Alpha and Omega

November 27
Bible Study Guide 13

Bible Background • REVELATION 22:8–21
Printed Text • REVELATION 22:12–21 Devotional Reading • REVELATION 1:4b–8

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: SURVEY the biblical references to the Second Coming to see the importance of this hoped-for reality; REJOICE that the invitation from Jesus to join the new community continues through the end of all things; and EMBRACE the call to become part of God’s kingdom.

Keep in Mind

“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Revelation 22:13).

- Teaching Tips
- Bible Text
- Context
- Explore

Words You Should Know

A. Idolaters (Revelation 22:15) eidololatres (Gk.)—Image servants or worshipers.

B. Testify (v. 16) martureo (Gk.)—To be a witness, bear record, provide evidence.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—From Beginning to End. People are aware that things have a beginning and an end. What is the source and final purpose of human life? Revelation affirms that God, who is the Alpha and Omega, controls all things.

A. Think of a time when you were excited to be invited to join a group or attend an event.

B. Pray and ask God to help you facilitate a lesson that conveys the excitement of receiving the auspicious invitation to join God’s kingdom.

C. Complete the companion lesson in the Precepts for Living® Personal Study Guide.

O—Open the Lesson
A. Ask the class to think of an instance when they were excited to be invited to join a group or attend an event. Once everyone has briefly shared the first memory, ask them to also recall something they pursued but had to wait a long time to obtain.

B. Pray and introduce the lesson.

C. Ask for a volunteer to read the Aim for Change and a different volunteer to read Keep in Mind.

D. Have participants read the In Focus story silently.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Have a volunteer read the Focal Verses.

B. Use The People, Places, and Times; Background; Search the Scriptures; At-A-Glance Outline; In Depth; and More Light on the Text to clarify the verses.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Answer the Search the Scripture questions together as a class.

B. Discuss the correlations between the In Focus story, the opening exercise, and the Scripture.

C. Read the Lesson in Our Society to the class.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Allow participants to read and reflect individually on the Make It Happen sections.

B. Ask for a volunteer to summarize the lesson (assist if necessary).

C. Close with prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Alpha and Omega

Song: “The Lily of the Valley”

Devotional Reading: Revelation 1:4b–8

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

You Will Not Find Me
(John 7:32–36)

TUESDAY

This is the Messiah
(John 7:37–43)

WEDNESDAY

The Lord God, the Almighty
THURSDAY

Your First Work Rewarded
(Revelation 2:1–7)

FRIDAY

Worship Without End
(Revelation 7:9–12)

SATURDAY

Promised Redemption Fulfilled
(Isaiah 43:1–7)

SUNDAY

Yes, I am Coming Soon!
(Revelation 22:8–21)

KJV

Revelation 22:12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

15 For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

18 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

20 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

NLT

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Revelation 22:12 “Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds.

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. They will be permitted to enter through the gates of the city and eat the fruit from the tree of life.

15 Outside the city are the dogs—the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idol worshipers, and all who love to live a lie.

16 “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this message for the churches. I am both the source of David and the heir to his throne. I am the bright morning star.”


18 And I solemnly declare to everyone who hears the words of prophecy written in this book: If anyone adds anything to what is written here, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book.

19 And if anyone removes any of the words from this book of prophecy, God will remove that person’s share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book.

20 He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon!” Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

21 May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s holy people.

The People, Places, and Times

Book of Revelation. John, who lived in a time of Roman persecution, oppression, and idolatry, began by penning his message as “things which must shortly come to pass” (1:1). Whether the text is interpreted as literal events to take place in the future or as allegorical principles of the kingdom of God, it is clear that initially the text was a prophecy (1:3, 22:18) and a letter (1:4) to the seven churches in Asia Minor, the region we know today as Turkey. John writes from the island of Patmos, where he said his visions occurred.

