

## THE BEAST OVERCOME

*Revelation 13; 19:11-21*

This lesson should be tied in with chapter 12 to show how evil in the heart and falsity in the mind unite to oppose the development of the church in the individual and in the world. With the three younger classes the individual should be stressed rather than the world.

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### Doctrinal Points

*Even today the “dragon” and his “beasts” try to persuade us that we can get to heaven no matter what kind of life we have lived. The Word has been opened to save us from such false reasoning. We are all invited to share in the “feast” the opened Word spreads out before us.*

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### Notes for Parents

The vision of the two beasts which arose, one out of the sea and the other out of the earth, is a picture of the results in the hearts of men on earth when they listen to the false reasoning of the dragon. Deep down in our hearts we all know that we ought to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as our God, study His Word, and obey His commandments. But our inherited selfishness is very strong, and we are prone to accept without careful examination any reasoning which favors the things we like to do. Some of these things, like the first beast, are obviously disagreeable. Ordinary intelligence prompts us to reject them. The beast received a deadly wound in one of his heads. But the wound was healed. We find some excuse which glosses over the seriousness of the offense. One very common excuse is: “Everybody does it.”

Other bad tendencies of ours put on the appearance of goodness, as for instance when a man, moving into a town, looks around for the church whose congregation seems most likely to be useful to

his business and becomes an active member of it. Or when we learn to quote Scripture so that we can condemn other people and impress them with our own goodness. This is like the second beast which had two horns like a lamb.

Only the Lord Himself, the rider on the white horse, could overcome the beasts. Only by honestly trying to find out what the Lord teaches in His Word and fighting such temptations under His leadership can we really recognize our secret selfishness and break down our false reasonings.

The Lord has opened heaven by showing us the inner meaning of His Word. This is the “feast” He offers us. We do not have to stumble along weakly through life, but can walk upright in the clear light of the Lord’s truth. Like the woman in the last vision we can have wings which lift us up out of the fogs of human opinion into a higher and purer mental atmosphere.

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### Primary

The book of Revelation in its letter makes a deep impression on young children. If they can be led to associate these great pictures with their own little temptations, the Word is brought home to them with all its power to help. Children love to dramatize, and if we suggest how the dragon and the beast are at war with the Lord and the angels in each of us, their own imaginations will do the rest. We do not have to work out dramatizations for children. The adult imagination is likely to be a hindrance rather than a help to them.

In the vision of a woman clothed with the sun and of a great red dragon which threatened her, you remember that Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and cast him down out of heaven, and the woman and her child were saved.

The visions of John are pictures of things that go on in our hearts and minds. They are given in the Bible to help us see ourselves as the Lord and the angels see us.

The woman and her child we may think of as our good feelings and thoughts. The dragon—“that old serpent”—is a picture of the excuses we make in our thoughts for doing what we know is wrong.

Our lesson today shows us what goes on in our hearts.

What did John see rising up out of the sea?

How was this beast like the dragon?

What different animals seemed to be part of him?

That was a strange vision, wasn't it? The beast seemed to be made up of different kinds of animals, and the dragon was helping him. All the things John saw in his visions were pictures of things that go on in people's minds and hearts. The dragon was that same old serpent who has tempted people from the beginning of the world, and that whenever a little voice in your mind whispers to you to do something you know is wrong, you may know that it is the voice of the dragon.

But sometimes you do wrong without even stopping to think about it, don't you? Perhaps you get angry and strike somebody, or you snatch something which another child is playing with and enjoying. This is the work of the beast in your heart—the love of getting what you want no matter how much it hurts somebody else.

Perhaps you think you can't help doing these naughty things. But that isn't so. That is just the voice of the dragon helping the beast.

Who appeared out of heaven to oppose the beast?

What can you tell about this rider?

What three different names are given him?

Who were with him?

What happened to the beast?

In our hearts the beast is the love of getting the things we want regardless of other people's rights and happiness.

If you see how wrong these things are and try hard not to do them, the Lord will help you to overcome the beast, too, just as the rider on the white horse did in John's vision. The rider on the white horse is a picture of the Lord speaking to us in His Word, for the lesson tells us: "His name is called the Word of God."

Can you see why the rider on the white horse is called "the Word of God"?

Where do we find the Lord's help?

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### Junior

Try to lead the pupils to give examples of the beast and the dragon from some

of their own daily temptations and experiences. You may be able to connect this chapter with problems involved in being a New Churchman by pointing out that the doctrines of the New Church show us the deeper evils in our hearts in addition to the evils of outward conduct, and so require more of us as well as offer us greater opportunities.

