

# Lesson 53

## **Revelation 22:8-9**

**8** And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. **9** Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.

We saw something just like this back in Revelation 19.

*Revelation 19:10 — And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*

So why, if John has been told just a bit earlier not to worship this angel, do we see John once again trying to worship an angel just a few chapters later? We looked at that question back in Chapter 19, and there we concluded that John is likely just overcome by all that he is seeing here. As we said earlier, perhaps the most surprising thing is that John did not fall down more often! Another possibility we considered is that John mistakenly thought this angel was Jesus, but we know that John knew Jesus very well and under normal circumstances would have recognized, but then these were not normal circumstances, so that remains another possibility.

But, for whatever reason, this event happens a second time, and once again God uses the event to teach a vital lesson — **worship God!** This book of Revelation has been filled with false gods and false worship. Christians were fac-

ing death because of their refusal to worship those false gods. A message that rings all throughout this book is that no created being is worthy of our worship — not even this wondrous angelic being. We must worship and serve the Creator rather than any creature (Romans 1:25).

Verse 9 is a beautiful verse. This wonderful angelic being describes himself as John's fellow servant, and as a fellow servant of the prophets, and as a fellow servant of those who keep the sayings in this book. It's that last part that to me is the really beautiful part — this wondrous angelic being is our fellow servant! We certainly don't know all that angels are commissioned by God to do in our world today, but one thing we know is that this angel is our fellow servant! This angel is working right along beside us to do the will of God.

And one more thing about verse 9 — those two words at the end are perhaps the primary theme of this entire book: worship God! When the choice is between Caesar and Christ, we choose Christ! When we are told to worship Caesar to maintain our position in the trade guild, we instead worship God! When we are told to renounce Christ or die, we instead worship Christ. We could have many lessons on true worship and false worship, but the most important fact about true worship is that true worship is worship of God. Everything else is false worship, be it worship of Caesar, worship of money, worship of pleasure, worship of ourself, or whatever. True worship is always worship of God and of God alone. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10). The first step to true worship is to cast away our idols.

### **Revelation 22:10-15**

**10 And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. 11 He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. 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.**

In verse 10, we have the fourth of the four central time frame verses in this book. The first two time frame verses were in verses 1 and 3 of the opening chapter. The final two time frame verses are in verses 6 and 10 of this closing chapter.

Why do I spend so much time emphasizing these time frame verses? Because they are the key to properly interpreting the entire book. If we ignore the time frame of the prophecy (the first statement of which occurs in the very first verse of the book), then we have no hope of correctly understanding the prophecy.

When God says that something will happen, God almost always gives a time frame for when that thing will occur. The so-called prophecies of men are nothing like that. Many have heard of Nostradamus, for example. He was a French physician and astrologer who lived from 1503 to 1566 and who wrote many so-called prophecies, some of which his followers claim have been fulfilled in our own lifetimes. But when we look at his prophecies what we find our just vague statements that could be fulfilled in many different ways at many different times. On the few occasions when Nostradamus included a time frame, he was dead wrong in what he predicted. Only God can tell us what will happen in the future **and when it will happen!** If we ignore the time frames in this book, then we are in effect treating the prophecies in this book as others treat the prophecies of Nostradamus — just slide them along the time line of all human history and look for a match. That is not how the prophecies of God work!

Of the four central time frame verses in this book, this fourth one in verse 10 may be the most informative. Why? Because it includes a link back to another

book we have studied, the book of Daniel. Here in verse 10, John is told to **seal not** the prophecy because the time is at hand. In Daniel 8:26, Daniel received the exact **opposite** command regarding a vision that he had just received.

**Daniel 8:26** — *And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore **shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days.***

God tells John **not** to seal up his vision because the time of its fulfillment is near, but God tells Daniel to seal up his vision because the time of its fulfillment is many days later. Here is the key question: how long was the “many days” in Daniel 8? How long did it take for that prophecy to be fulfilled? The vision in Daniel 8 was received in 550 BC and was fulfilled in 164 BC. That means the “many days” in Daniel 8:26 was 386 years, and because its fulfillment was that far off, God told Daniel to seal up the vision. Here John is told the opposite. Why? Because the time is at hand.

So, with that background, here is our question: if Daniel was told to seal up a vision that would not occur for nearly four centuries, and if John on the other hand is told to **not** seal up his vision because the time of its fulfillment is at hand — then on what basis can we possibly conclude (as so many commentators do) that nothing in the book of Revelation has been fulfilled after two thousand years and counting? Does that make any sense at all?

