

Revelation

*Part Thirty-Nine
The Beast of the Earth
A Lamb or a Dragon?
(Revelation 13:11-15)*

With Study Questions

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Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. ¹² And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. ¹³ He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. ¹⁴ And he deceives those who dwell on the earth – by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. ¹⁵ He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed (Revelation 13:11-15)?

Though it is not a Christian book, I found Malcom Gladwell's *Tipping Point* to be eye-opening in terms of cultural norms. It may also be somewhat accidentally accurate in terms of a biblical understanding of the influence of Israel's surrounding nations. The topic Gladwell highlights is the taking of one's own life.

He observed that in Micronesia suicide was almost unheard of. But a well-known young man, after a conflict with his father, took his own life. The event was highly publicized. Within four decades, the suicide rate in Micronesia became roughly eight times that of the U.S. It even became romanticized in music, literature and film.

That this young man would respond this way to difficulty, it is supposed, gave others a sort of permission-slip to respond similarly. It became an option. A highly used option. I must admit that I have a difficult time getting my arms around such a thing. But this is not restricted to Micronesia. When Marilyn Monroe killed herself (I know there is some suspicion that she did not), the national suicide rate increased 12 percent.

All this to say, we are not immune to the powerful influences which surround us. And what we are going to see in these five verses are a warning John is giving the church regarding the massive influence of their surrounding world.

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon (Revelation 13:11).

The Marketing Beast

We now have a second beast, not from the sea, but from the land. It does not have **“ten horns” (Revelation 13:1)** as with the first beast, but **“two horns”** and no crowns. This beast does not have the level of military might as the first, nor is it a political power. Its power appears to be in its ability to lie, manipulate and market the **“first beast.”**

The **“lamb”** is clearly a redemptive, religious figure (John 1:29; Revelation 5:12). But this lamb speaks like a **“dragon.”** If you have ever been bold enough to speak about your faith to your unbelieving friends, you have, little doubt, encountered the accusation of all the evil that has been done in the name of religion. That accusation is not without warrant. Both in Scripture and throughout history, great evil has been done in the name of religion. It was in the context of false apostles that Paul wrote:

And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

This second beast wants to elevate the first beast to the status of God. This will be necessary for the first beast (which we take to be Rome or the Caesars of Rome) to maintain his authority over all aspects of the lives of his subjects. In order to achieve this devotion, this second beast seeks to present himself as a lamb, but he speaks as a dragon, or more specifically, the devil (Revelation 12:7; 2 Corinthians 11:3).

With the proper lighting, winsome music, and sweetness of tongue, the most demonic human affairs can win our hearts. The Proverbs teach:

My son, pay attention to my wisdom; Lend your ear to my understanding, ² That you may preserve discretion, And your lips may keep knowledge (Proverbs 5:1, 2).

Oh, that we might be wise to know falsehood when it comes our way. And where is that wisdom found? It is found in the Christ of Scripture. In...

...Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3).

And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed (Revelation 13:12).

A Worshiping People

There is a great deal of speculation regarding the identity of this second beast. Some say it's Satan, the antichrist, the Roman Imperial Priesthood, the Roman Catholic Church, false teachers in general, etc.

At some level (at least in terms of continued application through history) many of these guesses have merit. I think the weight of the study would lead us to conclude that the original readers would have understood this to be the Emperor Cult of the first century. They were the ones who sought to promote the deification of the Caesars.

Instead of exercising his authority in the **"presence"** of God, as would a faithful priest, he exercises his authority in the presence of the first beast. It can be aptly said of both that...

...they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:43).

Again, there is much speculation regarding the **"deadly wound"** that was healed. It is likely the ongoing Caesars ruling over the Roman Empire. At the same time, let us not lose sight of how this strikes of a parody of Christ who died and rose again. It is not difficult to convince a people to put their trust in a state which seems invincible. I think Beale accurate when he writes:

Whereas the true prophet was to lead people to worship God, this prophet leads them to worship the state.¹

Man is inherently religious. Many people would object to such a statement. But the moment an 'ought' comes out of your mouth, you're appealing to some overarching system of ethics to which you believe others should bow. Who or what do you suppose has won the hearts of modern man? In the context of the writing of Revelation, this system was Rome. And this second beast was about succeeding in his business.

He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. ¹⁴ And he deceives those who dwell on the earth – by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. ¹⁵ He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed (Revelation 13:13-15).

Bow or Die

It is not terribly uncommon as we read the New Testament to see false signs or lying signs and wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Simon practiced sorcery and gained a reputation as a man having **“the great power of God”** (Acts 8:10). We also see:

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches” (Acts 19:13).

