

VISIONS OF HEAVEN

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Lessons: Revelation 12:1-9,13-17; True Christian Religion 791

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.... And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads (Revelation 12:1,3).

Today we read about a vision that the disciple John had when he was an old man living on the island of Patmos. This was after the Lord had lived in the world as Jesus Christ and then risen to rule in heaven. While John was on Patmos, the Lord opened his spiritual eyes so that he could see into heaven. He saw special visions that showed him how a New Church—a new kind of Christianity—would begin.

John beheld a beautiful sight in heaven—a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. And John knew that this woman was about to have a baby boy. It was a wonderful and beautiful vision.

But then John saw another vision in heaven. It was a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns. Its tail drew in a third the stars of heaven and cast them down to the earth. This horrible red dragon stood ready to eat up the beautiful woman's child as soon as he was born. But as soon as the child was born, the Lord took him up to heaven, where the angels would protect him. The woman fled to the wilderness, where there was not any food. Still, the Lord protected her and fed her. Then the dragon cast out of his mouth a flood of water so that the woman would be drowned; but the Lord gave her two wings like those of a great eagle to fly with, and the earth swallowed the flood. Finally the dragon was captured by the Lord's angels (see Revelation 20:1-3).

Now this story tells us that if we really love the Lord, the way the beautiful woman did, He will protect us from all harm. Our Heavenly Father will watch over us, just as He took care of the baby boy and the woman. The Lord is always ready to help anyone who really needs His help. But we must want the Lord to help us; we must pray to Him and always try to obey Him. Then, no matter how evil spirits try to get us to do evil things, no matter how they try to harm us, the Lord will always help us.

Family Talk

Now, the Lord has taught us many special things about this story in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church. He prepared His servant, Emanuel Swedenborg, so that he could see into heaven in the same way that John did. Swedenborg wrote down everything that the Lord told him to write, and all the things that the Lord told Swedenborg are written in what we call the Heavenly Doctrine. This is the Lord's Word. It is where we learn all about the Lord and what He wants us to do. When Swedenborg had almost finished writing down what the Lord told him, then the Lord sent His disciples all over the spiritual world to tell people about these teachings. He sent them out on the 19th day of June in the year 1770 (see *True Christian Religion* 791). And that is why the Nineteenth of June is the beginning of the New Church, or its birthday.

At that time many people had forgotten about the Lord. Even today, many people do not believe that the Lord is the one God of heaven and earth. So the disciples taught everyone in the spiritual world about the Lord. This was their most important message, that the Lord is the one God. And so they told everyone "The Lord God Jesus Christ reigns."

Now in the Heavenly Doctrine that the Lord has revealed to us we learn that the beautiful woman John saw was like the New Church. The New Church can be beautiful in just the way she was, if we all learn to really love the Lord.

The New Church is only just beginning. It is beautiful and wonderful, shining with the light of truth—like a woman clothed with the sun. What it teaches, however, is known only by a very few. And these few are just beginning to know what it means to make all things new, what it really is to make a new church. Many of the things we know are very basic. But the good people in the church love these basic things.

These basic teachings are like a newborn baby. The Lord protects them tenderly in His new heaven and in the hearts of those who love Him. And the Lord is fostering and protecting His church even as He protected the beautiful woman. He cares for our infant understanding, even as He caught the male child up to heaven.

There are many false ideas in the world today. Only with the Lord's help can the church possibly live and grow. This growth may take many years, and in our human judgment we may become impatient. Yet the more we are faithful in the tasks we see, the more we give ourselves to the Lord, the sooner He will be able to carry out His purposes.

No matter what age we live in, no matter what stage the church is in, the Lord is always calling us, and inviting us to call on Him.

Amen.