In our lesson from chapter 12, what did John first see?

What threatened the woman and her child?

How was the child saved?

Who fought against the dragon?

What was the dragon called?

How was the woman saved?

What happened to the flood the dragon cast out of his mouth?

What is the dragon in us?

The vision in our chapter for today follows immediately after the vision of the dragon and is tied in with it in several ways.

What did John see rising out of the sea?

How was the beast like the dragon?

What animals were part of him?

How did the dragon help him?

How was the second beast different from the first?

How were the followers of the beast marked?

What was the number of the beast?

In this chapter there are again many things which will have to wait for explanation until you are older, but you can understand now something of the difference between the dragon and the two beasts and their relation to each other. You may remember that the woman pictured the New Church, that her child was the true teaching of the church, and that the dragon was the selfish reasonings which would try to destroy the truth in our minds.

But there is something behind these reasonings—our selfish desires. These are the beasts. Notice that the first beast, though he has great power, is obviously ugly. In the Bible a leopard is always a picture of stealthy destructiveness and a bear of outward roughness. The first beast is our selfish desires which can easily be seen to be disagreeable. Each one of you knows what some of these are in yourself. The fact that this beast had one of his heads wounded

to death means that we can't help admitting that these desires are wrong. But the second beast had two horns like a lamb, and a lamb is the picture of innocence. Some of our selfish desires can put on the appearance of being innocent and so defend themselves. This is why the Lord says to us: "Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast." If we are really wise, we shall see through all the excuses we make for indulging our selfish desires, even when many of the people around us make these same excuses. We know how strong worldly reasoning is in the world today and how many people really believe that it is all right to think of yourself first. But we should know the beast's number.

Now let us think about how the beast was destroyed.

In chapter 19 what did John see when heaven was opened?

What was the rider first called?

What is the second name given him?

What is his third name?

Who is he?

John in the beginning of his Gospel tells us that Jesus Christ was "the Word made flesh." The Lord who speaks to us throughout the Word is the same Lord who created the world and all of us and who came into the world as Jesus Christ. He is the only one upon whom we can rely—He is "Faithful and True"—the only one who surely tells us the truth—"the Word of God"—and the only one whose power will always triumph in the end—"King of kings, and Lord of lords." We are all born selfish: the beast is in our hearts, and our minds are eager to accept the arguments of the dragon. But if we believe in the Lord, study His Word, and try to face the truth honestly and to correct our lives according to it, the Lord and the angels are fighting with us and will give us the victory without fail.

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### Intermediate

For this class the application of the lesson has been made in terms of the individual rather than of the church as a whole. The teacher may add the further application if he thinks the class is sufficiently mature to deal with it.

You remember that animals correspond to our affections. The two beasts in the vision in chapter 13 represent the kind of affections which develop in men on earth who listen to the dragon. When people stop looking to the Lord in His Word for the truth to guide their lives, ideas are developed which favor the selfish things they want to do, and these ideas in turn increase the evils in their hearts until everything in both their hearts and their minds becomes just the opposite of what it ought to be. For instance, it is natural for us, because of our inherited selfishness, to want things which other people have. As long as we remember the commandments “Thou shalt not steal” and “Thou shalt not covet” and think of them as the Lord’s truth, and therefore binding upon us, we shall see our selfishness as wrong and fight it. But if someone tells us “We are born selfish, and cannot help it; so it can’t be really wrong for us to try to get all we can for ourselves,” and we let ourselves believe this, we shall become less and less honest and generous, and wealth and power will soon seem to us the only sensible things to work for. We know that many people, even church members, feel this way.

It was through this desire for selfish power that the first Christian Church declined, just as all those before it had declined. It did not “abide” in the Lord, but listened to the arguments of selfish men instead, although it still professed to worship the Lord and to call itself Christian. The great doctrine which was developed to excuse the indulgence of selfish desires is called the doctrine of “faith alone.” This doctrine teaches that we cannot do anything to deserve heaven—we are all naturally sinners—but that Christ by His death on the cross paid the penalty for all man’s sins and so appeased His angry Father; therefore all we really need to do is to acknowledge His sacrifice and by means of it claim the Lord’s forgiveness, and if we do this, we shall get to heaven no matter what kind of life we have lived.