I would say that that will be my final word on the time frames in this book — but I can't say that! We will see the time frame again in verse 12 and again in verse 20.

In verse 11, the speaker tells the wicked to continue in their wickedness — “he that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.” Why? The answer to that question is at the end of the previous verse — because the time is at hand! Their judgment is coming! The message to them is this: “Just keep it up! Your judgment is right around the corner!” Earlier we saw calls for repentance, but any Roman still hanging around until this final chapter is almost certainly so entrenched in his evil that he will never change, and so the message of repentance becomes instead a message of impending judgment. If they want to do more wickedness, then they had better hurry because their time is short! We see similar statements elsewhere in the Bible.

**Matthew 13:15** — *For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with*

*their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

**Hebrews 10:26-27** — *For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.*

God is long suffering (Romans 2:4), but God is not forever suffering! At some point God determines that enough is enough, and the hammer of judgment falls. Rome has reached that point here.

Verse 11 ends with the opposite command to the faithful — they should continue in their faithfulness. Why? For the same reason — because the time is at hand. They will not have much longer to wait, but they must remain faithful unto death to receive their crown of life (Revelation 2:10). That is the reward in verse 12 — the same reward that was promised at the beginning of the book to those who remained faithful in the face of the terrible Roman persecution. They would receive a crown, while Rome received wrath and indignation. And when would this happen? Verse 12 also answers that question — it would happen quickly. And it did happen quickly. The command was not to remain faithful until the end of the world; the command was to remain faithful unto death.

At times we have had to wonder about whether the speaker is Jesus or an angel, but not here in verse 13. Only Jesus can say, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.” And again, the book has come full circle back to Chapter 1.

**Revelation 1:8** — *I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.*

This book has a wonderful structure and is a unified whole, and don't ever let anyone tell you otherwise! From beginning to end, the book is proclaiming the same message.

The beatitude in verse 14 is the final beatitude in Revelation, and it is the seventh. The beautiful structure of this book is based on the number seven — the number for perfection.

In the KJV, verse 14 reads, “Blessed are they that do his commandments.” The ESV instead reads, “Blessed are those who wash their robes.” We know that both statements are true based on many other verses in the Bible, but the latter (I am told) has better textual support in the manuscripts, and so that is the one we will use here: “Blessed are those who wash their robes.”

So how then does one enter into this city, which is the church? One obtains the right to enter this city by *washing*. That is how one enters the gates of the church, just as Peter told us in Acts 2:38 on the very day the church was established. Some say we can just **think** our way into the church without actually doing anything, but that is not what the Bible says. Others say that we are either in the church or out of the church as predestined by God and there is not anything we can do to change our location, but that is not what the Bible says. The church is the body of Christ (Colossians 1:18), and we are baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27).

That’s who gets to enter into the church through the gates — the washed. Who must remain outside? The unwashed, which verse 15 describes as dogs, sorcerers, whoremongers, murders, idolaters, and liars. Those terms are all self-explanatory, except perhaps for the first one, dogs. Who are the dogs?

The word “dog” is used in the Bible for various kinds of evil people. In Deuteronomy 23:17–18, the word “dog” designates a male prostitute. In first-century Palestine, the word was used in reference to the heathen as it is used in Matthew 15. In Philippians 3:2 Paul applied the term to the Judaizing teachers. In short, being called a dog is not a compliment! Anyone in this group described in verse 15 needs to obey the gospel and enter the city of God while the gates remain open.

### **Revelation 22:16-17**

**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.**

This word of prophecy about the church has come from the head of the church, Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18). Jesus loves his church deeply, and that great love is on full display all throughout this final book of the Bible.

Jesus is “the root and the offspring of David.” Jesus is “the bright and morning star.” What that tells us is that Jesus is everything that Caesar is not. Jesus, not Caesar, is the true king. Jesus, not Caesar, is the true light. Jesus, not Caesar, is the true guide for our life. Jesus, not Caesar, is living!

And what do we see in verse 17? A wonderful three-fold invitation to come! This invitation is from the Spirit and from the bride, which is the church.

To whom is this invitation extended? It is extended to those who are thirsty and to “whosoever” will come. Two questions: First, who are these thirsty outside the church who are invited to obey the gospel and enter the church if (as some suggest) this is all happening at the end of the world? And second, what does the word “whosoever” say about the false Calvinistic notion that each person is predestined to heaven or hell without regard to what they do in this life? Unlike Calvin’s invitation, Jesus’ invitation is to **everyone**.

