

November 27

Lesson 13

FIRST

AND LAST

DEVOTIONAL READING:: Revelation 1:4b-8

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Revelation 22:8-21

REVELATION 22:11-21

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.



Photo: Wavebreak Media / Thinkstock

KEY VERSE

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.—Revelation 22:13

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the descriptions that are intended to apply to Jesus.
2. Explain the descriptions of Jesus.
3. Sing a praise chorus, song, or traditional hymn that expresses the hope of Jesus' promised return.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Delays
- B. Lesson Background

I. Paths, Advent, Separation ([Revelation 22:11-15](#))

- A. Two Types ([v. 11](#))
- B. Second Coming ([vv. 12, 13](#))
- C. Two Outcomes ([vv. 14, 15](#))

When God Finally Gives Up

II. Testimony, Offer, Warning ([Revelation 22:16-19](#))

- A. Jesus ([v. 16](#))
- B. Water ([v. 17](#))
- C. Tampering ([vv. 18, 19](#))

The Danger of Deletion

III. Promising, Longing, Closing ([Revelation 22:20, 21](#))

- A. Reaffirmation ([v. 20a](#))
- B. Desire ([v. 20b](#))
- C. Benediction ([v. 21](#))

Conclusion

- A. Praying Maranatha
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. 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 flight delay can result in disrupted plans and great inconvenience. It is a mark of our impatience as a society how traumatic a few hours' delay can be.

Yet delays are part of our everyday life. Car repairs take longer than expected. That package with promised two-day delivery actually takes three. 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 nearly 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 Background

The Old Testament teaches in many places that God will send a deliverer for his people. The people of Israel in the first century thought such a person would be a political and military rescuer. God's anointed leader, they thought, 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 unexpected things happened. First, the Messiah that God sent did not come to be a leader of armies and defeat pagan invaders ([John](#)

6:15). He came, rather, to save his 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, for he was the sacrificial Lamb who took away the sin of the world ([John 1:29](#)). Most first-century Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah because he did not meet their expectations.

Second, the Jerusalem temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70 during the horrific War of the Jews. This was something that no Israelite 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 under distress as 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 in power and 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.

As today's text opens, the apostle John is still being addressed by the angel of the bowls of plagues, his guide to the new Jerusalem ([Revelation 21:9](#); [22:1, 8-10](#)). The angel has just told him that the prophecies he is to write are not to be sealed up "because the time is near" ([22:10](#)). This gives a heightened sense of the necessary fulfillment of these prophecies. It causes us to focus anew on the greatest of all of Revelation's prophecies: Christ will return.

I. Paths, Advent, Separation

([REVELATION 22:11-15](#))

A. Two Types (v. 11)

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 for John by noting the paths taken by the *one who does wrong*, the *vile*, the *one who does right*, and the *holy*. There are really just two categories here, and the contrast is strong: the unrepentant, who continue to walk the wide path of sin, and the repentant, who take the narrow road ([Matthew 7:13, 14](#)). In contrast with [Revelation 2:5, 16](#); [3:3, 19](#), there is no call for repentance here, for it is as if the judgment has already been cast. The obedient will continue to obey. The disobedient are not listening (see also [Revelation 9:20, 21](#); [16:8-11](#)). Only those with ears to hear will listen ([2:7](#)), the ones whose hearts are attuned to God's words.

What Do You Think?

How can your church help its members better handle living among the unrepentant?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

When others ridicule their faith

When others encourage them to sin

When others deny God's moral standards and final judgment

Considering [1 Corinthians 5:9, 10](#)

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 *I am coming soon!* (see [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 reward each person *according to what they have done*. The two sets of rewards are set forth in [verse 14](#), below.

13. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

For the final time in Revelation, we hear a voice asserting the speaker to be *the Alpha and the Omega* (compare [Revelation 1:8](#); [21:6](#)). The first time we hear this self-designation, it is clearly "the Lord ... the Almighty" speaking ([1:8](#)). Now the speaker is the one who is coming, Jesus the Lamb. We should not be troubled by this apparent blurring of the distinction between the Lord God Almighty and the conquering Lamb, which is a feature of this book. They are seated on the throne together ([Revelation 22:1](#)) to rule the new Jerusalem as one. While our Bible teaches us 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. We do not worship three gods, but one God. While this unity of persons might be mysterious, it is true ([Matthew 28:19](#); [1 Peter 1:2](#); etc.).

In this final case of Alpha and Omega self-designation, the two letters of the Greek alphabet letters are doubly explained. That alphabet has 24 letters, with Alpha standing at the beginning and Omega at the end. To be the Alpha and the Omega is therefore another way of saying the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End of all things (compare [Isaiah 44:6](#); [48:12](#); [Revelation 1:17](#); [2:8](#)).

