

## **A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH**

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*Readings: Revelation 20:11-15 and 21:1-8*

This lesson starts with the picture of the Lord sitting on a white throne. He has come as a Judge. All the people who have died are raised up and stand before His throne. The evil people are sent into a fire that burns forever, and the good people are taken into heaven.

When people die, do they lie in their graves until some last day? Do they get judged by the Lord, and get thrown into a lake where they burn forever if they are evil? No. Sometimes people have thought that this is what will happen after death, and it makes them sad. It makes them think of the Lord as a frightening God who would let people burn up forever to punish them.

The Lord doesn't do that. He doesn't want to punish anyone. The fire that is spoken of here stands for the fire of bad loves. Some people give in to hatred, and are cruel to others, even kill them. Some people want money so much that they steal it. These feelings are like fires that burn inside of them. If they don't turn back to the Lord, these "fires" will burn inside of them forever. The Lord does everything He can to change them, and to persuade them to be loving people. Unfortunately some people choose not to follow Him and to love evil instead.

The lesson also says that the good people are raised up into heaven. In fact, this story is telling about the time when the New Church was started. It was while Swedenborg was alive. At that time the evil people in the spiritual world were judged, and the good people were taken into a special heaven, called "the New Christian Heaven," where they would be most wonderfully happy forever. That is why John said, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth."

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." What a beautiful, grand sight he saw. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was shown many things in the spiritual world. Right at the end of these visions the whole heaven and earth seemed to change, and then, coming down from that new heaven was a most beautiful city. It was the New Jerusalem. John must have been standing on the earth and seen it come floating down from heaven. How do you think he felt when he saw it? His heart must have been full of wonder and excitement because the Lord had let him see this great city.

Then all of a sudden the picture changed—for a moment. He saw in the place of the city a most beautiful bride—a young woman who was about to get married. Have you seen a lovely young woman who is dressed for her marriage? She

often wears a shining dress of white, with a long train. Her hair has been arranged especially for the wedding, and she has a crown on her head, and a veil across her face. She carries flowers in her hand. But the most lovely thing about her is the look on her face as she turns to the man she loves, the man who will shortly be her husband. Her face is full of love for him, for this is the happiest day of her life, and she knows that she will be happy forever, for she will be with him always.

Why did John see these two pictures in the same place? The Writings for the New Church tell us the answer. They say that both these pictures stand for the New Church which the Lord has now given to us. The Holy City stands for the teachings of the New Church. It is a great and strong city, with high walls to protect it, with twelve gates that are open for all who want to come in and live in it, with streets made of gold and a river and a “magic” tree in the middle of it. All these things tell of the wonderful teachings that are in the New Church—teachings that will help us to know the Lord and to follow Him.

But the picture of the bride is a picture that makes us happy. It makes our hearts feel glad. This is how we should feel about the New Church too. For the Lord has built His New Church so that He can be very close to us, and bring us great happiness. His Church is often called His Bride. For when we turn to the Lord, then He fills His church with love and happiness. It is a special happiness, such as people know when they are in love. It is a happiness that will last forever.

So the Lord’s New Church appears like a city—a strong city, a safe and good city to live in. That is because the teachings of the church are great and wonderful, they make us safe, and help us to live good lives.

But His church also appears as a bride—a most beautiful bride, dressed for her wedding with her husband. This is because the New Church brings the Lord very close to us, and brings us a most wonderful happiness which will be ours forever.

Remember, then, these two pictures. They are wonderful ones, shown us by the Lord two thousand years ago. They tell us how His church is strong and safe, and how it is beautiful. You will find that this is true as you go through your life and come more and more into His church.