

THE SEVENTH SEAL

Revelation 8; 9

This is a rather difficult lesson to teach, because the interest is almost entirely in the details of the correspondence. It is suggested that in each of the three younger classes the teacher, after taking up the review, read from the Word at least chapter 8 and let questions and comments help to determine the direction of the discussion for the rest of the period.

Doctrinal Points

Judgment is the laying bare of our real spiritual states when faced with the truth about ourselves.

It is always divine truth that judges us.

The Lord cannot forgive us unless we repent of our evils.

Notes for Parents

Our chapters for today contain visions of disaster, and again we must realize that it is spiritual and not physical disaster which is pictured. If we remember that the giving of the ten commandments from Mount Sinai was heralded by “thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled,” we shall see that the sounding of the trumpets from heaven is a symbol of the proclamation of divine truth, and its effect shows us the spiritual devastation which is wrought in the souls of men by indifference to divine truth and denial of it.

In this world it is possible for us to put on the appearance of goodness when we are not good at heart. We all like to have others admire us and we like to think well of ourselves. But goodness which is put on for this reason has no real goodness within it. It is all on the outside and is left behind with the body when we pass into the other world. There we are seen as we really are, and if we

have not learned to be genuinely humble and loving and God-fearing, our inner states appear in all their ugliness. Our selfish ambitions, our pride, our resentment against those who do not favor us, our desire to be served by others, are pictured by the strange and terrible locusts of John's vision, and the false reasonings by which we have defended our selfishness are pictured by the destructive horses and their riders.

There is another very important lesson in our chapter. We like to imagine that we can put off serious thinking about spiritual things—that the Lord is so good and loving that He will in the end overlook all the evils we may have allowed to grow up within us, and will save us in spite of ourselves. But in this vision we are told plainly that in spite of the revelation of the ugly and destructive character of the things in their souls, the evil did not repent.

The Lord is indeed all-loving, but He is also all-wise. He created us in His own image and likeness, which means that He gave us the power to reason and the power to choose freely what we want to think and to be. He cannot take these powers from us without destroying our humanity. He cannot force us to love Him, because love must be freely given or it is not love. We know how this is from our experience with our children. We can make them behave, but we cannot make them like to behave. Our life in this world is our time of choice, the seed-time when we make ourselves what we want to be. The judgment in the other world is merely the harvest time, when we reap what we have sown.



Primary

As we read this chapter to the little children, we need to keep in mind that the words are the Lord's and that the children are very close to Him as they listen. It is sometimes hard for us older people, whose minds are busy searching for the meaning of such a chapter as this, to realize that the children are not troubled about the meaning and are impressed and delighted by the words themselves, as they should be. Do not expect the children to remember the details from one reading, but after reading the chapter, take up the questions, having the children who are able to read find the answers.

We have been reading about some of the wonderful things which the apostle John saw in vision. The Lord was showing him a great moving picture acted out before his spiritual eyes. John did not understand what it all meant any more than you do, but he was told to write it down, and he obeyed.

Where was John when he was given the vision about which we read in the book of Revelation?

What book did he see?

With how many seals was it sealed?

Who opened the seals?

What did John see as the first four seals were opened?

The opening of the next two seals revealed the good and evil gathered to be judged.

Our lesson today is about the opening of the seventh seal.

What immediately followed?

What did the seven angels have?

What did the eighth angel have?

What happened when he filled it with fire and cast it into the earth?

What happened when the first angel sounded his trumpet?

What happened when the second angel sounded?

What happened when the third angel sounded?

What was the name of the star?

What happened when the fourth angel sounded?

What did the angel who flew through the midst of heaven say?

The sad things that happen in our chapter are pictures of things that happen in our minds and hearts when we are selfish and unwilling to learn and obey the Lord's truth.

Many years later, when the people of the Christian Church had gone through hard experiences and those who were good had learned that they needed more knowledge, which only the Lord could give them, the Lord showed to a man named Emanuel Swedenborg what John's vision meant, and commanded him to write it down. So now you will be able, as you grow older, to understand it.