It is this doctrine which Swedenborg says the dragon represents, and the two beasts are the people who believe it and use it as an excuse for disobeying the commandments. He says the first beast

pictures the laity and the second the clergy. You notice the second beast had “two horns like a lamb,” which pictures the fact that they use quotations from the Word to make their doctrine seem true. There are plenty of passages in the Word which show that we cannot have goodness from ourselves, and if we use just this part of them, we can make them seem to teach what the dragon says. An example of this is found in Matthew 19:25-26. But if we read this carefully in connection with everything which is said in the same chapter, we find that we have something to do ourselves. We are saved not by merely saying we believe in the Lord, but by turning to Him for guidance and for help and strength to obey His commandments—help which He always stands ready to give us.

The description of the beast shows us what people are really like when they live according to the doctrine of faith alone. Read the interpretation of the three animals at the end of your notes. And the number six hundred and sixty-six—which is said to be “the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man”—shows us that if men look to themselves or to other men for their ideas of what they ought to feel and think and do, they will come into a state in which they will twist everything in the Word to support their selfish desires. People have often puzzled about this last verse of chapter 13, although we instinctively recognize that it must have a meaning, for it is natural for us to think of numbers in this way. When we believe we understand a person’s motives and the way his mind works, we may say, “I’ve got his number, all right.”

The other part of our lesson assignment—chapter 19—shows us what the Lord finally did to save men from this false reasoning which was growing stronger in the world and was making men beasts instead of men. We read: “I saw heaven opened.” The Lord did open heaven, the heavenly or internal sense of the Word, and so came to men on earth for the second time as the Word to make clear to us what the Scriptures really are and teach. The white horse pictures the true understanding of the Scriptures, its rider—who was King of kings, and Lord of lords—is the Lord, and the “vesture dipped in blood” is the letter of the Word which had been

so torn and misused. Verses 17 and 18 give us our invitation to share in the wonderful feast which this opening of the Scriptures spreads before us. If we accept this invitation, the beast can be cast out, and we shall see so plainly the falsity of all the interpretations of the Word which excuse selfish indulgence that we wonder how anyone could ever for a moment believe them.

*Basic Correspondences*

- a leopard = love of falsifying truths of the Word
- a bear = those who read the Word and do not understand it
- a lion = (in a bad sense) evil in its power falsifying the Word
- six hundred and sixty-six = every truth of the Word falsified

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**Senior**

The teacher should keep in the pupils' minds the distinction between judging principles and judging individual people. The Seniors are already facing the temptation to "follow the crowd." This temptation takes many forms, often excusing weakness of will under the disguise of charity. Neither the individual nor the New Church is helped by ignoring the plain-speaking of the writings and assuming that "all this is changed since Swedenborg's day." The evidences of its continued presence are all about us. Our young people should be clear-sighted.

The vision described in chapter 12 represents the intellectual opposition which the New Church would find in the Christian world. The vision which follows it, which is the subject of our lesson for today, represents the deeper opposition which comes from selfishness in the heart when it is supported by the doctrine of faith alone of the former church. We might note here that this is the doctrine on the basis of which the "Reformed" or Protestant Church originally separated itself from the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church does not hold that doctrine, but separated from the Lord in another direction, by setting up the priesthood, and in particular the pope of Rome, as the spiritual authority on earth with power to save or to condemn men. This

evil, together with its ultimate destruction, is pictured in the visions recorded in chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation.

Swedenborg interprets the two beasts of chapter 13 as the laity and the clergy of the Reformed Church, but we should note that he is not talking about all Protestant laymen and ministers, but about those who have “confirmed” in their lives the principal doctrine of Protestantism, which is “faith alone.” To confirm a doctrine is to live according to it. No individual is either saved or condemned by membership in any particular church organization on earth. A person is saved by the development of love to the Lord and the neighbor in his heart and the carrying out of these two loves in his life. In every church organization there are people who are regenerating and people who are not. This is a matter of free choice. At the same time we should not fall into the popular fallacy that “one church is as good as another.” If we are really trying to live as the Lord would have us live, we shall long for genuine truth to guide us, and the more genuine truth we can obtain the better and happier we shall be. Swedenborg tells us that the New Church is to be “the crown of all the churches.” This is because it is founded on the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as the only God of heaven and earth and on the genuine truths of the internal sense of the Word. We are New Churchmen only to the extent that we accept the Lord as our authority and try to study and live these truths.

Read carefully the quotation at the end of this lesson, which shows why the actual acceptance of the doctrine of faith alone makes a man a beast such as is pictured in our lesson. In the numbers which follow it Swedenborg tells us that a leopard “signifies the affection or lust of falsifying the truths of the Word,” a bear signifies being “full of fallacies from the sense of the letter of the Word read but not understood,” and a lion signifies “Divine truth in power . . . but here falsity in power appearing like truth by reasonings.”

