

General Church Education



**FAMILY LESSONS: REVELATION 4
JOHN'S VISION OF THE
THRONE IN HEAVEN**

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Family Lesson 34 – A

John's Vision of the Throne
Revelation 4

FAMILY TALK:
THE LORD IN HEAVEN

by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss

John was called the disciple whom Jesus loved, and while Jesus was on earth he often saw Him and talked with Him. In our story today, however, John for the second time saw Jesus in heaven. Earlier in the book of *Revelation* it is said he saw Him in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. Now he saw Him sitting on a wonderful throne in heaven, with a green rainbow around His throne and a sea of glass in front of Him, and 24 elders (that means older people) sitting around Him. Between the elders and the Lord were four living creatures—one like a calf, one like a lion, one like an eagle, and one like a man.

John saw the Lord in heaven. That makes him a very lucky man, because very few people have seen the Lord in heaven, and been able to tell us about it. Swedenborg was one of those few people, and he is able to tell us in the Writings for the New Church what the Lord looks like when the angels see Him.

What would the Lord look like if your spiritual eyes were opened now and you saw Him in heaven? Probably like John saw Him—He would be wearing a shiny white robe, and a golden girdle would be around His chest. His eyes would seem to be flaming, because He loves people so much and He sees so clearly.

Do you know what the look on His face would be? Would He be stern or cross or serious? The Writings tell us the answer. They say that the Lord's face is "mercy, peace, and every goodness." His face is mercy—He is very gentle with and sorry for anyone who is unhappy. His face is peaceful—you would feel a gentle glow from it that made you feel peaceful too. His face has every goodness in it. If you could look at it you would probably be unable to speak because you would feel such goodness coming forth from Him and touching your heart.

Sometimes the Lord appears in heaven for the angels to see, and when He does that is how He looks. And their hearts are filled with wonder and love because they always knew the Lord was goodness itself and kindness itself, but when they see Him they realize that He is good and kind far beyond what they had imagined. We are told that when angels see the Lord like that they fall down on their faces before Him. He is so wonderful they feel they are not good enough to look at Him.

In fact, John did that. When he first saw the Lord he fell at His feet as if dead, and the Lord raised him up and spoke to him, and told him to write the book of Revelation.

In the story we are reading the Lord came down into heaven to help all the good people of heaven and earth. He came down because evil people had been hurting the good ones, and there had been much unhappiness. Therefore He sat on a throne as a judge, one who would make sure that the evil people who had been doing this no longer had the power to hurt anyone who was good.

How do you think He looked to the evil people? I think He tried to look like He always does—someone who is merciful and peaceful and completely good. But the evil people didn't like that because good people help each other. The evil people didn't want a God near them who would stop them hurting and ruling over others. They felt He was in the way. They felt He was a nuisance. They were afraid of the great power of His goodness. They probably thought of Him as a harsh, stern God who didn't love them at all. It wasn't true, but He was going to stop them doing evil things, and they loved doing evil things. Therefore He seemed to be their enemy. They couldn't see the wonderful love in His face, and His mercy, and His peace, and His goodness.

But you can. If you close your eyes tonight and say the Lord's Prayer, try to have a picture of Him in your mind. Try to see Him on that throne, with a white, shining robe on and a golden girdle around His chest. Picture His face—the most gentle and peaceful and good face you can possibly imagine. And when you have that picture in your mind, tell yourself that the Lord looks even better than that. Try to feel His mercy, and His peace, and His goodness reaching out to you—for He is truly right there with you, and He can and will give you these things, if you ask.

Then pray to the Lord that He will lead you so that one day you will actually see His face in heaven, and feel the wonder which John felt, and which Swedenborg felt, and which all the angels feel when they see Him looking upon them, and know how much He loves them.