Even now you can know that John's vision is a picture of the way in which the wonderful love and truth and power which the Lord is always offering us is received by different kinds of people. Good, unselfish people are made happy by it, but bad, selfish

people hate it and are tormented by it.

Does this seem strange? When you are feeling naughty and trying to get your own way, how are you likely to behave when your mother tries to show you what is right?

In this world we can cover up our ugly feelings and thoughts, but in the other world they all come out and everyone sees them.

Junior

The Junior notes suggest a line of thought in which this lesson can be meaningful for this age group. The thought of this meaning can be introduced in connection with the review and then developed after the striking pictures of the text have had their effect.

In our lesson today we have the beginning of the completion of John's vision with the opening of the seventh seal, which pictures the complete openings of the Word so that people can really be sure of what it teaches. Look up John 9:39-41. We all often do wrong things without realizing that they are wrong. Although such things may have very bad consequences, we feel that we shall be forgiven because we did not mean to do wrong. But when we know a thing is wrong and do it anyway, we do not want anyone to find it out because we know we are to blame. We like to think well of ourselves and to have other people admire us. When the real truth is known so that we cannot help seeing how selfish and foolish we have been, the pretty picture of ourselves which we have built up is destroyed. It is this kind of destruction which John was shown in his vision, and these two chapters will mean something to you if you will think that the things which are overthrown or burned up or drowned one after another as the trumpets sound are our ideas of our own goodness and wisdom.

We are told in chapter 7 that before the seventh seal was opened all the good people were marked or "sealed" by command of the Lord so that they would not be hurt by the things which were about to happen. Swedenborg tells us that the silence in heaven when the seventh seal was opened is an expression of the amaze-

ment of the angels when they saw how bad men of the church on earth really were.

How many angels did John see standing before God?

What were given to them?

What did still another angel have?

What happened when he cast his censer full of fire to the earth?

In our two chapters how many of the trumpets are sounded?

In the Word the sounding of a trumpet is always a symbol of the proclaiming of truth from the Lord. Look up Exodus 19:16 and read what happened just before the ten commandments were given from Mount Sinai. The blowing of the seven trumpets, like the opening of the seven seals, means the appearance of more and more of the truth. All these scenes are like a great moving picture which the Lord gives us to make us stop and think and not let our own hearts and minds get into such a state that we cannot bear to face the truth. Notice especially the last two verses in our lesson. Men and women can become so settled in selfish and evil ways that even disaster does not make them want to change themselves. Think how hard it sometimes is even now for you to acknowledge that you have been wrong and begin to behave differently. And the longer we go on closing our eyes to our own faults and just trying to have our own way the harder it is to change. But when you are young, good habits are just as easy to form as bad ones, and if we are wise, we can see that it is goodness and not selfishness which brings happiness to us as well as to others.

Intermediate

Much more can be done with this class on the general meaning of the two chapters, and the young people should be introduced to the thought that this is a picture not only of judgment on our individual lives but specifically of the Last Judgment, which took place at the time of the Second Coming. This is especially necessary as a preparation for the lessons that follow.

In the last lesson only the first six of the seven seals on the book of the Word were opened. Chapter 7, which we have not assigned, tells how the Lord, before allowing the seventh seal to

be opened, had all the good souls sealed with His seal so that they could not be hurt by the things which were about to happen. There is a very plain and simple lesson for us in this. Other people cannot make us bad against our wills and we should never blame other people for our own weakness, because when we really want to do right, the Lord always makes it possible for us.

The opening of the seventh seal is the final revelation of the Lord's truth. You remember from our lessons on the Creation story that the six days represented the stages or preparation and development of the first church formed from the human race on earth, and the seventh day represented the completion of this development. The number seven signifies "all," and we think of it as a holy number because we connect it with the sabbath and because it is so often used of holy things in the Word. So here six seals are opened, and then there is a pause before the opening of the seventh. Then when the seventh seal is opened, two chapters are given to the story of the sounding of the first six of the seven trumpets, and then a new chapter and series of visions begins with the sounding of the seventh.