John. Specifically naming himself as the author of Revelation, John writes with authority to the church as a whole. From reading these Scriptures, it is apparent the son of Zebedee was a visionary and a prophet. He and his brother James were nicknamed by Jesus as the “Sons of Thunder.” John had a seemingly special relationship with Jesus. In at least three instances, John accompanied Jesus apart from the majority of the twelve disciples (Luke 8:51; Matthew 17:1; Mark 14:33).

Background

The book of Revelation is considered apocalyptic writing. The term “apocalypse” refers to Jewish and Christian literature that uncovers or unveils future events or unseen realms of heaven and hell; conversationally, the word is applied to religious events surrounding the anticipated destruction of the world. Apocalyptic writing is notorious for mysterious language and imagery that could be perceived and interpreted in many different ways. In the Old and New Testaments, there are two full apocalypses (Daniel and Revelation), both of which speak cryptically of corrupt, human political realms in contrast to God’s heavenly and eternal realm.

Eschatology, the study of end times and more specifically death, judgment, and heaven and hell, has been closely associated with apocalyptic literature. Both Revelation and Daniel (chapter 9) prophesy that the end is on the horizon. Daniel also introduces the Jewish (and then also Christian) concept of being raised from the dead (12:1–2),
and the Book of Life mentioned throughout Revelation is first mentioned in Daniel (12:1).

Another heavily discussed or avoided topic is the second coming of Jesus. This phenomena has drawn a lot of thoughts that vary widely throughout the faith. In the most literal context, it is the belief that Jesus will literally return to earth and satisfy unfulfilled prophecies.

**In Depth**

1. **Alpha and Omega (Revelation 22:12–13)**

   The significance of the “I am” statement stems from the book of Exodus (3:13–15), when God instructs Moses to tell the people of Israel that God sent him. Moses asks God for a specific name, and God’s response is, “I AM THAT I AM,” that is, “I am everything and whatever is required at any given moment.” The term is all-encompassing. God further explains that this will be His name forever.

   Jesus employs the “I am” statement as an assertion of His divinity and connection to God. He quotes God’s declaration of being the first and the last who is the one true God (Isaiah 44:6, 48:12). Jesus utilizes the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet (alpha and omega) to further stress the point. The phrase occurs four times throughout Revelation (1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13).

2. **City Gates (v. 14–15)**

   Revelation was written to churches in large cities. Thus John intentionally describes a particular place that contrasts with the metropolitan life the recipients are used to. Chapter 3 introduces this city of God as the New Jerusalem (3:12), while chapter 21 provides the description. The dimensions, ethos, foundation, building materials and jewels, walls, and character of its inhabitants are all detailed.

   John writes that those who have the right to the tree of life will enter the city by the gates; there are twelve of them. Three gates face each compass direction, and there is an angel and inscription of the twelve tribes at all the gates. The people outside the gates are those who are disobedient to God’s commands. They would corrupt the city with their sin.

3. **Root and Descendant of David (v. 16–21)**

   Throughout the messianic prophecies is a motif that connects the expectant Savior to the lineage and legacy of King David. The Gospels continue the motif by casting Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecies, and whatever remains void, the New Testament asserts will be accomplished once Jesus returns. Based on Scripture and because of their plight as a people, the initial followers of Christ longed for a Davidic king who would conquer the enemies of God in the same way that David did.

   Even in the apocalyptic text that was canonized last in sequence, Jesus identifies Himself with the legacy and lineage of David. An interpretation of Isaiah 11:1, 10 is that there is still a constant connection between what was and what will come.

**Search the Scriptures**

1. What is the severe punishment for anyone who adds or takes away from this book of prophecy (Revelation 22:18–19)?

2. Jesus calls those who follow His commandments blessed (v. 14). Write out a mission statement that details how you are going to live a blessed life.

