truth and Love would similarly overwhelm them if He did not provide a revelation suited to their needs.

What is wonderful is that when we read the Word the Lord helps us see what we are ready to receive. So, young children understand the Word in one way, while older readers find deeper meaning in the same story.

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So as we read and reflect on the Word we can learn more and more about how the Lord loves and cares for us, and what we can do to receive His love and truth.

The Five Churches

There have been five major phases of religious history. The Writings call each historic period a “church”. The five churches are the Most Ancient Church, the Ancient Church, the Israelitish Church, the Christian Church and the New Church. The first four started with hope, reached a peak and declined. However, the Writings tell us that the New Church will last forever.

The Lord has given each church a revelation of truth especially suited to the people of that time. People who receive this revelation can know and love the Lord and can connect with Him in a special way. These people are called the Lord’s “specific” church. People in each era who do not have this revelation cannot enjoy this direct connection. But if they have some knowledge of God which they sincerely live by, they can connect with Him in a more general way. These people are called the Lord’s “universal church”.

The Revelations to the Five Churches

The revelations to the five churches took different forms. The people in the Most Ancient Church communicated with angels and learned about the Lord through visions and dreams. They did not have a written Word. The true ideas they learned were written on their hearts, and they responded with love for the Lord.

The next church, the Ancient Church, had a written revelation called the Ancient Word. This revelation contained stories with spiritual meanings. Most of that Word was lost. However, some stories from it are found in the first part of the book of Genesis. These include the stories

of creation, Adam and Eve, and Noah. The people of the Ancient Church were especially drawn to loving their neighbors.

The Lord gave the people of the Israelitish Church the Old Testament. This revelation traces the history of Israel from the time of Abraham through the exodus from Egypt under Moses and the conquest of Canaan, to the kings of Israel. This part of the Word contains the Ten Commandments which teach the way to heaven. The people of the Israelitish Church were moved to obey the laws of Israel.

The Lord gave the Christian Church the New Testament. It tells us about the Lord’s life and ministry in this world, and about His earliest followers, the twelve disciples. The Lord sent His disciples out to teach the news of His coming. The final book of the



Noah. Mosaic in Basilica di San Marco, Venice. Available from: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3d/Noah_mosaic [Accessed 6 June 2025]

New Testament, the book of Revelation, prophesies the coming of the New Church. Like the Ancient Church, people of the Christian Church were moved by love for their neighbors.

The revelation for the New Church is the Writings, or the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Jerusalem. This revelation discloses the inner meaning of the stories in the Old and New Testaments. It also lays out new teachings about the Lord, heaven and marriage. The doctrine of the New Church is pictured by the holy city New Jerusalem and the woman clothed with the sun in the book of Revelation. The special love held out to the New Church is a love of the Lord.



The Cycle of the Five Churches

Many natural phenomena occur in cycles. For example, the seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter always follow each other. Similarly, each day starts with dawn, followed by noon, afternoon, and night. The cycle starts again with a new dawn, and so on.

The Writings compare the five churches with these cycles. They associate the Most Ancient Church with spring, the Ancient Church with summer, the Israelitish Church with autumn, the decline of the Christian Church with winter, and the New Church with a new spring. They also tell us that each church represents a time of day. They link the Most Ancient Church with dawn, the Ancient Church with noon, the Israelitish Church with afternoon, the decline of the Christian Church with night, and the New Church with a new dawn.

Further Symbols

The Writings also tell us that the churches have developed like a person. The churches before the Lord's coming were like a person being born and educated, and the churches since His coming have been like a person growing in intelligence and wisdom, and becoming regenerate or getting ready to enter heaven.

The Writings also connect the five churches with a statue King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon saw in a dream (Daniel 2). They associate the Most Ancient Church with the statue's head and shoulders, which were gold. They link the Ancient Church with the statue's chest and arms, which were silver. They connect the Israelitish Church with the statue's belly and thighs, which were bronze. They relate the Christian Church to the statue's legs and feet, which were iron mixed with clay. However, the Writings compare the New Church with a huge rock cut without hands which crashed into the statue and destroyed it and then became a mountain that filled the earth.

The cycle of the five churches shows us how the Lord perpetually cares for people and leads them toward heaven by giving them the truths they are ready to receive.

Activity Overview

Projects and Activities (see back of book for answers)

Choose one or two.

Revelations for the Five Churches

Match the name of each church with a description of its revelation. Then look at four quotations and identify which revelation they come from. Finally, circle the names of revelations the Lord is using to teach us today.

Cycles of Nature and the Cycle of the Five Churches

Natural cycles illustrate the cycle of the churches which have existed on the earth. Each church started out with promise, progressed, declined, and ended. Draw a cycle such as a day or the seasons in the circles provided. Write the name of one of the Five Churches next to each circle to show how each phase of the cycle illustrates a church.

Revelations for the Five Churches

The Lord has always provided the truths people need to lead a heavenly life. As humanity changes, the Lord provides new forms of truth to meet these changing needs.

Draw a line from each church on the left to the description of its revelation on the right.