John's Vision of the Throne
Revelation 4
LEVEL 1 – A PICTURE OF THE LORD

MATERIALS NEEDED

Scissors and gluestick
Crayons
Green and blue construction paper (different shades of each if possible)
Large piece of white construction paper (12x18)
Plastic wrap
Optional: shiny pieces of green and blue paper

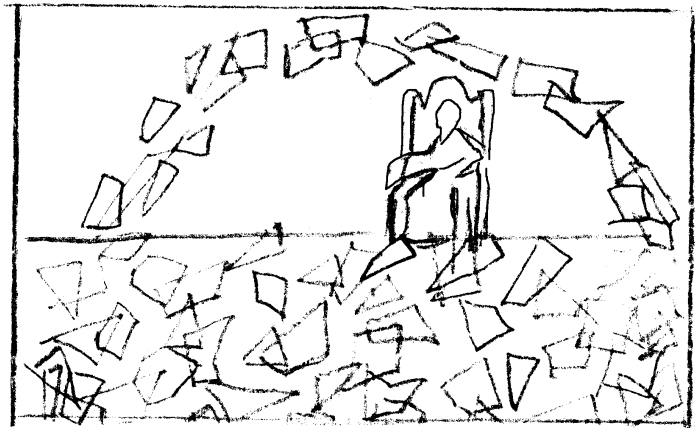
Read the following to your child:

