General Church Education

The Most Ancient Church

Lesson 2

The Five Churches

For ages 11-13

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The Most Ancient Church

Teacher Background

The Most Ancient Church comprised the first human beings to know and worship the Lord. They loved the Lord and let Him lead them to happiness and did not struggle with selfish feelings. They spoke to the Lord and angels and did not need a written Word. They saw the Lord everywhere and recognized Him in all creation. The Most Ancient Church existed in the Fertile Crescent, where food grew in abundance. People lived in tribes, households and families. Marriage was the chief source of their joy. They knew nothing of controlling others and had no government. However, people gradually closed their minds to the Lord and the Church slowly came to an end. The Word pictures its ending in the story of Noah's "flood" .

Focus Points

- In Most Ancient times people knew and loved the Lord and saw Him in all created things.
- They did not have a written Word but spoke to the Lord and angels.
- They lived in tribes and families, and loved marriage.

Readings from the Writings

"To people in the Most Ancient Church with whom the Lord spoke face to face, the Lord appeared as Man." *Arcana Coelestia* 49

"As regards the Word, this did not exist in most ancient times when the Church was celestial, for members of that Church had the Word inscribed on their hearts. Indeed the Lord taught them directly by way of heaven what good was and from this what truth was, and enabled them to perceive each of these from love and charity, and to know each of them from revelation. To them the very Word itself was the Lord." See *Arcana Coelestia* 3432.2

"Members of the Most Ancient Church ... talked to the Lord and to angels. They were also taught through visions and dreams, which to them were supremely delightful and blissful. They received perception from the Lord continually; and as a result ... when they thought from things in their memory they instantly perceived whether these were true and good." *Arcana Coelestia* 125

Their marriages were their chief sources of happiness and delight, and whatever admitted of the comparison they likened to marriage, in order that in this way they might perceive its felicity. See *Arcana Coelestia* 54

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Teacher Activity Overview

The student lesson offers the following activity choices:

Projects and Activities (see back of book for answers)

The Most Ancient Church True or False?

Read seven statements about the Most Ancient Church and decide whether they are true or false. Then think of a story from the Word in which a person learns through a dream. Compare this type of instruction with the way the Lord revealed Himself to people in Most Ancient times.

Correspondences in Nature

Whenever the most ancients looked at natural things they thought about their spiritual meaning. In time, people lost the "science of correspondences", as it was called, and no longer saw the Lord in the things around them. The Writings for the New Church restore this "science". Learn the correspondence of objects, and use your "spiritual eyes" to see nature like the most ancients!

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

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

The Five Churches Statue Twist

Create a model of Nebuchadnezzar's dream statue and twist the statue to match each segment with one of the five churches, a major figure in the Word, a time of the day, a season of the year, an age of a person's life, and various metals to which it corresponds. Available at https://newchurchvineyard.org/file/activity-the-five-churches-statue-twist.pdf

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The Most Ancient Church

Vocabulary

conjugial love—special love between a husband and wife
correspondence—a connection between spiritual and natural things
Golden Age—a period of peace, harmony and prosperity

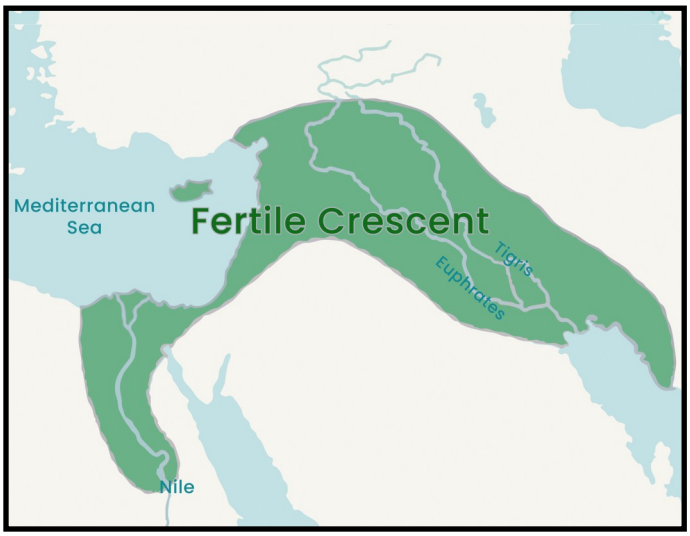
Introduction

From ancient times many people have thought the earliest period of human history was a "Golden Age", a time when everyone was happy, knew no evil and lived in harmony. The Writings say these ancient people were the first human beings to know and worship the Lord. They formed the first church on earth, the Most Ancient Church. The creation story in Genesis tells about the development of people to the point where they could be called a church. The church was called "Adam". The Garden of Eden pictures the happy and beautiful life which the people of this church had. Today, the area where they lived is called the "Fertile Crescent". It stretches from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in the west and the Nile River in the south. This area had plenty of water for cultivating fruits and vegetables.

