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INSTRUMENTS OF THE DRAGON AGAINST THE REMNANT—I: THE BEAST FROM THE SEA

Those who plan to wage war usually seek additional support, particularly if the enemy they face has a reputation of being powerful. That explains why Jesus said to us that without Him we cannot do anything (John 15:5). The forces of evil are too powerful for any human being to confront them on his or her own strength independent of the true source of power, Jesus Christ, who has always defeated them. Only our union to Christ enables us, through the power of the Spirit, to overcome as He did. Those who believe have formed an alliance, a covenant, with the Lord. They have committed themselves to rely on Him in their struggles and conflicts with evil, knowing that the Lord will strengthen them and support them during their most difficult times.

In his war against the remnant the dragon realizes that he faces a formidable enemy and that he needs to form an alliance with false religious powers as well as with the political agencies that he can use to achieve his purposes. Revelation 13 describes that alliance or coalition. The dragon intends to unite the world against God's remnant people as part of his last attempt to become our world's sole and exclusive ruler. Knowing that Christ defeated him in heaven and on the cross, and that he has not been able to destroy the woman, the dragon is now more careful in planning his last struggle against the remnant.

Instead of immediately launching a massive attack, the

dragon “went off,” that is to say, he “went away” to get ready to make war against the remnant (Rev. 12:17). Where did he go? Revelation 13:1 tells us that he went to the seashore to coordinate his plans with a beast from the sea and another from the land. Together they will form a powerful coalition to fight against the remnant. For now we will concentrate on the beast from the sea (Rev. 13:1-10).

STRUCTURE OF THE PASSAGE

Biblical writers organized their ideas or the message they received in various ways in their desire to effectively communicate with their audiences. By studying how the author put a biblical passage together we avoid misreading it and are able to follow the flow of thought without major difficulties. Revelation 13:1-10 seems to be organized as follows:

Description of the Beast		13:1, 2
Experience of the Beast		13:2-4
Power Received	13:2	
Power Lost	13:3	
Power Restored	13:3, 4	
Work of the Beast		13:5-7
Blasphemed	13:5	
Exercised Authority	13:5	
Blasphemed	13:6	
Exercised Authority	13:7	
Future Experience of the Beast		13:8-10
Power Restored	13:8	
Power Removed	13:9, 10	
Exhortation—Description of the Saints		13:10

We follow that outline in our exposition of the passage.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BEAST (REV. 13:1, 2)

The first beast arises from the depth of the sea, a symbol of chaos and the realm of the demonic and evil that the Lord in the future will bring to an end (Rev. 21:1). The beast's description indicates that it is indeed the dragon's representative. Like him it has 10 horns and seven heads, but the horns now have crowns on them, a detail suggesting that the kingdom symbolized by this beast is already a divided one. The description further clarifies our identification of this power. Its body resembled a *leopard*, the feet were like those of a *bear*, and the mouth like that of a *lion*. Such details point the reader back to Daniel 7, in which we find the same symbols representing different kingdoms. The lion stood for Babylon, the bear Medo-Persia, and the leopard Greece. Revelation lists them in inverted order not only because those kingdoms are in the past but also because John wants us to understand that the beast from the sea is the same as the fourth beast of Daniel 7—pagan and ecclesiastical Rome. The fact that the horns have crowns indicates that what the beast from the sea does will take place after the division of the pagan Roman Empire. Therefore, the beast from the sea symbolizes ecclesiastical Rome.

EXPERIENCE OF THE BEAST (REV. 13:2-4)

1. *Power Received*: As the beast emerged from the sea, the dragon deputized it as his representative by granting it his power, his throne, and great authority. This is basically an enthronement ritual during which the dragon appoints the beast as his coregent. To some extent it parallels the enthronement of Christ described in Revelation 5. In fact, throughout the book Revelation John portrays Satan and the beast as attempting to imitate God and Christ. The parallels are impressive.