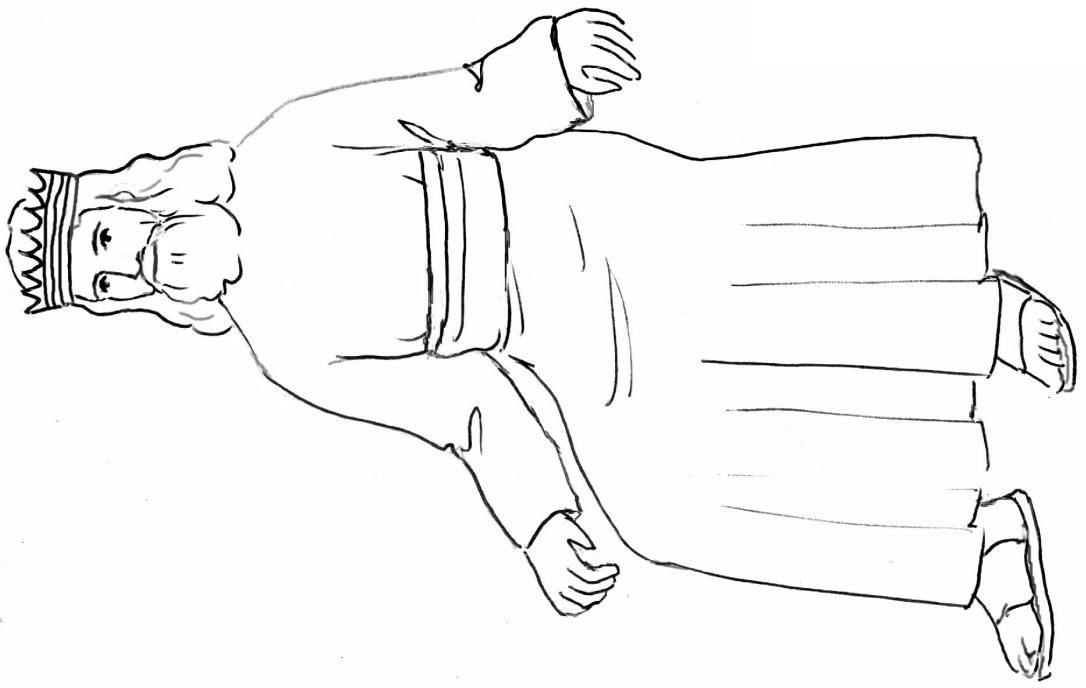
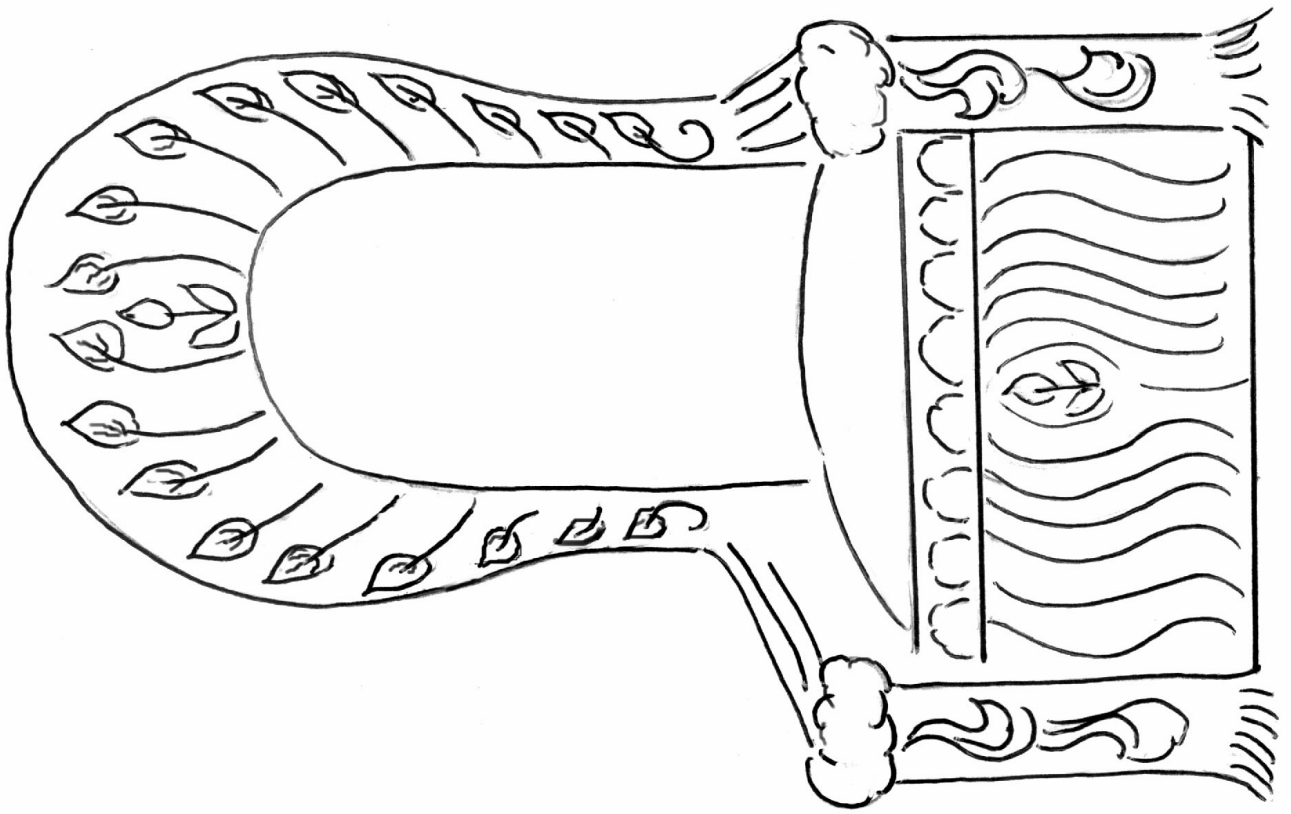
I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. . . . A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. . . . Before the throne was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

(Revelation 4: 2,3,6)

Now help your child:

1. Cut out pieces of blue and green paper, approximately 1" x 1", explaining that these will be the sea and the rainbow. If your child is too young to handle scissors, you may want to cut the pieces yourself ahead of time.
2. Spread glue on the bottom half of the white paper, and then lay the blue pieces out on the glue to make a mosaic sea.
3. Next, make a rainbow shape over the sea with the gluestick. Spread the green pieces of paper out on the glue.
4. Color the picture of the Lord and throne. Cut out the pictures, spread glue on the backs, and place the throne under the rainbow (or anywhere your child wishes). Place the Lord on the throne.
5. Glue a rectangle of plastic wrap over the sea to make it look like a sea of glass.





John's Vision of the Throne
Revelation 4
LEVEL 2 – PUPPETS OF THE FOUR CREATURES

MATERIALS NEEDED

Paper grocery bags, glue or stapler
Markers or crayons
Scissors

Read Revelation 4:6-8 for a description of the four creatures.