A trumpet in the Word represents "Divine truth manifested and revealed out of heaven." Look up Exodus 19:16, where the voice of a trumpet heralded the giving of the ten commandments from Sinai. When Joshua took Jericho, you remember, the people marched around the city, following the priests who bore the ark, once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day, and then the priests blew their trumpets and the walls of the city fell. And perhaps you remember how in the story of Gideon (Judges 7:16-22) each of Gideon's men was given a trumpet and a lamp within a pitcher and when Gideon sounded his trumpet, all the others broke their pitchers so that their lights appeared suddenly, and blew their trumpets, and the enemy fell into confusion and was easily overcome.

In our lesson today, as each trumpet is sounded, destruction of one kind or another follows. We have seen that this vision given to John is a picture of the judgment which was to take place at the

end of the first Christian Church. We have studied the successive churches on earth—the Most Ancient, the Ancient, and the Israelitish—and have seen how each began with a new revelation of truth from the Lord, how this truth was received and used by the good and falsified and rejected by the evil, and how in each church the evil gradually increased until the Lord had to step in to save the remnant of good people and form them into a new church. The coming of the Lord into the world was the beginning of the first Christian Church, but the Lord Himself told the disciples (Matthew 24) that it would follow the same course as the others and that He would have to come again before the final Christian Church on earth could be established.

So the destructions which take place in our two chapters are a revelation of how falsities and evils gradually destroyed truth and goodness in the souls of most of the people in the first Christian Church. These people all thought that because they belonged to the church and professed to believe in the Lord, they would go to heaven. But you know that, although we can often hide our real feelings and thoughts while we live in this world, we have to leave all this “protective covering” behind us with our bodies when we die. The judgment is nothing more than the laying bare of our real spiritual states in the other world when we come face-to-face with the truth about ourselves.

We have not tried to take up the details of these chapters in a Sunday school lesson because there are too many of them. They are, however, all explained in Swedenborg’s works *Apocalypse Revealed* and *Apocalypse Explained*, which you will want to study after you are grown up. You might notice now, however, that the first four destructions took place in the earth, the sea, the rivers and fountains, and finally the sun, moon, and stars, and you remember from other lessons that the earth pictures our life as to goodness, the sea the knowledges of truth gathered in the memory, the rivers and fountains truth as it comes to us from the Lord, and the sun, moon, and stars our love for the Lord, belief in Him, and knowledge about Him. In each case it is said that a third

part was destroyed, and Swedenborg tells us that a third has the same meaning as the number three which refers to the three planes of the soul: will, thought, and act. So the sounding of these first four trumpets shows how the evil in the church destroyed in themselves all love, truth, and goodness.

In chapter 9, with the sounding of the fifth and sixth trumpets, the hells were opened to show the quality of those in them and the kinds of harm they do. Swedenborg tells us that those exposed by the fifth trumpet are those among the evil in the church who have considered themselves learned and wise and have desired to rule others, while those exposed by the sixth trumpet are those who did not pose as wise but who chose to believe that they could live as they pleased and nevertheless be saved in the end because they professed to believe in the Lord.

As we read chapters like this, we wonder how anyone could see such terrible destructions and still choose to reject the Lord's truth. But read the last two verses of our lesson. We should learn from this that while we may be kept by punishments from committing outward evil deeds, our desire to commit them cannot be changed except by our own free choice. No one can be driven to love and serve the Lord or to love the neighbor.

Basic Correspondences

a trumpet = divine truth manifested
and revealed out of heaven

Senior

This is a good lesson in which to arm the young people against the arguments of fundamentalists concerning the Second Coming and the Last Judgment. Our young people need such protection and we owe it to them. There are also in these chapters things which will help them to understand the chaotic conditions in the Christian world of today and to chart their course wisely and with charitable insight into the problems of young people in other churches.