**Discuss the Meaning**
1. How relevant is the Second Coming to the way you live your life?

2. What does it mean to you personally that Jesus is the beginning and the end?

Lesson in Our Society

Although Jesus graciously extends the invitation for us to enter the kingdom and offers “waters of life,” we cannot receive these gifts without obligation and investment. Sometimes we can be so preoccupied with the daily routine of life that we have no interest in questions of ultimate significance. These are the things that need to occupy our minds and influence our lives on a daily basis.

Make It Happen

Verse 15 gives a few examples of actions and character flaws that can separate us from Jesus. Aside from what was mentioned, can you think of anything that may separate you from fully preparing yourself for Christ? The thoughts, words, or actions do not have to be what some consider “sin” in the conventional sense, but rather anything that could prevent you from dwelling in the closest proximity possible to Jesus.

More Light on the Text

Revelation 22:1–7

Revelation 22:12–21

The context of the last chapter of the last book of Scripture brings a close to human history. Like ultimate bookends of humanity’s story, our beginning and end are contrasted and captured by authors Moses and John. In Genesis, the serpent tempts the first Adam; he falls, and paradise is lost. In Revelation, the serpent is destroyed, the second Adam is victorious, and paradise is restored. The significant elements of the garden paradise were two people, the tree of life, and a river that watered the garden (Genesis 2:9–10). In the New Jerusalem, the fountain of life flows from the throne of God (Revelation 22:1–2, 4:6), and lining both sides of the river are many trees of life (22:14) that are not only freely accessible but ever fruitful for the enjoyment and healing of many nations (Psalm 46:4). In Eden, one tree was forbidden; in the New Jerusalem, nothing is forbidden. This succinct picture of our final paradise supersedes the original, particularly because of the absence of temptation, death, and evil.

12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

Although “quickly” is the standard interpretation of the Greek ταχύς (tah-KOOS), the more literal rendering is “suddenly.” Both intend for the Church, the bride of Christ, to prepare herself and be ready at any time for the return of her beloved Bridegroom. This is because no one really knows when it will happen. The main point, repeated over and over in Scripture, is to be ready for Christ's return whenever it happens.

It is misguided thinking to take this verse out of context and try to say we are justified by works; too many other Scriptures clarify this issue (Ephesians 2:8–9; James 2:20). Paul clarified that it is God’s grace alone that saves us (Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8–9), and Jesus declared that the Law and the Prophets rest on a single commandment to love God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37–30; cf. Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). In other places like Revelation 22, the Scriptures declare that our deeds are important (Matthew 16:27; James 2:20). Read together, all these verses remind us that as humans, we always fall short of perfection, so we can never save ourselves by our deeds alone. We will always need God’s grace for salvation. However, passages such as Matthew 16, James 2 and Revelation 22 also remind us that we cannot expect to get away with corrupt behavior, mistreating one another intentionally. Hollow or shallow faith that does not lead to growth is not enough. A positive take on the verse is that Jesus will come with “rewards” (Gk. μισθος, mis-THOS), like wages or payment for services, for those who have been faithful. While no one is saved by works, those who are saved will be rewarded according to their works (Gk. έργον, ER-gon, employment or labor).
13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

Alpha is the first of twenty-four letters in the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last, thus making the connection between the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Psalm 90:2 says God is from “everlasting to everlasting,” and He is the same “yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). If Genesis and Revelation are the bookends of human history, Jesus is the holder of the bookends both pre-existing and post-existing our temporal time frame. This is true not only in the sense of existence, but also in character and holiness, without beginning or end, and without change (Malachi 3:6). Alpha and Omega, moreover, is one of many self-proclaimed images of Christ found in Scripture. The same names are applied to God (cf. Isaiah 41:4, 44:6; Revelation 1:8, 21:6) and here specifically applied to Christ (cf. Revelation 1:17, 2:8), giving another insurmountable argument for His deity.

14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. 15 For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

Jesus gives His blessing to those who obey God’s commandments; this is their qualification for entering the gates of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. These people have a right (exousia, ek-ZOO-seh-ah) or authority to eat from the tree of life. Adam and Eve were banished from the garden and they were not able to eat from its tree (Genesis 3:22–24). Now the tree is available to all who follow Jesus and obey God’s commandments.