**THE DIVINE VERSUS THE DEMONIC
IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

GOD	DRAGON/SATAN
1. A Holy Trinity: Father, Christ, and the Spirit (Rev. 1:4, 5)	1. False Trinity: Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet (Rev. 12:13; 16:13, 19)
2. God Sits on a Throne (Rev. 4:9)	2. Satan Has a Throne (Rev. 2:13)
3. God Is Worshiped by the Inhabitants of the Universe (Rev. 4:10; 5:13)	3. Satan Is Worshiped by the Inhabitants of the Earth (Rev. 13:4)
4. God's City Is the Heavenly (Rev. 21:2, 10)	4. Satan's City Is Babylon (Rev. 14:8; 18:10)
5. God Places a Seal on His People (Rev. 7:4)	5. Satan Puts a Mark on His Followers (Rev. 13:16)
6. God's People Are Represented by a Pure Woman (Rev. 12:1)	6. Satan's Followers Are Represented by a Harlot (Rev. 17:2)
7. God Is Full of Wrath Against His Enemies (Rev. 11:18; 19:15)	7. Satan Is Full of Wrath Against the Church (Rev. 12:12)
8. God Has Three Angelic Messengers (Rev. 14:6-11)	8. Satan Has Three Demonic Messengers (Rev. 16:13, 14)
9. God Gives Authority to the Christ (Rev. 2:27)	9. Satan Gives Authority to the Beast (Rev. 13:4)

We also find some significant parallels between Christ the Lamb and the beast from the sea. (See next page.)

As we can see, the book of Revelation uses almost the same terminology and images to describe the activity of both God and Satan and Christ and the beast from the sea. Through this literary characteristic Revelation seeks to disclose the true nature of satanic deception: Satan wants to occupy God's place in our planet, and he plans to achieve his

goal by falsifying the divine. To that end he gave power to the beast.

THE DIVINE VERSUS THE DEMONIC

THE LAMB OF GOD	THE BEAST FROM THE SEA
1. Christ Received Authority From the Father (Rev. 2:27)	1. Beast Received Authority From the Dragon (Rev. 13:2, 4)
2. Christ Sits on the Throne With God (Rev. 3:21)	2. Dragon Gave His Throne to the Beast (Rev. 13:2, 4; 16:10)
3. Christ Is Worshiped by the Universe (Rev. 5:13, 14)	3. Beast Is Worshiped by the Dwellers of the Earth (Rev. 13:4, 12)
4. Christ the Lamb Has Seven Horns (Rev. 5:6)	4. Beast Has 10 Horns (Rev. 13:1)
5. Christ Was Dead but Is Alive (Rev. 1:18)	5. Beast Received a Deadly Wound but Lived (Rev. 13:14)
6. Christ's People Reign With Him (Rev. 1:6; 2:26, 27)	6. Beast Is Supported by the Kings of the Earth (Rev. 17:12)
7. Christ Has a Remnant (Rev. 12:17)	7. Beast Has a Remnant (Rev. 19:21)
8. Christ Has a Prophet (Rev. 1:1, 9)	8. Beast Has a False Prophet (Rev. 19:20)
9. Christ Is at War (Rev. 12:7; 19:11-17)	9. Dragon and Beast Are at War Against the Lamb (Rev. 12:17; 19:19)
10. Christ Has an Army of Angels (Rev. 12:7)	10. Satan Has an Army of Fallen Angels (Rev. 12:7)

2. *Power Lost:* However, a mortal wound seriously threatened the beast's power (Rev. 13:3), an event that took place at the end of the 1260 years in 1798, during the French

Revolution, when General Alexander Berthier took Pius VI prisoner and the prelate died in prison. At that time “many assumed that the destruction of the holy see had at last been accomplished, and the fortunes of the papacy had indeed reached their nadir under him.”¹ The arrest and death of Pius VI “marked a low point in papal fortunes not plumbed for centuries and gave rise to a prophecy that the apostolic succession had come to a close with the demise of ‘Pius the last’”² The French government hoped to destroy the pontifical government after the pope’s death by not allowing the election of another pope. The wounding hoped to bring the system to an end.

3. *Power Restored*: The prophecy stated that the wound would be healed so that what looked impossible still would take place. In fact, the restoration process began during the French Revolution itself with the election of a new pope, Barnaba Chiaramonti called Pius VII, who entered into dialogue with the French government. As a result a concordat issued in 1801 legally established the Roman Catholic religion in France. Since then the restoration of the influence and power of the church has been constant but will reach its climax in the near future when humanity will worship the dragon and the beast. This political and religious power will be so powerful that no one will dare to face it. Except the Lamb!

