

August 28 Lesson 13 (NIV)

A WELCOMING INVITATION

DEVOTIONAL READING: Revelation 22:10–21

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Revelation 22:8–21

REVELATION 22:10–21

¹⁰ Then he told me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near. ¹¹ Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy.”

¹² “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

¹⁴ “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

¹⁶ “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.”

¹⁷ The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

¹⁸ I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. ¹⁹ And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.

KEY VERSES

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.—Revelation 22:18–19

PARTNERS IN A NEW CREATION

Unit 3: The Great Hope of the Saints

LESSONS 10–13

LESSON OUTLINE

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HOW TO SAY IT

Alpha *Al*-fa.

Bethlehem *Beth*-lih-hem.

Gentile *Jen*-tile.

Deuteronomy *Due*-ter-*ahn*-uh-me.

Ecclesiastes *Ik-leez-ee-as*-teez.

Isaiah *Eye-zay*-uh.

Judaizers *Joo*-duh-ize-ers.

Maranatha (Aramaic) Mare-ah-*nath*-ah (*nath* as in *math*).

Messiah Meh-*sigh*-uh.

Omega O-*may*-guh or O-*mee*-guh.

phenomenological *fi*h-naw-meh-neh-**law**-jih-kuhl.

Thessalonians *Thess*-uh-**lo**-nee-unz (*th* as in *thin*).

Zechariah *Zek*-uh-**rye**-uh.

Introduction

A. Oh, Those Delays!

“Your flight has been delayed.” These words are distressing to the air traveler. In an environment of tight connections and few direct flights, a departure delay can result in disrupted plans and great inconvenience.

It is a mark of our impatience as a society that a few hours’ delay can be so traumatic. Our everyday schedules are thrown into chaos when car repairs take longer than expected, and when a promised two-day delivery actually takes three, when our food at the restaurant takes 10 minutes longer than we think it should. Delays are a frustratingly common element of life.

But what if the delay is for hundreds of years? Thousands? Christians must balance their expectation of Christ’s “could be at anytime” return with the awareness that his return has yet to happen after some 2,000 years. How do we live expectantly for Christ’s return while simultaneously being in an “expect delays” mode? This quandary has faced the church since the first generation of believers.

B. Lesson Context

In effect, the entire Bible serves as the context to today’s lesson. The Old Testament teaches in many places that God will send a deliverer for his people. First-century Jews thought that such a person would be a political and military rescuer. God’s anointed leader, they believed, would be empowered to defeat their nation’s enemies, bringing peace and independence in the process (compare Acts 1:6; etc.). Jerusalem and its temple would be freed from Gentile influence, and pure worship of the Lord could then take place.

But two things happened to challenge this thinking. First, the Messiah that God sent did not come to be a leader of armies (see John 6:15). He came, rather, to save people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). His mission ultimately was for all humanity, for all are sinners. His death was a sacrifice for sins, intended to be effective for all people for all time. He was the sacrificial Lamb who took away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Second, the Jerusalem temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70 during the horrific War of the Jews. This was something that no Jew of the time expected. Jewish faith, based as it was on the sacrifices of the temple, went into a downward spiral. Expectations of a military messiah to defeat the Romans were crushed.

Some, perhaps most, Christians of the same century found their own hopes being challenged when Jesus' return did not materialize as they thought it should (compare 2 Peter 3:3–4). But Jesus himself promised that he would indeed return. His return will be “with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). His return will usher in the final judgment of both the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10). Christians and some Jews both look for the Messiah to come, but their expectations are very different.

I. Paths, Advent, Separation

(REVELATION 22:11–15)

A. Two Types (vv. 10–11)

10. Then he told me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near.

As today's text opens, the apostle John was still being addressed by the angel of the bowls of plagues (Revelation 21:9). This angel was John's guide to the New Jerusalem (22:1, 8–10). The fact that *the time is near* gives a heightened sense of the necessary fulfillment of *prophecy*. This should cause us to focus anew on the greatest of all Revelation's prophecies: Christ will indeed return.

11. “Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy.”

The angel sums up the state of things by noting the paths that people take. There are really just two categories here, and the contrast is strong: the path of the unrepentant (who continue to walk the wide way of sin) vs. the path of the repentant (who take the narrow way; see Matthew 7:13–14).

In contrast with Revelation 2:5, 16; 3:3, 19, there is no call for repentance here. It is as if the judgment has already been determined. The obedient will continue to obey; the disobedient are not listening (see also 9:20–21; 16:8–11). Only those with ears to hear will heed (2:7); they are the ones whose hearts are attuned to God's word.