The people outside the city are those who do not keep God’s commandments. Since the whole city is God’s temple, then those who would defile it are kept outside. These people have disobeyed God to the point that their disobedience has become their identity. This list is very similar to the list in Revelation 21:8, with the addition of the category of dogs. Dogs were considered unclean animals in Judaism because they would eat carrion (Leviticus 11:27; Deuteronomy 14:7), and by extension in Greco-Roman and Jewish culture, dogs sometimes represented immorality, including at times sexual immorality (Deuteronomy 23:18; Matthew 7:6; Philip 3:2). The phrase “whosoever loveth and maketh a lie” is more than likely a further description of idolaters.

16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

Jesus places His stamp of approval on the testimony of the message of Revelation to the Church (the word “you” in the Greek is plural), which includes our present age. No mortal could be both root (the Creator) and offspring (Isaiah 11:1); Jesus is both the Lord of David and the son of David (Matthew 22:42–45). The fallen angel Lucifer, once called a morning star (Isaiah 14:12; also day star in some versions), has from the beginning lied to mankind and falsely presented himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). Jesus affirms that He alone is the true Morning Star. Here three words associated with light are used to describe Jesus: star (Gk. aster, ah-STAIR; star, flame), bright (Gk. lampros, lam-PROS; white, radiant) and morning (Gk. orthinos, or-thin-OS; what is to the right, correct). Morning is associated with the re-introduction of light to the world. After a period of darkness, the star of the morning will appear, shining brightly.

17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

The Spirit of God and the bride of Christ invites everyone who has yet to decide for Christ to come to the water of life! We, along with the Spirit, wait expectantly, but we also serve as a testimony that the human heart is satisfied by coming to Jesus, and any who come to Him may freely drink of the water of life (John 7:37–39; Revelation 22:1), both now and forever.

18 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: 19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.
Matthew Henry, a 17th century Bible scholar, observes that the words of warning resemble previous words of protection found in Scripture: “This sanction is like a flaming sword, to guard the canon of the Scripture from profane hands.” Henry’s words are reminiscent of the angel guarding the tree of life with a flaming sword (Genesis 3:24). God installed similar sanctions for the protection of the Law (see Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Proverbs 30:5–6). God will judge offenders appropriately for their violation of His logos. The clearly promised curse balances the previous promised blessing offered to the faithful (v. 12) and together retain a familiar blessing/curse theme from the Old Testament as the New Testament closes.

20 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Christ’s parting words are filled with mercy and hope. When Jesus ascended after His resurrection, He promised to be with them by His Spirit; now He promises He will soon return. His coming will be fulfilled as completely as the fulfillment of sending the Holy Spirit, the Comforter and Teacher of the church. The Greek word for “testify” is martureo (mar-too-REH-oh), meaning to give or bear witness, just as the apostles were witnesses of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Once Christ does return, it will be the end for all who rejected Him. The primary message for the church is to be and remain ready. The book of Revelation started with the Spirit (1:10), the church lives and exists because of the Spirit, and individual believers are raised to newness of life only through being born of the Spirit (John 3:5, 8; Galatians 4:29). The heartbeat of every Christian (the body of Christ) is the Spirit. The Spirit has been our teacher of truth, always leading us toward Christ. All born–again believers will be ready because of the Spirit and will wait expectantly, no matter how long it takes.

21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

It is no coincidence that both the book and the Word end with a word of grace. Christ came to bring us grace. When His work on earth was finished, He left to prepare a place for us, and as surely as He first came according to His promise, He will return as promised for His bride. Until we are perfected in Him, we can find no better comfort, stronger peace, or more enduring hope than the presence of His grace to sustain us until His return.

Say It Correctly

Plagues. PLAYGZ.
Testifieth. TES-ti-FEYE-ith.