The deadly wound which one of the heads of the beast received relates to the obvious fact that charity and good works are so con-

stantly commanded in the Scriptures, and the healing of this wound “signifies the healing of that head of the doctrine by this reasoning, that no one can do a good work of himself, and fulfil the law, and that there is on that account provided another means of salvation instead, which is faith in the justice and merit of Christ, who suffered for man, and thereby took away the condemnation of the law.” That the second beast—who represents the clergy—had two horns like a lamb and spake like a dragon signifies “that they speak, teach, and write from the Word, as if it were from the Lord’s Divine truth, and yet it is truth falsified.”

From these quotations you can form a general idea of what the vision represents and of how much is involved in each detail of it. It would be impossible in one Sunday school session to go into all the details, but we should note verse 18. We may sometimes say, “I’ve got his number,” when we think we have discovered a person’s hidden motives and ways of thinking. If we are truly wise, we shall “count the number of the beast”; that is, we shall keep in mind the underlying falsity on which Protestantism was originally based and the lengths to which it still can lead the person who really accepts it. Of the number six hundred sixty-six Swedenborg says that it signifies that “all the truth of the Word is falsified by them.”

We remember that Michael and his angels cast the dragon down out of heaven but that he still remained active on the earth. The two beasts were the result of the dragon’s activity. In chapter 19 we find that, although heavenly societies of angels help, it is the Lord Himself who must overcome the beasts—Swedenborg identifies the “false prophet” with the second beast. The opening of heaven in verse 11 is the opening of the internal sense of the Word in the Second Coming, and all the details of the description of the rider on the white horse teach us about the Lord as He should appear to us in the Word. In opening the Word the Lord invites us to a feast. If we accept His invitation, He can give us power to recognize and overcome all the temptations presented to us in the modes of thought current in the world around us.

### Adult

The quotation at the end of the lesson may offer additional material for discussion. The teacher should read all the notes from the Intermediate up in order to be able to answer questions on the correspondence of details of the vision, as some have not been repeated in the Adult notes. We need to define clearly the basis of our church and our own responsibility.

In the vision we considered from chapter 12, the principal action was on the plane of the heavens rather than of the earth. The vision of our lesson today shows the effect on earth of the dragon's presence and subtlety. The two beasts of chapter 13 picture those of the laity and those of the clergy in the Protestant Church who have confirmed in their lives the doctrine of faith alone. The first beast rises out of the sea and the second out of the earth because the laity are "in the externals of the doctrine of the church, and the clergy are in its internals." The various animals which form parts of the first beast are different manifestations of affections of falsity, the leopard "heresy destructive of the church," the bear "fallacies from the sense of the letter of the Word read but not understood," and the lion "falsity in its power appearing like truth by reasonings." The "two horns like a lamb" in the second beast signify that the clergy "speak, teach, and write from the Word, as if it were from the Lord's Divine truth, and yet it is truth falsified." It is the dragon which gives the first beast its power, and we read that the second beast speaks "as a dragon."

The interpretation of the deadly wound suffered by one of the seven heads of the dragon and its healing is particularly enlightening. In AR 576 and 577 we read: "*And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded unto death*, signifies that this point of doctrine, which is the head of the rest, that man is justified and saved by faith alone without the works of the law, does not agree with the Word, where works are so often commanded. . . . *And the stroke of his death was healed*, signifies the healing of that head of the doctrine by this reasoning, that no one can do a good work of himself, and fulfil the law, and that there is on that account provided another means of salvation instead, which is faith in the

justice and merit of Christ, who suffered for man, and thereby took away the condemnation of the law.”

The last verse of chapter 13 should be taken to heart by all of us. If we are New Churchmen we believe that the opening of the inner meaning of the Word was the Second Coming of the Lord, in which Swedenborg was merely an instrument, the true “servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The interpretation of these visions in Revelation is not Swedenborg’s therefore, but the Lord’s. The conditions and states of thinking here attributed directly to the Reformed or Protestant Church are not merely conditions as Swedenborg perhaps saw them. They are conditions which the Lord saw and which are still evident today if we do not close our eyes to them. The same is true in regard to the interpretation of the visions recorded in chapters 17 and 18, in which the evils of the Roman Catholic Church are exposed and judged. If the New Church is to grow upon earth, its members must face facts, even when these facts are as unpleasant and threatening as the dragon and the beasts. Swedenborg says many times that falsities must be exposed and rejected before the truth will be generally accepted. Read AR 547.