All this to say that we should not be surprised that during the time of the Apostles, there were **“great”** albeit false **“signs.”** Let us be aware that the power to perform signs and wonders had, as its primary purpose, the authentication that the one performing those signs, was a voice from God

¹ Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 707). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

(Acts 14:3). But even if one performs signs, yet gives a false message, we should **“not listen” (Deuteronomy 13:1-3).**

Of course, this beast is using these powers to **“deceive.”** And it would appear that the primary purpose of this deception is to all the more promote the beast. There was to be unchallenged devotion to the state. To foster this devotion, we see reference to an **“image”** that was to be worshiped. To neglect that worship, put one’s life in peril.

All the cities addressed in Revelation had temples dedicated to the deity of Caesar.² The idea behind giving **“breath”** to the image may have been various pseudo-magical tricks, including ventriloquism, false lightning, etc. These types of false wonders were used during John’s time in the courts of Roman emperors and governors.³

I tend to take this **“breath”** to **“speak”** a bit more metaphorically in terms of the ways things can speak and influence us. Again, Beale has a valid point:

This could include magical tricks but is broader, referring to anything that convinces people that the image represents true deity (as in Wis. 14:18–21).⁴

I know the modern person thinks him/herself too erudite to fall into this type of idolatrous trap. We view ourselves as informed and scientific. Yet there may not be one in a hundred who truly grasps why we believe the things we believe and behave the way we behave. Jesus told a parable addressing just that phenomenon.

When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none.⁴⁴ Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds *it* empty, swept, and put in order.⁴⁵ Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than

² Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 710). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

³ Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 711). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁴ Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 711). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation (Matthew 12:43-45).

There is perhaps nothing more dangerous than a soul, or a collection of souls, **“empty, swept, and put in order.”** As horrible as anarchy is, at least it has fails to give the illusion of order. The generation during the time of Christ is not unlike or own. It is like a well-constructed buffet for darkness. And there are any number of customers who will pick at it until it is subdued.

And the primary customer during the writing of Revelation (not dissimilar to our current direction) is the state. In my estimation, the Constitution is one of the grandest man-made documents ever to govern a society. But it is in fact man-made. I cringe a bit when I hear Christians appeal to it as a sort of final say in the matter.

For, as we have seen of late, the Constitution (or any human document or endeavor) is only effective in the context of a Biblical life and world view. The liberties afforded by the Constitution to the people under its care, means very little if we have no consensus on what defines an actual person.

When the state takes upon itself the role of defining these types of things, it becomes religious. It is insidious but inevitable. It wasn't terribly long ago that books and movies had an arc that led their characters to the door of a church for redemption. Today the church, and all that it stands for, has become an object of ridicule. It has been replaced by secular, court-appointed psychologists, and federal so-called altruism.

Discussions regarding what defines a man, a woman, a marriage or a human are now taking place on Capitol Hill. These are highly religious discussions, and the expectation is that our current culture will acquiesce before the legislator's conclusions on these matters. And we will do so under penalty of some form of legal coercion.

We recently had Pride month, which sought to celebrate a departure from a biblical understanding of love and marriage. If someone is born a certain way, as is often argued, I'm not quite sure how pride is an appropriate disposition for that which required no effort. But Pride month is not Pride month at all. It is 'you'd better get on board' month. It is a political, cultural, and religious phenomenon. And you had better show support.

At this point I am not encouraging a hostile disposition. Quite the contrary, the weapons of our warfare (as stated many times) include, love, faith, patience, truth, prayer, and the like. I am primarily stating here that we must be aware of our environment if the Revelation is to be of current value. Again, Beale hits the mark.

Price's (another theologian) conclusion is confirmed by the fact that in Asia Minor the culture increasingly expected public expressions of loyalty to the imperial cult, and local civil authorities not untypically mandated by law that inhabitants of towns and cities show varying degrees of support for the imperial religion (parenthesis mine).⁵

In our next meeting we will discuss this hotly debated subject of the mark of the beast. For now, let us be a people who know who the true King of kings actually is. Let us be a people who, though generally deferential to God-ordained human authority (Romans 13), know when we're coming dangerously close to the soul-damning proclamation made by the religious community during the trial of Christ.

The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15)!

Let us not put our faith in a nation which appears to survive deadly wounds, but in a Savior, through whom all of our wounds and sins are healed.

But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, He *was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5).

⁵ Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 712). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

Questions for Study

1. Discuss the power that cultural phenomena can have on our personal behavior. Can you give examples (pages 2, 3)?
2. What are some characteristics of the beast out of the earth and how are they different than the first beast (pages 3, 4)?
3. How can we protect ourselves from the types of influence we see coming from this second beast (pages 3, 4)?
4. What is this second beast seeking to achieve (page 5)?
5. Signs and wonders are used for what purpose? How is this beast seeking to use them (pages 5, 6)?
6. How does Jesus' parable of the unclean spirit apply to us (pages 6, 7)?
7. How is King Jesus different from all other kings (pages 7, 8)?