With a grocery bag, create a creature.
If the bag is printed, turn it inside out.

OR

Use lunch bags and make hand puppets of all 4 creatures.

Other bags can be used for a mane, ears, wings, etc.

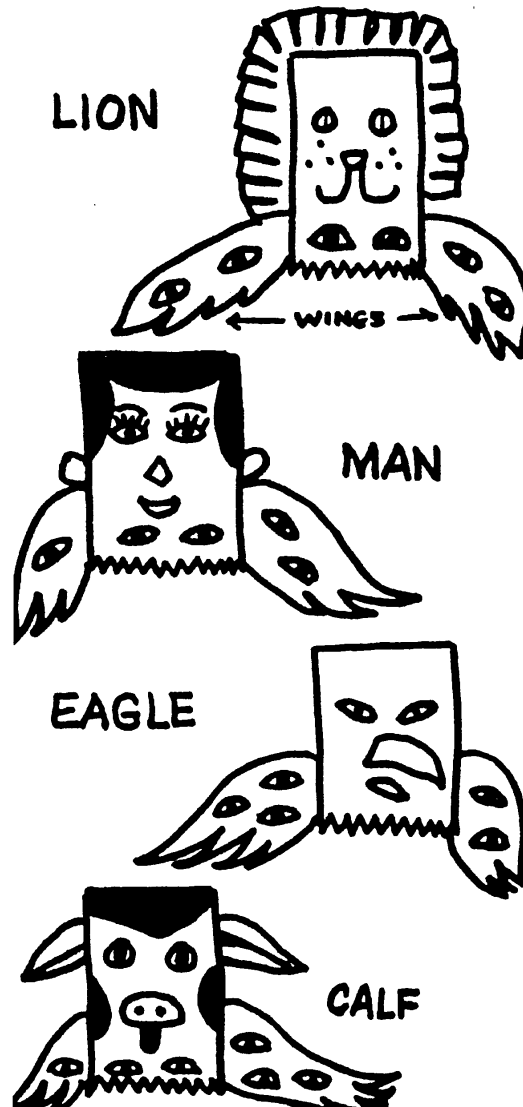
Glue or staple these parts onto the bag.
(The illustrations are to help you get started.)

Draw on the creatures' features with magic markers or crayons.

While you are working, repeat:

*“Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!”*

So when you are done you will know what the creatures said.



John's Vision of the Throne

Revelation 4

LEVEL 3 – COLORS AND THEIR SPECIAL MEANING

MATERIALS NEEDED

Word or Bible

Pen or pencil

John, the Lord's disciple, was called the disciple whom Jesus loved. When John was an old man the Lord had him write the book of *Revelation*. This was many years after the Lord was crucified, and also after John had been preaching the Lord's teachings for many years.

The things which John wrote about are called visions by many people. What is a vision? It is something which people see. Where do they see it? They don't see it in the world around them, but in their minds, sort of like a dream. Where did John see the vision he wrote about in today's lesson? He did not see it in this world. The Lord allowed John to look into heaven with his spiritual eyes and see the things he wrote about.

There is something in the story that gives us a clue as to where John saw this vision of the Lord on the throne with the lamps, the sea of glass, the beasts, and the elders. What was around the throne? It was an emerald rainbow. An emerald is a beautiful bright green sparkling precious stone. Green is the color that represents the natural heaven. It was in the first heaven that John saw this vision.

Think about the emerald rainbow. What was it like? We usually think of a rainbow as many different colors. What is a green rainbow like? Is everything green the same color? Green is the color, which represents the first heaven, and also it is the color of many things in the natural world.

This vision of John's with the green rainbow can be a sign to us to help us remember something very important. The Lord made us and helps us live. We too, should worship Him, as the elders did.

Projects

1. On page 2 is an activity about the color green, and some questions for you to answer about the rainbow.
2. On page 3 is a picture of John's vision of the Lord on the throne, for you to color. Read Revelation 4 carefully to help you with the colors.

Think about why the elders threw down their crowns and worshipped the Lord.