Relationship with the Lord

Above all else, the people of the Most Ancient Church loved the Lord. They were wise and heavenly because they believed what the Lord told them and let Him lead them to happiness. They always trusted the Lord, and never worried about what might happen next because they knew He would take care of them. Due to this, the symbol of the Most Ancient Church is gold.

The most ancients saw and felt the Lord everywhere. They could see Him in the beauty and order of nature—in the sun, moon and stars, in plants and in mountains. They called this the "science of correspondences". Correspondences let them intuitively connect everything in nature with the spiritual idea it represented. They also recognized the Lord in each other. For instance, if someone did something good, they knew that the Lord had really done it, since all good comes from Him.



The Most Ancients and the Word

The people of the Most Ancient Church did not need a written Word to tell them

who the Lord was, and what He wanted them to do. To begin with, they learned from their parents. Later, the Lord taught them through dreams and visions. They also spoke with angels, just as you talk to your friends. Whenever they thought about what they knew or experienced, the Lord gave them a special perception about whether or not it was good or true. Therefore, the Word was "written on their hearts."

What Were the Most Ancients Like?

We do not know what the most ancients looked like, but when Emanuel Swedenborg saw them in the spiritual world they looked similar to the people of today. However, some things about them were quite different. For example, Swedenborg hardly noticed their breathing because they had an internal way of breathing. Due to this, they hardly ever spoke but had an inner perception of other people's thoughts. To communicate, they changed their facial expression by moving their lips and their eyes. So they could speak their mind through their face. Swedenborg noted that their faces were always "honest". In other words, they could not pretend to be something that they were not or say anything that disagreed with their thoughts.

Another difference is that the most ancient people were born wanting to be good. They did not struggle with selfish feelings but loved the Lord and the neighbor more than themselves! Of course, they had to grow up and choose to follow the Lord, but this was easy for them to do.

Worship

Worship is really a matter of how you live, and since the most ancients thought about the Lord at every moment of their lives, they were constantly worshiping Him. However, they also received instruction and took steps to show their love and respect for the Lord. For example, they showed their humility by prostrating themselves before Him in prayer. They also chose to worship in their tents or on mountains heights symbolizing the Lord. They sometimes faced the rising sun as they worshiped because the Lord is the Sun of heaven. In addition, fathers took steps to teach their families religious principles.

How Did the Most Ancients Live?



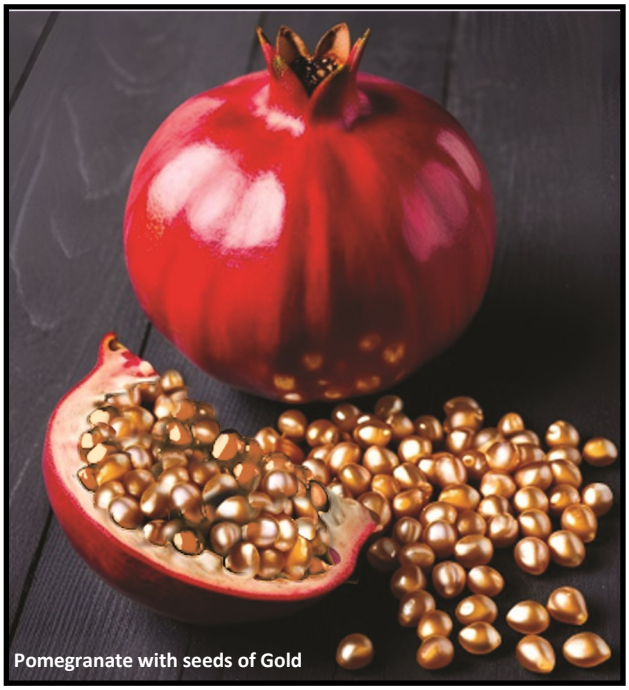
These most ancient people lived simply. They did not accumulate wealth or love possessions for their own sake but kept things that were useful. The sheep they raised provided them with milk and butter, and wool for making their tents and clothing. As shepherds they often moved their dwellings to find pasture for their flocks. Some were more settled and tilled the ground to grow crops like fruit, vegetables and grain.