WORK OF THE BEAST (REV. 13:5-7)

The following verses describe how the beast used the power it received from the dragon. A summary of its work appears in Revelation 13:5, and the two following verses further develop it. The beast opened its mouth and spoke insolent words and *blasphemies*, but John does not yet tell us what it said. The beast also had *authority*, given to it by the dragon, and exercised it for 42 months. Revelation describes the work of the beast here in terms of the little horn of Daniel 7, which tells us that it spoke against God and exercised authority for 1260 years (Dan. 7:25). The period of 42 months is the same as the 1260 years. For sym-

bolic purposes, the biblical writer considered each month to have 30 days that when multiplied by 42 give a total of 1260 days. The same prophetic period mentioned in Revelation 12:6 and 14, it suggests that Revelation 13:1-10 is a development of Revelation 12:6 and 13-16.

The text returns now to the theme of *blasphemy* in order to expand it a little more (Rev. 13:6). The Bible often uses the phrase “to open the mouth” to introduce a solemn and authoritative speech, as, for instance, when Jesus opened His mouth to preach the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:2), or as an introduction to a sermon (Acts 10:34). “The use of this phrase in Revelation 13:6 suggests that the beast is speaking in an official, formal manner.”³

In the Bible “to blaspheme” designates a type of speech that devalues another person or thing and that expresses human arrogance. The beast *blasphemes God*, robbing Him of His glory and honor in order to build up his own glory and honor. In the New Testament to blaspheme God is to ascribe to oneself divine prerogatives, for instance the capacity to forgive sins (Mark 2:7). The beast also *blasphemes the name of God* by damaging His reputation. The conduct of those who claim to be His servants could damage God’s reputation if their behavior does not exhibit loving obedience to God’s expressed will (e.g., 1 Tim. 6:1). Acts of apostasy also blaspheme God (Acts 26:11). But obviously the most serious blasphemy against God and His name is to accept worship due only to Him (Rev. 13:8).

The beast *blasphemes God’s dwelling place*. Christ ministers on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary, applying to our lives the benefits of His atoning death. To blaspheme it is to detract from its uniqueness and importance within the plan of salvation. It is precisely what the little horn in Daniel 8:9-12 was doing as it cast down the sanctuary and took away the daily from the Prince of hosts. When we deny the reality of the heavenly sanctuary and substitute the church and a human priestly system, we diminish and damage the importance of God’s dwelling place.

The connection between the phrase *to blaspheme those who dwell in heaven* and the previous one (*blaspheme the dwelling of God*) is not as clear in the Greek as we would like it to be. Notice the different ways translators render the passage: “to slander . . . his dwelling place and those who live in heaven”; “blaspheming . . . his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven” (RSV). The second translation equates God’s dwelling with those who dwell in heaven, while the first one considers them to be two separate objects against which the beast blasphemes. The interpretation that finds here two different subjects is supported by Revelation 12:12 in which the heavens and those who dwell in them are invited to rejoice because of Christ’s victory over the dragon. In addition, John tells us several times that he saw the heavenly sanctuary where heavenly beings worshiped God (Rev. 4; 5; 11:19; 14:17).

Who are the dwellers of heaven? Perhaps we can answer that question by asking Who are the dwellers of the earth? In the book of Revelation the dwellers of the earth are those who worshiped the dragon and the beast, that is to say those who do not have their names written in the book of the Lamb (Rev. 13:8; 17:8). Enemies of God and His people (Rev. 6:10), they killed God’s two witnesses (Rev. 11:10). The servants of God are not part of the inhabitants of the earth; they belong already to the kingdom of God and are, spiritually speaking, dwellers of heaven. Blaspheming against them means that they became the object of persecution by the beast, as the next verse indicates (cf. Acts 13:45; 18:6).