We have seen that the four horses and their riders which appeared as the first four seals were opened picture different ways in which

people look at the Word of the Lord. And the opening of the fifth and sixth seals revealed the general states of the good and of the evil with respect to their desire for divine truth.

There are many people in the Christian world who think that there is to be a judgment day on this earth, when the various prophecies in the Bible will be literally fulfilled, the dead will be raised, the evil cast into hell, and the good taken up to heaven. These people forget that some of these same prophecies were made in the Old Testament concerning the first advent and they were not literally fulfilled, although they believe the Lord came. The prophecies were all spiritually fulfilled, however, as all the prophecies in the New Testament will be.

The opening of the seventh seal marks the beginning of a long series of symbolic pictures of the judgment on the evil. There are two applications of these visions, one to the experience of the individual when he enters the other life, and the other to the general judgment on the first Christian Church which took place at the time of the Second Coming of the Lord in the middle of the eighteenth century. It is in this sense that it is called “the last judgment.” We have seen in our lessons that at the end of each of the great dispensations—the Most Ancient, the Ancient, and the Israelitish Churches—there was a judgment, when the states of the people were revealed and the remnant of good people were separated from the rest, given a new revelation, and became the nucleus of a new church. In the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew the Lord Himself tells His disciples the same thing will happen to the first Christian Church when He comes again “in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” And this prophecy is directly connected with our lesson for today by verse 31 of that chapter: “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Read here the first three verses of chapter 7 of Revelation. That chapter, which we have not included in our assignment, tells us that before the Lord permitted the seventh seal to be opened, He

had all the good people sealed with His own seal so that the destruction which was to follow should not touch them.

From the book of Revelation we learn that judgment is no instantaneous process accomplished by a fiat of the Lord when one enters the spiritual world or at the end of a church on earth. We see this in the fact that there are many religions still in the world which are remnants of the Ancient Church, and the Jewish Church is still with us, and the first Christian Church is all around us. Only the Most Ancient Church has been completely removed from the earth. But in these churches which remain changes are going on, which we can see and understand in the light of our teachings. The Last Judgment took place in the spiritual world. Its effects on earth appear only gradually.

The same is true of our judgment as individuals. When we pass into the other world, our final choice has actually been made, but we are not immediately raised to heaven or cast into hell. If we have chosen to acknowledge and obey the Lord and to give up our own desires and thoughts whenever we found them to be contrary to the teaching of the Word of God, we shall find ourselves “sealed” with the divine seal, that is, protected against the assaults of evil spirits in the intermediate world, instructed, and led gently and happily toward the heavens. But if we have rejected the Lord’s guidance and insisted on following our own way, the progressive destruction represented in our chapters will take place. Throughout the Word the sounding of a trumpet pictures the proclamation of divine truth, and it is in the light of divine truth that our evils appear and the falsities of the reasonings by which we have justified our selfishness are exposed. And we do not change from evil to good, as we learn from the last two verses of our lesson. We have to fit ourselves for the enjoyment of heavenly happiness. If the delights we crave are selfish, they can be found only in the hells.

The details of these visions are too many to be considered in a lesson, but they are all explained in the writings. An example follows the Adult notes.



Adult

The comparison of the gradual development of man into a church, as pictured in the Creation story, with the gradual judgment upon the man who has destroyed the church in himself is an interesting discussion topic. Another is Swedenborg's treatment of the Reformed Church, which we call Protestant. We all need to face this subject frankly, realizing that in talking about the first Christian Church we are speaking of it as an organization founded on certain doctrines and that we are not pronouncing judgment on any of its present members. We should hold the same thought in speaking of the Church of the New Jerusalem in the world. It is an organization founded on certain specific doctrines. If we profess to belong to it, we have the responsibility of studying and trying to live those doctrines. Our souls take their form from what we really believe, and it is this form which is revealed in the light of divine truth when we pass into the spiritual world.