(The picture is from *The Book of Revelation Forty-Nine Pictures* by Mary Sandstrom Cooper.)

Make a list of some things in nature that are green and then put beside each thing what kind of a green it is: dark green, yellow-green, blue-green, light green, emerald, olive, lime, sea-foam, teal are a few examples.

THINGS FROM NATURE

KIND OF GREEN

Think of these greens together like a rainbow to get an idea of what John saw.

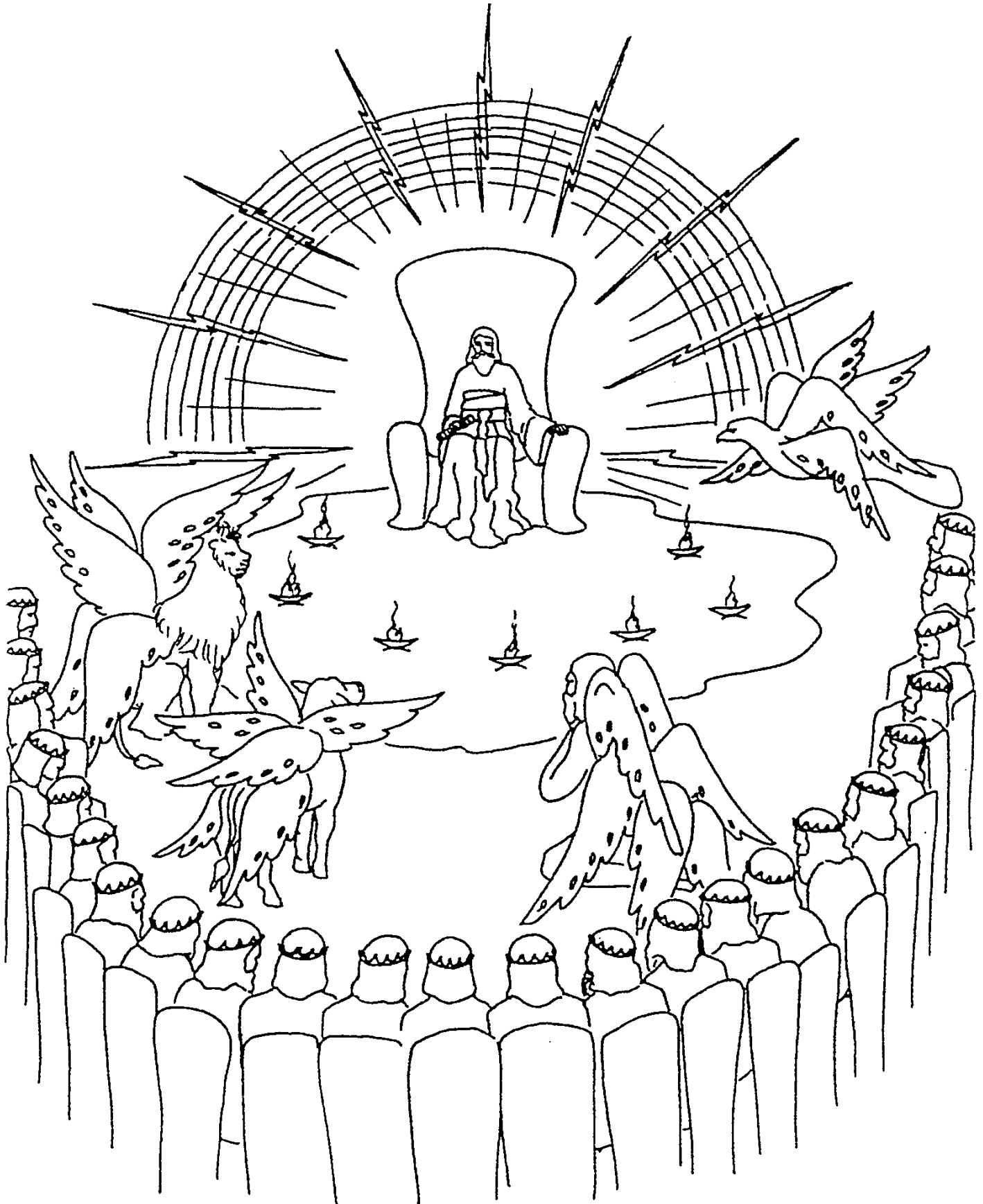
1. Why did John see a rainbow? _____

2. Where have you heard of a rainbow in the Word before? _____

Do you remember that after the Flood the Lord used a rainbow as a sign to remind Noah of His Promise? The emerald rainbow was also a sign—to remind those who saw it of the Lord's Love and Wisdom.