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](#), [lesson 11](#)), 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](#)).

What Do You Think?

In what ways has Christ made you an overcomer?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Over your own past

Over opposition in the present

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 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, is a metaphor for a male prostitute ([Deuteronomy 23:18](#), see NIV footnote), 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 ([Matthew 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 singular 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.

WHEN GOD FINALLY GIVES UP

We normally picture God as one who never gives up on people. But there are times when God does seem to give up, times when he releases people fully to their own wicked desires and lusts (examples: [Jeremiah 44:24-28](#); [Psalm 81:11, 12](#); [Acts 7:42, 43](#); [Romans 1:18-32](#)). When that happens, it is almost as if God is saying, “You want to live like that? Fine. I’ll let you live like that.”

As we look at all the evil in our world today, we may wonder why God tolerates it. Why doesn’t he just wipe everything out, as in the days of Noah ([Genesis 6:5-7](#))? The reason he does not do so is stated in [2 Peter 3:9](#): God “is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

HOW TO SAY IT

Alpha *Al-fa*.

Gentile *Jen-tile*.

Isaiah *Eye-zay-uh*.

Jeremiah *Jair-uh-my-uh*.

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

Messiah *Meh-sigh-uh*.

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

Sirius *Sir-ee-oss*.

Zechariah *Zek-uh-rye-uh*.

But make no mistake: there will come a day when God does indeed give up on the unrepentant—for all eternity. Those who do wrong and are vile will be separated from those who do right and are holy. The former are left outside, while the latter are admitted to the city. It’s a dangerous thing to test the patience of God!—J. B. N.

II. Testimony, Offer, Warning

(REVELATION 22:16-19)

A. Jesus (v. 16)

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.”

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 the line of David by the earthly genealogy traced to Joseph ([Matthew 1:1-17](#); [Romans 1:3](#)). The imagery of *the Root* is a little more complicated, though. Prophecy spoke of the coming Messiah as a “Branch” to grow from “roots” (see [Isaiah 11:1](#), see [lesson 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 its fullness. Any status that David has ultimately flows from Jesus Christ, not the other way around.

The final self-identifier, *the bright Morning Star*, has resulted in Bible students searching the Old Testament for various “star” prophecies or tie-ins to the star of Bethlehem. But that is unnecessary. Early risers have seen the phenomenon called “the morning star,” which is a reference to Venus as it is visible in the eastern sky before sunrise.

At its brightest, Venus (a planet in our terminology, not a literal star) can be up to 16 times brighter than Sirius, the brightest actual star (not counting the sun). One who observes the rising of bright Venus knows one thing for certain: night is almost over, since the appearance of the sun is imminent. This is another way for Jesus to say that he is coming soon. The eternal day of the holy city and of the everlasting reign of the Lord and the Lamb is near (compare [2 Peter 1:19](#)).

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.

We do not have to wait for Christ to come again to respond to the invitation given in this verse. *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. These representatives of Christ are present now, and they invite all who hear their message to *come* and drink of the eternal *water of life* now. This is a call to faith and obedience, a call to join Christ before he comes again. It is a choice available to all!

What Do You Think?

What are some ways churches hinder themselves from issuing clear “come to the water” invitations? How can this problem be fixed?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In terms of ministry priorities
- In terms of staffing priorities
- Considering cultural contexts and differences
- Considering reputation in the community
- Other

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 of the book 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 book 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 the book are also warned against. All the book’s messages are to be taken to heart! Taking out parts we don’t like will have 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 violent, too disturbing, or too hard to understand. A good strategy is to read the entire book in one sitting, to allow its full message to speak to our hearts. This is how we will gain the full blessings of its 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 in our world and reign in victory forever from his golden, eternal city.

THE DANGER OF DELETION

In the world of quotations, citations, and references, there are rules about how all this is to be done. The “fair use” concept, for example, allows the use of someone else’s copyrighted material with certain restrictions. Fairness implies that cited material must be quoted accurately; this is true with regard to the words used as well as the intent. For example, consider a hypothetical critic by the name of John Smith whose review of a play reads like this:

This presentation was terrible. The acting was poor, the dialogue was inane, and the plot superficial. It was about as riveting as watching grass grow. The plot was well developed if written by a preschooler. The acting was wonderful if these people were reading their lines for the first time.

Then imagine the producers of the play quoting the critic this way:

John Smith described the play as “riveting,” noting that “the plot was well developed” and “the acting was wonderful.”

Obviously the exact quotations do not give the sense that the original critic intended! That is blatant dishonesty; that’s why a quotation must give a fair sense of the original. Leaving out words may give a very wrong impression.