B. Second Coming (vv. 12–13)

12. “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.

As in Revelation 22:7 (last week's lesson), the voice of the Lamb (Jesus) breaks through. He does so to restate his promise to come *soon* (see Revelation 2:16; 3:11). Previously a blessing was given to the ones who kept the words of the prophecy (1:3). Here, however, we might interpret the Lamb's pronouncement as both a blessing and a curse, for he promises *to give to each person according to what they have done*. The two sets of rewards are set forth in 22:14, below.

13a. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,

For the final time in Revelation, we hear a voice asserting the speaker to be *Alpha and Omega* (compare Revelation 1:8; 21:6). The first time we heard this self-designation, it was clearly “the Lord ... the Almighty” speaking (1:8). Now the speaker is the one who is coming, namely Jesus the Lamb.

We should not be troubled by this apparent blurring of the distinction between the Lord God Almighty and the conquering Lamb; this is a feature of this book. They are seated on the throne together (Revelation 22:1) to rule the New Jerusalem as one. While the Bible teaches that there are three persons in the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (and all three are in Revelation)—we should not forget that there is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4). We do not worship three gods, but one God. While this unity of persons might be mysterious, it is true (Matthew 28:19; Colossians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14; 1 Peter 1:2; etc.).

13b. “the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

In this final case of Alpha and Omega self-designation, the two letters of the Greek alphabet are doubly explained. That alphabet has 24 letters, with alpha standing at the beginning and omega at the end. To be Alpha and Omega is, therefore, another way of saying *the Beginning and the End* and *the First and the Last* of all things (compare Isaiah 44:6; 48:12; Revelation 1:17; 2:8; see also the discussion of typological language in the illustration on the next page).

C. Two Outcomes (vv. 14–15)

14. “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

The only way to enter the city is *through the gates* of pearl (Revelation 21:21). There is no secret passageway. No one can sneak over the walls at night, because there is no night (21:25; 22:5). The gates are guarded by powerful angels (21:12), and only those who have lived victorious, obedient lives will be allowed *into the city*. These are granted eternal life, as signified by their access *to the tree of life* (compare 22:2, last week’s lesson). They have overcome (2:7).

15. “Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Comparing this listing with the one in Revelation 21:8 (see lesson 10), we note that the latter designates eight categories of evildoers, while the verse before us has six. Five of these six are duplicates of those in 21:8, while one is new: *dogs*. It is unlikely that John would include a literal reference to an animal group in listing categories of human transgressors, so something else must be meant here.

There are several possibilities. The word *dog*, in singular or plural, serves as a metaphor for a male prostitute (Deuteronomy 23:18), for those who mocked Jesus at his crucifixion (Psalm 22:16–18; Matthew 27:35–44), for the enemies of David (Psalm 59:1–7, 14), for Israel’s greedy watchmen (Isaiah 56:9–12), for profane people who are incapable of receiving what is holy (Matthew 7:6), for Gentiles (15:21–26), for Judaizers (Philippians 3:2), and for false teachers (2 Peter 2:1–22).

There seems to be no decisive textual basis for selecting any one of these as the single reference over all the others. But a common thread is that the above categories refer to people who reject God’s authority. As seen in lesson 10, those to be denied access to “the water of life”

(Revelation 21:6) are designated for housing in the lake of fire (21:8). These are the evildoers who are left *outside* the city in the text before us.

II. Testimony, Offer, Warning

(REVELATION 22:16–19)

A. Jesus (v. 16)

16a. “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David,

Jesus includes more self-designations that help us understand the importance of the book of Revelation. To be *the Offspring of David* is easy to grasp: Jesus is from that line by the earthly genealogy traced to Joseph (Matthew 1:1–17; Romans 1:3).

The imagery of *the Root* is a little more complicated. Prophecy spoke of the coming Messiah as a “Branch” to grow from “roots” (see Isaiah 11:1; compare Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 6:12). For Jesus himself to be that root in an ultimate sense is quite a strong claim! He is Messiah in all fullness. Any status that David had ultimately flowed from Jesus, not the other way around.

16b. “and the bright Morning Star.”

Jesus’ final self-identifier has resulted in Bible students searching the Old Testament for various “star prophecies” or tie-ins to the star of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:2, 7, 10). But that is unnecessary. Most of us have seen the phenomenon called the morning star, which is a reference to the planet Venus as it is visible shortly before sunrise.