3. What did the beasts do when they saw the Lord on the throne and the rainbow around Him? (Look at *Revelation 4:8*) _____

4. When the elders heard what the beasts said, what did they do? (Look at *Revelation 4:9-10*) _____



The LORD Is Seen On a Throne in Heaven

John's Vision of the Throne

Revelation 4

LEVEL 4 – THE THRONE IN HEAVEN

When we read the book of Revelation, we read about many things that are very hard to picture in our minds. The story in the book of Revelation, chapter 4, has many things we *can* imagine: the thrones, 24 people with crowns on their heads, and so on. But there are also things we cannot picture easily. Where did these images come from?

The same thing happens sometimes when we read the Writings. We read of beautiful or fantastic things that do not exist on earth. Swedenborg got to see them, or to talk to someone recently arrived from earth who was amazed at what he saw there. Read what a botanist, a man who studied plants all his life, saw in heaven:

“He was allowed to wander over the field, and not only to see the plants in detail, but also to gather them and bring them close to his eye, and to examine them....He said he never would have believed it, and that if such things had been heard of in the world, they would have been regarded as marvels. He said further that he saw an immense abundance of flowers there which have never been seen in the world, and of which it would be almost impossible there to form any idea; and that they all glow with an inconceivable brightness, because they are from the light of heaven.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 4529)

Even nowadays there are a few people who are getting the chance to see amazing things which do not exist on our earth. There are people who ‘die’ and are revived by doctors in the hospital. Sometimes while they are ‘dead’ they are actually aware of the spiritual world. They see things that are totally real, and absolutely amaze them. They often say things “I can’t describe it. There is nothing like it on earth.” One man wrote,

“I ‘died’ from cardiac arrest, and as I did, I suddenly found myself in a rolling field. It was beautiful, and everything was an intense green—a color unlike anything on earth. There was light—beautiful, uplifting light—all around me.” (*Life After Life* by Raymond Moody, p.73)

Where do these sights come from? By now you can easily guess that they are in the spiritual world. There are far more things there to delight us and fascinate us than there are on this earth. Your mind and spirit is far more adventuresome and able to imagine than your body with its limitations of space and time.

Application

Carefully read *Revelation*, chapter 4. An artist has drawn a picture of the scene described there. Look closely at the picture on page 3 and compare it to the story in the WORD. Certain parts are different colors than they would be in the world. Certain things could not exist here.

1. List some of the things that could not exist here:

2. What sounds are described?

3. What is described as feeling hot?

4. What is described as feeling smooth?

Since this scene actually happened in heaven, you can see that there are wonderful things there, and that we will still have all our senses to perceive them.



John's Vision of the Throne
Revelation 4
LEVEL 5 – THE LORD AS A JUDGE



How does the Lord judge us? The picture of Him on a throne in heaven speaks of Him as a judge. It is talking of the Second Coming, and how the Lord needed to judge the false ideas that were in the church and establish a New Church where His laws were to be clearly known and followed.

The Lord doesn't want to judge. He is a loving God who wants nothing but happiness for all His children. But He is also a wise God who gives us the freedom to accept His love, and who protects good people from those who would hurt them. This protection is sometimes called judgment.

How does the Lord judge whether a person is deliberately doing evil? The Writings talk about times when people did evil and yet the Lord did not consider them guilty. In other words, they did something wrong, but they weren't guilty of sin. They were not to blame in the Lord's eyes.