If we are wise, we shall “count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.” This number, we are told, “signifies this quality, that all the truth of the Word is falsified by them.” We meet this falsification of the Word in some of the works of modern scholarship, in theological magazines, in sermons, and in the arguments of fanatics. If we are wise, we shall recognize and face it, not try to close our eyes to its existence under the pretense of charity. We do neither the Lord nor the neighbor, nor yet the New Church, service by compromising with falsity.

The overcoming of the beasts is the work of the Lord in His Word. The opening of heaven (19:11) is the opening of the internal sense of the Word and the white horse is the interior understanding of it. The details of the description of the horse’s rider are all familiar to us. His eyes as a flame of fire “signifies the Divine wisdom of the

Lord's Divine love." The diadems upon His head are "the Divine truths of the Word." The "name written" is the quality of the Word in its interiors, which only the Lord knows and is able to reveal. The garment dipped in blood is "Divine truth in its ultimate sense, or the Word in the letter, to which violence has been offered." The sharp sword going out of His mouth "signifies the dispersion of falsities, by doctrine from the Lord." The whole picture should impress upon us the fact that the New Church is founded on the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only God of heaven and earth, that He conjoins Himself to man by means of the Word, and that the opening of the Word is His doing and necessary to the salvation of mankind. The church on earth has power only as it looks to the Lord in His Word for all its direction. The Lord has indeed spread a feast before us, food which our souls need if they are to have strength and wisdom to meet the demands of our age and to accomplish the work which the Lord has given us to do. Let us not be among those who "beg to be excused" from this feast.



#### From the Writings of Swedenborg

*Apocalypse Revealed*, n. 571: "And upon his heads the name of blasphemy, signifies the denial of the Lord's Divine Human and the doctrine of the church derived not from the Word, but from one's own intelligence. By 'seven heads' is signified insanity from mere falsities . . . and this insanity speaks blasphemy, when it denies the Lord's Divine in His Human; and also when it does not draw the doctrine of the church from the Word, but hatches it from its own intelligence. As to the first, that it is blasphemy to deny the Lord's Divine in His Human, the reason is that he who denies it is opposed to the faith received throughout the whole Christian world, namely from Athanasius, where it is expressly said, that in Jesus Christ, God and Man, that is, the Divine and the Human, are not two but one, and that they are one Person, united like soul and body . . . As to the second, that it is blasphemy not to draw the doctrine of the church from the Word, but to hatch it out of one's own intelligence, the reason is, because the church is from the Word, and its quality is according to the understanding of the Word . . . And the doctrine that faith alone, that is, faith without the works of the law, justifies and saves, is not from the

Word, but from a single expression of Paul falsely understood (Rom. 3:28 . . .); and every falsity of doctrine is derived from no other source than from one's own intelligence. For what is more universally taught in the Word, than to shun evil and do good? and what is more evident that that God and the neighbor ought to be loved? And who does not see, that no one can love the neighbor, unless he lives according to the works of the law, and he who does not love his neighbor does not love God? for in the love of the neighbor the Lord conjoins Himself with man, and man conjoins himself with the Lord, that is, the Lord and man are together in that love.”

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### Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. In chapter 12, what did John first see? *woman clothed with sun*
- P. What threatened the woman? *dragon*
- J. What can you tell about the dragon? *seven heads, ten horns*
- P. How was the woman's child saved? *caught up to God*
- J. Where did the woman go? *wilderness*
- P. Who fought with the dragon? *Michael*
- P. Who won? *Michael*
- J. How was the woman saved? *eagle wings*
- P. In our lesson for today what first appears? *beast*
- P. Can you describe the beast? *seven heads, ten horns, ten crowns*
- J. What happened to one of his heads? *wounded*
- P. What did the second beast look like? *two horns like a lamb*
- J. What part does the dragon play in this vision? *gave power to the beasts*
- J. What is the number of the beast? *six hundred sixty-six*
- P. In the second part of our lesson, what appeared when heaven was opened?  
*white horse*
- J. What can you tell about the horse's rider? *eyes like flame, many crowns, vesture dipped in blood*
- J. What three things is he called? *Faithful and True, Word of God, King of kings*
- P. Who followed him on white horses? *armies*
- J. What invitation was given? *fowls to supper of great God*
- J. What happened to the beast? *cast into lake of fire*
- S. What do the two beasts picture? *(1) disagreeable selfish desires, (2) innocent-appearing selfish desires*
- S. What does the number six hundred sixty-six mean? *every truth of the Word falsified*
- I. What is meant by the opening of heaven? *revealing inner sense of the Word*