God feels the same way about his book. Adding to the original is bad; leaving things out can be just as bad if not worse. God does not want his masterpiece tampered with. One must wonder if Thomas Jefferson read [Revelation 22:19](#) before he decided to create his own cut-and-paste version of the Bible!—J. B. N.

What Do You Think?

In what ways do people minimize or dilute the authority of God’s Word? How do we guard ourselves against this danger?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding the way we live
- Regarding how we speak
- Regarding financial priorities
- Other

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 that he is *coming 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 in glory and judgment, and 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. *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 *Amen. Come, Lord Jesus* is similar to Paul’s expressed desire in [1 Corinthians 16:22](#). 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](#)).

What Do You Think?

What will be your part in helping fellow Christians be better prepared to meet the Lord face to face?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In terms of knowledge ([Colossians 1:10](#))

In terms of faith ([2 Corinthians 10:15](#))

In terms of service ([Ephesians 4:16](#))

Other ([2 Peter 1:5-9](#))

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 sore need of God's grace and mercy in their difficult situations. Likewise for us, this is a blessed word of calming peace, assuring us that God's marvelous grace toward us is not just past or future. It is present and available right 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.

This morning I did so by praying "Maranatha," an Aramaic word meaning "Come, Lord" (see the NIV footnote on [1 Corinthians 16:22](#)). I am ready for Christ to come again. When I read the news of another mass shooting, of another suicide bomber, of 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 come again.

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 honestly 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

Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus! Come now, we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

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



Visual for Lesson 13. Start a discussion by pointing to this visual as you ask, “How else can we illustrate ‘the First and the Last’ nature of Jesus?”

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

As class begins, have a learner with a strong, emphatic voice stand abruptly and read [Revelation 1:7](#). After the reading, note, “That is the theme from beginning to end of our book of study: Jesus is coming again! From that verse just read in chapter 1 to our text in chapter 22, that is the key truth: Jesus is coming again.”

Use the gospel song “Coming Again” by Mosie Lister to begin class today, either being sung by a soloist or as a group activity. You will need to provide the words, and you may want to recruit a leader and/or accompanist. The words about his coming again will be sung 12 times, a fitting emphasis for today’s text.

Alternative. Download and distribute copies of the “I Know He’s Coming” activity from the reproducible page to consider others who believed in Jesus’ coming.

Into the Word

Say, “A key question to be asked always is ‘Why?’” Then distribute these why questions to your learners randomly: 1. Why is there no call to

repentance in [verse 11](#)? 2. Why would Jesus have said he is coming soon when he has been gone 2,000 years? 3. Why is reward to be based on what one has done? I thought works were irrelevant and only grace matters. 4. Why would Jesus call himself the beginning and the end? Isn't he eternal? 5. Why are some given access to the tree of life? 6. Why would practitioners of the magic arts be singled out as banned from Heaven? Isn't it just harmless fun? 7. Why does Jesus use intermediary angels to give his revelation to John and us? 8. Why is the invitation to "Come" repeated in [verse 17](#)? 9. Why is the one who adds to or subtracts from the message of this book given such a drastic punishment? 10. Why would John feel compelled to pray for Jesus to come when Jesus has just repeated his promise to do so?

Let learners ask and answer the questions freely. Jot ideas on the board as appropriate. Add clarity from the commentary as necessary.

Since [Revelation 22](#) has been a rich source for hymns, gospel songs, and choruses through the ages, use a musical activity to draw attention to key ideas and phrases in the text. Perhaps have an instrumentalist play melody lines from the following songs/hymns, and ask to name the song: (1) "Come, Every One Who Is Thirsty" by Lucy J. Rider; (2) "He the Pearly Gates Will Open" by Fredrick A. Blom; (3) "O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright" by Philip Nicolai; (4) "The King Is Coming" by Bill and Gloria Gaither; (5) "Of the Father's Love Begotten" by Aurelius Prudentius (includes "He is Alpha and Omega").

Many contemporary songs also issue from [Revelation 22](#) and its beauty; you may well want to choose some of those for your class. Web pages such as hymnal.net and songandpraise.org can provide choices and sound tracks.

Into Life

Distribute copies of the well-known hymn, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," which you have prepared in advance. Say, "Though traditionally used at Christmas, this hymn is an appropriate conclusion to today's study. It is a prayer petitioning God for a prompt resolution of all things, similar to John's joyous, anticipatory cry at the end of Revelation: 'Come, Lord Jesus.'"

If group singing is inappropriate, invite a soloist to prepare and sing the song. Be sure to ask the group to add a rousing "Amen" at the end, to parallel the way the Spirit ends John's book.

Option. Distribute copies of the "So Be It!" activity from the reproducible page. Either have students complete it individually or read it together as a class and voice the "Amens" heartily.