The concept of *authority* that Revelation 13:5 introduced, verse 7 now develops a little more. The beast becomes a persecuting power, opposed to God and those who serve Him, thus repeating what we found in Daniel 7:25. The beast was a religious and political power launching an attack against God’s people and attempting to gain universal hegemony.

FUTURE EXPERIENCE OF THE BEAST (REV. 13:8-10)

4. *Power Restored*: If you look carefully at your Bible, you will notice that while the verbs in the previous verses speak of something in the past, now in Revelation 13:8 the verbs look to the future, suggesting that the events narrated have not yet happened.⁴ It describes the future restoration of the beast and what will take place after its healing (verse 4). The language used suggests that the events still lie in the future: “All the inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast” (verse 8). This refers to the time when the whole human race will have polarized into two groups—those who follow the Lamb of God, and those the dragon. The inhabitants of the earth are those who support the dragon’s global program, described in some detail in the following chapters.

Worship plays a central role in the war between good and evil. As we have suggested, Satan and his allies want to occupy God’s place in our planet and become the exclusive objects of worship. Revelation 13:8 indicates that they will achieve that goal only to a limited extent. Those who join them are only those whose names do not appear in the Lamb’s book of life. The book of life contains the names of the citizens of God’s kingdom, those who have the right to enter the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:27). That privilege belongs to them because of the Lamb “who was slain from the creation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). The blood of the Lamb alone makes it possible for us to be citizens of the heavenly city and to overcome the dragon and his allies.

5. *Power Removed*: The apocalyptic prophecy announces the moment when the beast will permanently lose its power. The book of Revelation often uses the phrase “he who has an ear, let him hear” to introduce an important exhortation (Rev. 2:11, 17; 3:6). Some evidence suggests that Revelation 13:10 describes the experience of believers. In that case, it would be saying that some of them will go into captivity and some will be killed, but that they should all remain faithful to the Lord

(cf. Jer. 15:2). But it could also be describing the final fate of those who persecuted and killed God's servants (Matt. 26:52). This will be the time when the Lord will vindicate His servants, avenging them as they earlier requested Him to do (Rev. 6:10). It is a comforting thought to know that evil will not last forever, that it is God's plan to exterminate it from the universe. Meanwhile, His servants are to remain loyal to Him.

EXHORTATION—DESCRIPTION OF THE SAINTS (REV. 13:10)

The final exhortation describes those who will resist the persecution and oppression of the beast and the dragon to the very end. The victorious ones are "the saints," another name for the remnant mentioned in Revelation 12:17. They are saints because they identified themselves with the Holy One (Rev. 16:5) and thus belong to Him. And they are saints because they are totally devoted to the Lord and manifest it through a life of prayer. The priestly work of Christ makes their prayers acceptable to God (Rev. 5:8; 8:3, 4). The saints are the enemy's object of attack (Rev. 13:7), and some of them will die as martyrs (Rev. 16:6; 17:6; 18:24), but they will not betray their Saviour (Rev. 14:12). Righteous people (Rev. 19:8), they look forward to the reward they will receive from God (Rev. 11:18). At the final judgment they will rejoice with the rest of the universe in proclaiming God's justice in the way He dealt with evil (Rev. 18:20). Their final destiny is the New Jerusalem, where they will reside forever (Rev. 22:5).

Revelation exhorts the saints to be patient and to be faithful, two fundamental characteristics of the Christian life. Patience means perseverance in faith, a refusal to yield or surrender under even the most distressing circumstance. But it also expresses the idea of looking forward to the moment of liberation. Hope precedes patience, but patience makes it possible for us to resist. Faithfulness implies a particular object of devotion and commitment, a deep level of loyalty based on a response of gratitude to God for the many benefits He has

bestowed on us. The object of commitment is God and the Lamb, whom the saints will never betray. The bond between them and their Saviour is so strong that nothing will be able to break them apart. Secure in the sense that they are in God's hands, they know that nothing can snatch them out of His grasp (John 10:28). Those who will be victorious in the final conflict have a personal connection with their Saviour, and through the power of the Spirit they will not allow anyone to wrest them from Him.

However, the conflict is not yet over—more is coming.

¹ J.N.D. Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 302.

² J. F. Broderick, "Papacy," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 10, p. 965.

³ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 744.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 746.