Church	Description of Revelation
1. Most Ancient Church	a. Written revelation with made up histories and stories filled with spiritual meaning. Most of this Word was lost.
2. Ancient Church	b. Tells the history of these people to teach us about the Lord and the way to heaven.
3. Israelitish Church	c. Tells what the Lord did on earth as Jesus Christ. Describes His miracles and what He taught people.
4. Christian Church	d. Tells the inner meaning of the Old and New Testaments and provides teachings about heaven and marriage.
5. New Church	e. Received heavenly ideas through angels and by perceiving Divine things when looking at nature.

Write the name of a revelation next to each quotation, listing four different revelations.

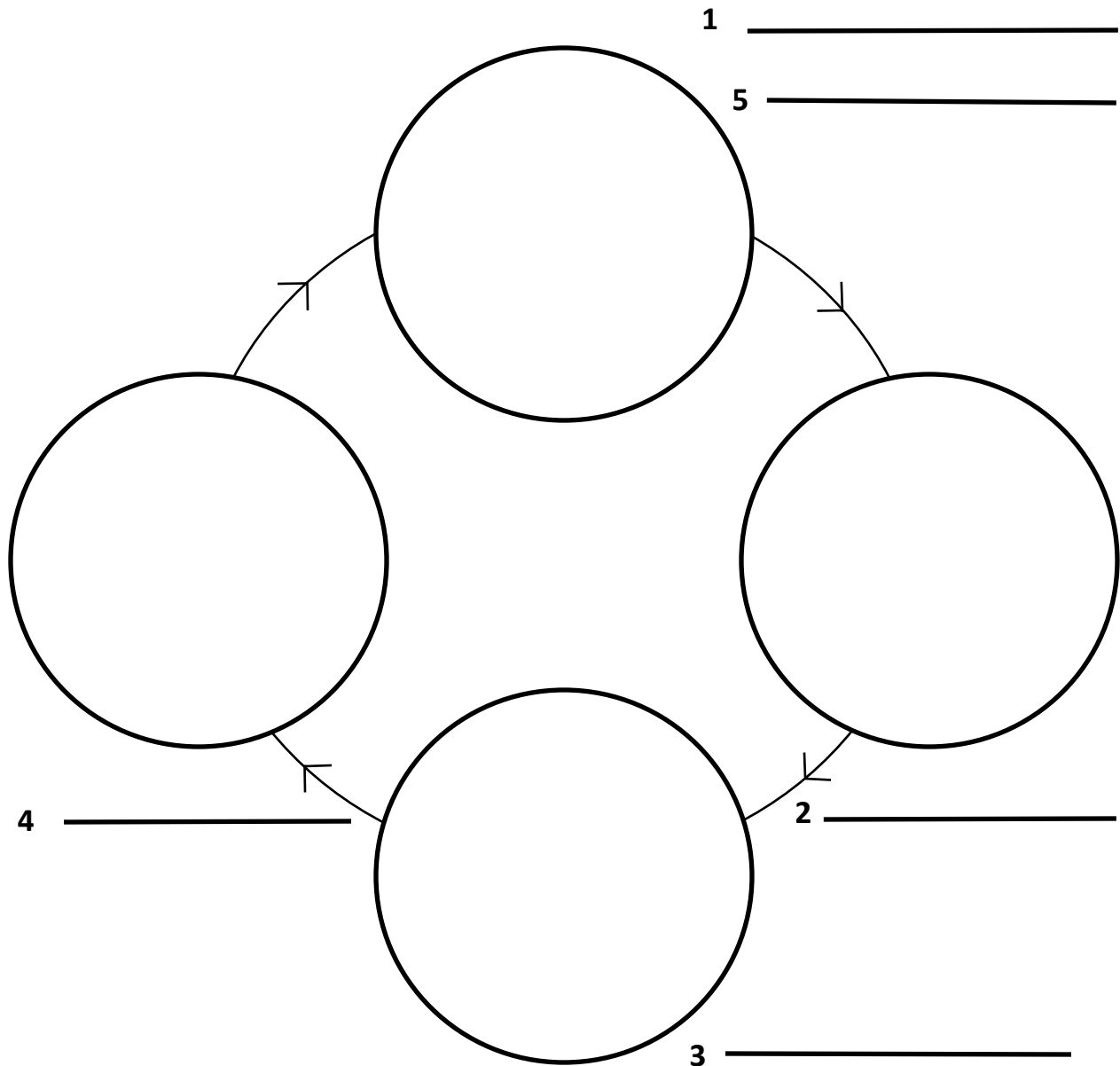
Revelation	Quotation
_____	1. The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in Truth.
_____	2. Then God said, “Let there be light”, and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night.
_____	3. The life that flows in from the Lord through the Word is the light of truth into our minds and the love of good into our will.
_____	4. “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

Cycles of Nature and the Cycle of the Five Churches

Natural cycles illustrate how each church that has existed on the earth started out with great promise, progressed, declined, and eventually ended.

On a larger scale, these cycles also illustrate the progression of the Five Churches. The progression starts with the Most Ancient Church and ends with the Christian Church. It does not include the New Church because the New Church re-starts the cycle.

Choose the cycle of the seasons or the cycle of a day and draw them in the circles below. Start with spring or morning at the top and move in a clockwise direction. Then write the name of a church on each of the numbered lines to show the spiritual history of the human race.



Answers

Lesson 1

Revelations for the Five Churches

1. e, 2. a, 3. b, 4. c, 5. d.

Old Testament; 2. Ancient Word; 3. Writings; 4. New Testament.