Application

Here are a few examples. From your knowledge of how the Lord judges, decide if the person was guilty of a sin or not, and give reasons for your decision. Some passages are suggested, if you want to see where the Word speaks of these subjects. *(Answers appear on the last page of the lesson)*

1. A person is raised among a cannibal tribe. He kills people and eats them. Is he guilty of murder? (John 9:41).
2. A young woman grows up without a Christian education. She has sexual intercourse before marriage. Is she guilty? (John 9:41).
3. A young woman in a Christian home is taught that premarital sex is wrong but is never taught why. She gives in to temptation and disobeys what she has been taught (See *Conjugal Love* 486,487).

4. A man knows it's wrong to steal. He works in a company where the only thing people talk about is how to get rich. He has a chance to steal some money—just once. He knows it's wrong, but he can't help himself (See *Conjugal Love* 488,489).

5. A person is very bad-tempered. He joins a religious group which teaches that it's all right to punish people who are less "godly" than he is, and is very cruel to those around him. Is he guilty of that cruelty, even though his religion tells him that it is all right?

6. A woman has been good for ten years of her adult life and then gives in to temptations and becomes a vicious, greedy person. Do the ten years of goodness make her less guilty?

Before reading the answers to the above questions, consider how two people who act in exactly the same way might be judged differently:

I once knew a young boy who had been taught to steal by his grandmother, because the family was on the brink of starvation. Stealing was a real problem with him. He was often caught by the police stealing at a local store. But he never stole anything from his friends, or from those who were kind to him.

Compare him with a man who is well brought up and who decides to steal only from big corporations or "those who won't miss what I take," but doesn't steal from his friends.

The young boy would not be judged guilty of his stealing. His decision to be honest to those who were kind to him is a move in the right direction—away from his terrible upbringing. The man who stole only from big companies is looking for an excuse for his evil: "I only steal from those it won't hurt." He is probably guilty—even though he was doing the same thing as the young boy.

Answers to the questions above:

It is important to remember the teaching of the Writings that no one except the Lord can know for sure what people's real motives are. So only the Lord can really know how much responsibility a person bears for certain actions. We can only make more external judgments about how things seem.

- 1&2. Not guilty. The reason is made clear in the passage referred to. "If you had been blind you would have had no sin," Jesus said. Those who are ignorant of the truth are not blamed for the wrong things they do because of ignorance.

Note that they may hurt other people. The people the cannibals killed were hurt! Ignorance produces much unhappiness. But it excuses people in the Lord's eyes. If, after they are taught the truth, they still do evil, then they sin. The Lord continued His statement, "But now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains."

3. This is more difficult. The young woman is still not guilty, because she did not understand the truth. It will hurt her to do what is wrong, but she will not go to hell because of it.
4. The person is not yet guilty. By giving in to temptation he has committed what the Writings call a sin of the will only. If he feels terribly guilty and decides never to do it again, he has not sinned. If, however, he makes excuses for himself and would do the same thing again if he could get away with it, he sins.
5. Guilty. Even though his religion teaches him false things (and ignorance usually excuses) he joined that religion to find an excuse to be bad-tempered and unkind.
6. She gets no credit for the first ten years of good behavior. She has undone it by sinning afterwards. The Lord gave this teaching in Ezekiel. When a person turns away from being good, "all the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered" (Chapter 18, verse 24). But by the same token if a person has been evil for twenty or thirty or forty years, and then repents, "None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live" (chapter 18, verse 22).

In summary, then, here are a few rules of the Lord's judgment:

- a) We are not blamed for those evils we do if we are ignorant that they are evils.
- b) We are not blamed for evils we do if we don't understand why they are wrong.
- c) We are not blamed for an evil we do once in a moment of passion if we afterwards condemn it and take it won't happen again.
- d) We are blamed for the things we do by free choice, if we know they are wrong. "To see and to understand that a thing is evil and still to do it makes a person guilty" (*Arcana Coelestia* 9069).
- e) We are blamed if we choose false beliefs, or choose to stay in ignorance because we want to follow an evil habit (*True Christian Religion* 254).
- f) The present is what matters. If we repent today, the Lord forgives us for all of yesterday's sins; but we must keep following Him, for each day is a "new present."