We might begin our study of this lesson by noting some of the striking parallels it presents with other parts of the Word. We are familiar with the fact that the Bible begins and ends with accounts of the great river of water of life and the tree of life. We also realize that the great dragon of Revelation 12 is "that old serpent" which we first meet when he tempts Eve in the Garden of Eden. But we do not often carry our comparison further. Consider, then, the six days of creation, picturing the stages of the development of man into a true church, with the seventh day marking the completion of the process; then think of the opening of the six seals and the blowing of the six trumpets—with the seventh in each case set off by itself and signifying completeness—and realize that these mark the stages in the judgment upon those who reject the Lord and so refuse to be built into a church. Again, note that in the first chapter of the Bible we read that the sun, moon, and stars were created on the fourth day and that in our chapter on the judgment it was the sounding of the fourth trumpet which heralded the destruction of the sun, moon, and stars. Remember the "voice of the trumpet exceeding loud" which was heard from the mount just before the giving of the ten commandments from Sinai. Then there is the familiar story of the capture of Jericho, when the children of Israel marched around the city once each day for six days

and seven times on the seventh day following the priests who bore the ark, and the walls fell when the priests sounded their trumpets. And there were seven priests—seven trumpets. In the story of Gideon, the Midianites were thrown into confusion by the sounding of the trumpets and the sudden flashing out of the lights as the pitchers which had hidden them were broken. And in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew—the so-called “little Apocalypse”—verse 31 tells us that at the Second Coming of the Lord—when He is to come “in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”—“he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” Compare this with Revelation 7:1-3. There are also many verses in the Prophets in which the sounding of a trumpet spells victory for the righteous and doom for the evil.

Even without a knowledge of correspondence it should be evident that these parallels are too many to be accidental, and that there is some meaning behind the letter, but in the light of the New Age we can see this meaning clearly. The sounding of a trumpet, we are told, represents “Divine truth manifested and revealed out of heaven” (AE 262). It is in the light of truth that evils and falsities are recognized in all their destructive and deadly character. We all tend to go along blithely believing what we want to believe, what is convenient for us to believe. This tendency in the Christian Church was evident as early as the time of the giving of the book of Revelation, as we learn from the Lord’s messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor. The Second Coming took place—had to take place—when the perversion of the Lord’s teachings had become so widespread and so entrenched that the simple good in the Christian Church could no longer find out the truth. The same situation existed, we remember, at the end of the Israelitish Church when the Lord made His first Advent. So while our chapters, like all the Word, have their application to the judgment on the life of every individual when he comes into the spiritual world, they refer specifically to what is called “the last judgment,” the judgment which was executed in the spiritual world at the time of the Second

Coming upon all who had been gathered into that world from the Christian Church since its beginning. We are told in the writings that the permanent Christian heavens could not be formed until the Word had been opened, and that the good who entered the spiritual world from the first Christian Church were in the meantime kept in the part of the intermediate world which is called the “lower earth,” while the evil were gathered in “imaginary heavens.” The Last Judgment, made on the basis of the opened Word, was executed upon these; the imaginary heavens were dispersed; the evil, given to see their own actual states, found their places in the hells; and the good were raised from the lower earth and formed into permanent Christian heavens. The dispersion of the imaginary heavens is what is pictured by Revelation 6:14. The condition of the good and their protection by the Lord until the completion of the judgment is described in Revelation 6:9-11 and 7:1-3.

A very brief statement of the general meaning of our two chapters for today is given at the beginning of these chapters in the *Apocalypse Revealed* and is quoted here to help in our study of these chapters:

On chapter 8: “The church of the Reformed is here treated of, as to the quality of those therein who are in faith alone: the preparation of the spiritual heaven for communication with them (vers. 1-6). The exploration and minifestation of those therein, who are in the interiors of that faith (ver. 7). Of those who are in its exteriors (vers. 8, 9). What they are as to the understanding of the Word (vers. 10, 11). That they are in falsities and thence in evils (vers. 12, 13).”

On chapter 9: “Of the exploration and manifestation of the states of life of those in the church of the Reformed, who are called learned and wise from the confirmation of faith separated from charity, and of justification and salvation by it alone (these are treated of from verses 1-12).