B. Water (v. 17)

17. The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

The Spirit is the Holy Spirit, the promised divine presence on earth after Christ’s ascension (see John 16:7–13). *The bride* is the church, the embodiment of Christ in his followers on earth (see lesson 10). Their invitation to *come* and drink of the eternal *water of life* is a call to faith and obedience, a call to join Christ before he comes again. It is a choice available to all!

C. Tampering (vv. 18–19)

18. I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll.

The voice now switches to that of the one who records it, John himself. Two stern warnings are in order at this point, and the first one is that hearers *of this scroll* must not add content. The penalty of *plagues* on anyone foolish enough to do so is described in Revelation 16.

19. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

Deletions *from this scroll* are also warned against. All the book's messages are to be taken to heart! Ignoring or removing parts we don't like will have eternal consequences. Persons unwise to the point of making such subtractions will not be part of the citizenry of the New Jerusalem. Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32 inform us that neither this prohibition nor the one just before it is anything new!

All this should give us something to think about in studying Revelation because we tend to be selective. We avoid chapters that seem too disturbing, too hard to understand, or that don't fit our image of what God "should" do.

A good strategy is to read the entire book in one sitting to allow its full message to speak to our minds and hearts. This is how we will gain the full blessings of Revelation's prophecies. This will be true even if we do not comprehend everything. This book promises blessings for the future but also for today (Revelation 1:3). It is the grandest story of all time. It is the promise that God will defeat the forces of evil and will reign in victory forever from his golden, eternal city.

III. Promising, Longing, Closing

(REVELATION 22:20–21)

A. Reaffirmation (v. 20a)

20a. He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

One last time John reminds us of Jesus' promise to come *soon*. This promise embraces both the presence of Christ in his church today (compare Revelation 2:5, 16; 3:11) and the promise of Christ's return in the future (compare 22:7, 12).

There will be only two reactions when Christ returns: joy and fear. Christ is coming the second time—a time of glory and judgment. He will vanquish all the evil that seems so powerful now. Who can stand before the wrath of the Lamb? No one (Revelation 6:17). The intent of this book as a whole is to bring readers to repentance, faithfulness, and endurance so that we will greet the return of Christ with joy.

B. Desire (v. 20b)

20b. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Lack of fear is the position of John as he ends the book with a short prayer. The word *Amen* means "It is true." This is a loaded, powerful word in this context, for John is in effect saying, "Everything I just told you—all the visions, all the prophecies, all the warnings, all the blessings—is absolutely true." If this were not the case, then John would not dare express a desire for Jesus to return, lest John's falsehood be exposed!

But John is telling the truth, and his *come, Lord Jesus* is similar to Paul's "Maranatha" in 1 Corinthians 16:22. That is an Aramaic word meaning "Come, Lord." Perhaps the greatest faith prayer a Christian can utter is to ask sincerely for Christ to come, for that means the one praying is ready to meet the Lord, master, and judge face-to-face (compare 2 Timothy 4:8).

C. Benediction (v. 21)

21. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

John offers a final blessing to the readers. This is comforting for the persecuted and fearful readers of the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3, for they are in dire need of God's grace and mercy in their difficult situations. Likewise for us, this is a blessed word of calming peace. It assures us that God's marvelous *grace* toward us is not just past or future. It is present and available *now*.

Conclusion

A. Praying Maranatha

The return of Christ is a key theme of the book of Revelation. We joyously celebrate his first coming, his first "advent," in the Christmas season. But daily we should also anticipate and pray for his return, his second "advent," to take us home to be with him forever.

Today I did so by praying "Maranatha." I am ready for Christ to come again. When I read the news of another mass shooting, another terrorist attack, or another outrage to my Christian conscience, I am ready for Christ to come again. Despite the efforts of people of good faith, the dark side of humanity seems an unquenchable source of evil. I am ready for Christ to return.

I don't know exactly how his coming or our residence in the New Jerusalem will work. The closing chapters of Revelation give answers, but in all honesty, they raise questions as well. Yet I don't need to know everything, and I am at peace with that. I am ready for Christ to come again.

Are you ready as well, or does part of your heart fear that you will be among those excluded from the holy city? Being able and willing to pray for Christ to return right now is a great test of one's spiritual health, a test of one's relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Practice the Maranatha prayer for a week. Pray it sincerely, in true faith. If you take this seriously, it will make a difference.

B. Prayer

Father, thank you for promises both fulfilled and yet to be fulfilled. In this light, we pray, "Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!" Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Make the Alpha and Omega first and last in your life.¹

¹