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Marriage

Marriage was the chief source of their joy. People lived as happily married couples. Swedenborg spoke with a couple in the celestial or highest heaven who told him about "conjugial love", the special marriage love they treasured. This love involves each partner loving the Lord, their spouse and others more than themselves. The Writings compare this special love to the way in which the heart and lungs work together in the body.

Swedenborg also described their beautiful clothing. The husband wore an outer blue robe over a white wool tunic. The wife wore a purple dress over a beautifully embroidered linen blouse. During the visit, the angel gave Swedenborg a pomegranate with seeds of gold as a symbol of the Most Ancient Church.


Pomegranate with seeds of Gold

Social Structure

The people of Most Ancient Church did not live in cities. They did not have governments because there was no need to control others. Instead, they lived as tribes, households and families. When a family needed to make an important decision the father or patriarch would decide what to do. The relationship between the father and the family was like that of a parent and child. This social structure gave people an inner sense of peace.

The Fall of the Most Ancient Church

Despite this beautiful way of life, people gradually began to think differently. They wanted to feel more independent, and less connected with the Lord. They turned inwards and started seeing themselves as wise and intelligent. Consequently, they thought they were better than others. As they began to love themselves more than the Lord and other people, they closed their minds to the Lord and started to hate people who disagreed with them. They also began to eat meat. Adam and Eve's temptation described in Genesis represents this change or "fall". Yet, the Most Ancient Church did not end suddenly, but over many years. Its people divided into numerous groups, which are pictured in all Adam's descendants. Noah's "flood" pictures the final judgment which occurred at the very end of this church.

The Most Ancient Church and Our Lives

The Golden Age was like heaven on earth. We too can experience heaven on earth when we reject selfish and worldly thoughts. And like the most ancient people, we can only have genuine happiness when we are open to the Lord leading us through the Word and use the gift of conscience to help us walk with Him.

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Activity Overview

Projects and Activities (see back of book for answers)

Choose one or two.

The Most Ancient Church True or False?

Read seven statements about the Most Ancient Church and decide whether they are true or false. Then think of a story from the Word in which a person learns through a dream. Compare this type of instruction with the way the Lord revealed Himself to people in Most Ancient times.

Correspondences in Nature

Whenever the most ancients looked at natural things they thought about their spiritual meaning. In time, people lost the "science of correspondences", as it was called, and could no longer look at plants, animals, rocks, etc. and know their meaning. The Writings for the New Church restored this ability by teaching the meaning of natural things. Learn the correspondence of various objects, and then use your "spiritual eyes" to see pictures as the most ancients would have done!

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The Most Ancient Church True or False?

Read the following sentences. Circle T if you think a statement is true, or F if you think it is false.

T or F 1. The Most Ancients lived in the land of Canaan which, at that time, reached from the Nile River to the River Euphrates.

T or F 2. The life of the Most Ancients was like heaven on earth.

T or F 3. The period during which the Most Ancients lived is sometimes called the "Golden Age".

T or F 4. The Most Ancients had a written Word which they read every day.

T or F 5. The Most Ancients got everything they needed for food, clothing and shelter from plants and animals.

T or F 6. Members of the Most Ancient Church worshiped the Lord by burning incense in a stone temple.

T or F 7. The Most Ancients were happy as long as they looked to the Lord.

Learning Through Dreams

Can you think of a story in the Word in which a person learns through a dream? Write about the story in the space below. Compare this kind of instruction with the way the Lord revealed Himself to people in Most Ancient times.

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Correspondences of Nature

Whenever the most ancients looked at natural things they thought about their spiritual meaning. In time, people lost the "science of correspondences", as it was called, and could no longer look at plants, animals, rocks, etc. and know their meaning.