“Of the exploration and manifestation of those therein, who are not so learned and wise, and are in faith alone, and who live as they please (from verses 13-19).

“Lastly, of those therein, who know nothing but that faith is

the all by which man is saved, and not anything besides (verses 20, 21).”

From this we see that in this first part of John’s vision the judgment is upon those who have confirmed themselves in the doctrine of “faith alone,” the doctrine on which the Reformed, or Protestant, Church is founded. Some of the later visions deal with the Roman Catholic Church. We need to keep clearly in mind that Swedenborg is talking of the first Christian Church in its various divisions according to the doctrinal basis on which these divisions were made and developed. We sometimes choose to ignore such doctrinal foundations and to assume that “nobody believes those things anymore.” But this is mere wishful thinking, growing, perhaps, out of our inclination to seem broad-minded and ecumenical. When people refuse to think about the teachings on which their church technically stands and continue to belong to it, believing anything they please, their allegiance is mere lip-service to a name and has no effect on their lives. There are plenty of people today who believe very firmly in the doctrine of faith alone although many of them do not live it. But any one of us may indeed be living in faith alone if we ride along on the assumption that we do not need to study the Lord’s truth and live according to it—that the Lord is so kind that He will save us no matter what we think or do. We need to read our two chapters very thoughtfully in this light, for the destruction pictured in them is very real. It is the gradual destruction of all genuine goodness and truth in the soul of the person who chooses to lead himself instead of to be led by the Lord.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed, nn. 410-411: “*And the name of the star is called Wormwood; and the third part of the waters became wormwood, signifies the infernal falsity from which their own intelligence is derived, and by which all the truths of the Word are falsified. By ‘a star’ is signified their own intelligence springing from pride from infernal love . . . By ‘name’ is signified its quality . . . ; by ‘wormwood’ is signified infernal falsity concerning which something will be said presently; by ‘waters’ are signified truths . . . , here the truths of*

the Word, because the subject relates to faith; by ‘the third part’ is signified all . . . A Christian man has spiritual life from no other source than from the truths of the Word, for in them there is life; but when the truths of the Word are falsified, and man understands and views them according to the falsities of his religion, then spiritual life with him is extinguished. The reason is, because the Word communicates with heaven; therefore when it is read by man, the truths therein ascend into heaven, and the falsities to which truths are adjoined or conjoined, tend towards hell, whence there is a rending asunder, whereby the life of the Word is extinguished. But this is the case only with those who confirm falsities by the Word, but not with those who do not confirm them. I have seen such rendings asunder, and have heard the noise like that of wood split by the fire on a hearth.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What was the book sealed with seven seals? *the Word*
J. Who opened it? *the Lord*
P. What did John see when the first seal was opened? *white horse*
P. What were the colors of the other three horses? *red, black, pale*
J. What was the rider on the pale horse called? *Death*
J. Who were seen when the fifth seal was opened? *the good under the altar*
J. Who were seen when the sixth seal was opened? *the evil*
J. What did these last people ask? *let the rocks hide us*
J. What happened immediately after the seventh seal was opened? *silence*
P. How many angels did John see standing before God? *seven*
P. What were given them? *trumpets*
P. What did an eighth angel have? *gold censer*
J. What did he first do with his censer? *put incense on it*
J. What did he then fill it with? *fire*
P. What happened when he cast it to the earth? *thunder, lightning, earthquake*
J. In the two chapters of our lesson how many trumpets were sounded? *six*
J. Can you tell some of the things that happened? *hail, fire, mountains into sea, star fell, third of sun darkened*
J. What was the name of the star that fell from heaven? *Wormwood*
J. What two names are given for the angel of the bottomless pit? *Abaddon, Apollyon (destroyer)*
P. Did the people to whom all these things happened repent? *no*
I. What do these two chapters treat of in their internal sense? *the gradual destruction of truth and goodness in first Christian era*
S. What is it which determines whether we go to heaven or to hell? *whether we follow or reject the Lord's guidance*