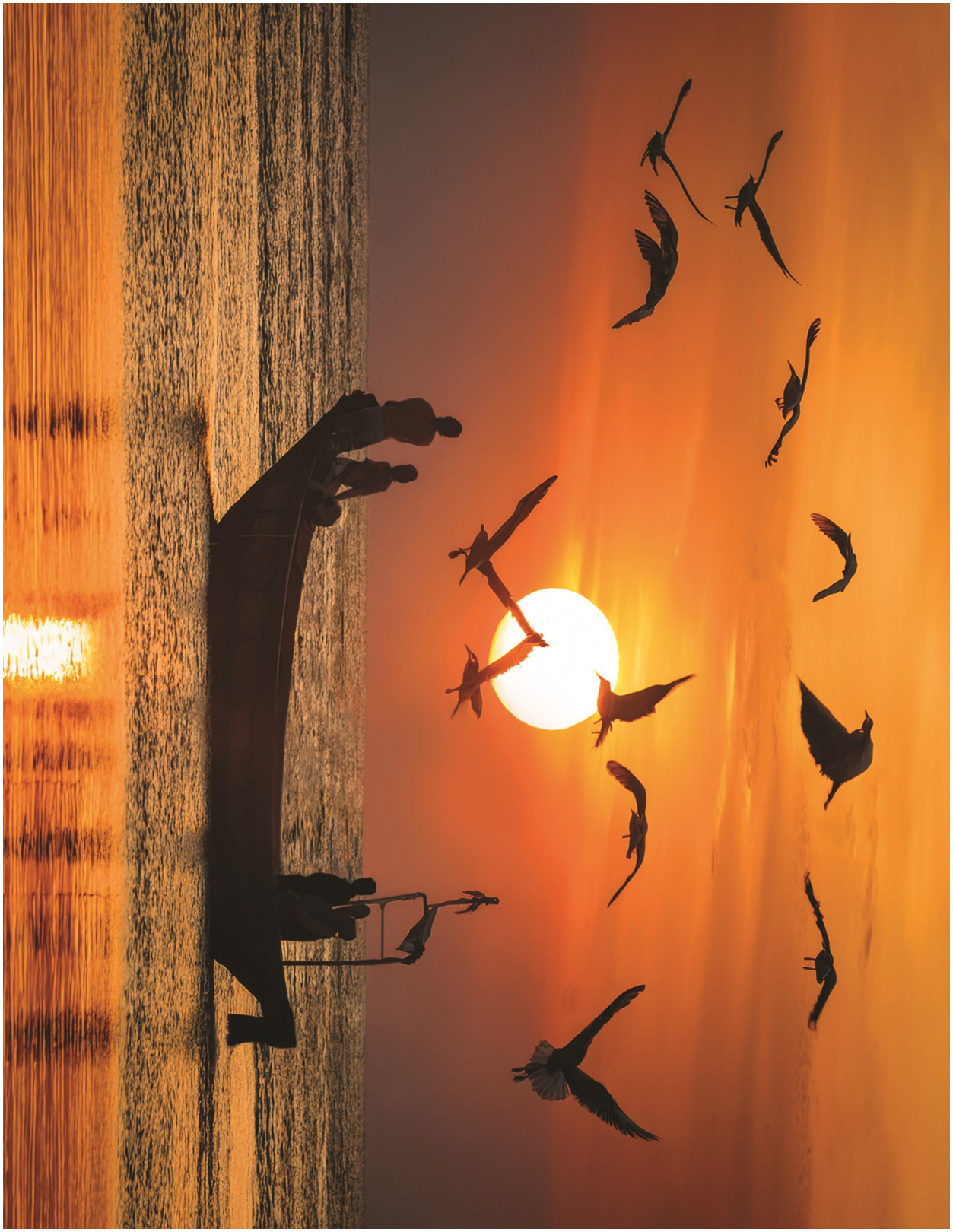
The Writings for the New Church restored this ability by teaching the meaning of natural things. Look at the chart, below, to discover the correspondence of various objects. Then examine the pictures on the following pages as the most ancients would have done! How does that change what you see?

Birds Affections that lift our thoughts	**High** Elevated above worldly concerns	**Rocks** Stable facts or truths
Boat Beliefs that transport or guide us	**House** The mind that 'houses' our thinking	**Seat (sit)** To be in or remain in a particular state
Clouds Obscure ideas	**Leaves** True ideas	**Spiritual heat** Heavenly love from the Lord
Darkness Ignorance	**Light** The Lord's Divine Wisdom	**Sun** The Lord's Divine Love
Doors Openings that lead to truth, goodness, or the Lord	**Lion** Spiritual strength and courage	**Sunset** The end of a church
Fishermen People who look into and teach earthly truths, then do the same with spiritual truths	**Low** Superficial, removed from the Lord	**Trees** Ideas that help us live in safe and orderly ways
Flowers Happy thoughts from being useful	**Plant** Knowledge about a specific subject	**Water** True ideas that cleanse the mind
Heat Divine Love going out from the Lord	**Roads** Ways to understand true ideas	**Window** Inner sight, ability to think

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Answers

Lesson 2

The Most Ancient Church True or False?

1. T, 2. T, 3. T, 4. F, 5. T, 6. F, 7. T.