To what are the thirsty invited? They are invited to take the water of life freely. We know what that means!

*John 4:14 — But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*

That’s the same invitation we are seeing right here. This is the invitation to come to Christ and partake of the living water that only Christ can give. Only by partaking of that water can we never thirst again.

This book has ended with a beautiful description of the Lord’s church, and the most beautiful thing about it is that the gates are open! We can enter into the church and enjoy the blessings of that great city if we come to Christ and obey his word by being washed in the waters of baptism. “The Spirit and the bride say, Come!”

## **Revelation 22:18-19**

**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.**

Tampering with the word of God is serious business. Those who add to the words in this book by teaching things in Christ's name that Christ never taught will find themselves sharing in the horrible plagues described in this book. And those who take away from the words in this book the parts they disagree with or the parts that don't fit with their theories will lose their share in the tree of life and in the holy city.

What? You mean the right to the tree of life can be taken away? Yes, and we have already seen that one's name can be blotted out of the book of life (Revelation 3:5). What does that tell us about the false doctrine of "once saved, always saved"? And one more thing — there is no clearer statement in the Bible than here that there are no lost people in the church. When people in the church fall away from Christ, God removes them from the church. That is what verse 19 says — "God shall take away his part out of the book of life, **and out of the holy city.**" There are no lost people in the church. The church is the body of the saved.

Verse 18 confirms something we have been saying all throughout our study of this book — the judgment in this book is a spiritual judgment. How does verse 18 confirm that? Verse 18 says that "if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book." The "end is near" crowd believes that the plagues in this book are physical judgments such as atomic bombs — does that make sense in light of verse 18? If I add something to God's word, will I have an atomic bomb dropped on me? If that were true, then atomic bombs would be going off all over the place! No, the plagues in this book are **not** physical plagues that can strike only a few people at a certain time. The plagues in this book are **spiritual** plagues that can strike anybody at anytime if that person is not faithful to Christ. Verse 18 tells me that they can strike me today if I start tampering with God's word!

Whenever I read verse 19 I think of the *Reader's Digest Condensed Bible* that was released in 1982. As its name suggests, the aim of that project was to remove the parts of the Bible that the editors of the *Reader's Digest* thought we did not need to read. The Old Testament was cut by 55% and the New Testament by 25%. Except for Philemon, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude, every book in the Bible was condensed to some degree. (Apparently those four books were considered short enough already. I guess Obadiah had some fluff!) Up until recently, I had always wondered if verse 19 made its way into the *Reader's Digest Condensed Bible*, but now I know the answer to that question because I bought a used copy of that book from Amazon.

What do you think? Is verse 19 in or out? Put yourself in the place of that editor who has spent weeks and weeks drawing a line through verse after verse in the Bible, and then right at the end he gets to verse 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.” Does he leave that verse in or strike it out? I can now report that he struck it out. The *Reader's Digest Condensed Bible* deleted the verse that condemns the *Reader's Digest Condensed Bible* — which I suppose is not too surprising. One thing we can say from this is that, although the NIV is a very poor translation of the Bible, it is not the worst!

But with all humor aside, let me ask a serious question — do we sometimes *effectively* use an abridged version of the Bible ourselves? Are there parts of the Bible we never study either because of neglect, or worse just because we don't much like what they say? There is more than one way to draw a line through a verse in the Bible! Let's be sure we study, live, and teach “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). The Bible is not a cafeteria line where I am free to take the fried okra and leave the brussel sprouts behind!

### **Revelation 22:20-21**

**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.**

The book of Revelation ends with two things: a final encouragement for those suffering persecution and a final reminder of our time frame.

The church had nothing to fear from Rome. Jesus was coming quickly against Rome to bring vindication and judgment, and nothing would stand in his way — be it the mighty Roman empire or the modern commentator who believes it did not happen quickly!

Jesus said he was coming quickly, and Jesus did come quickly in judgment against Rome. God heard the prayer of his people in Revelation 6:10, and God answered that prayer. The kingdom of Rome is no more — swept away long ago by the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ just as Daniel had foretold! ***What a beautiful ending to a beautiful book!*** “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen!”

## Conclusion

Now that we have reached the end of our study of this book, it might be helpful to review the five central themes we have seen.

Perhaps the most often repeated theme of the book is the question: ***Christ or Caesar?*** “Choose you this day whom ye will serve!” Will we save our life just to lose it, or will we die for Christ to gain life eternal? Will we bend the knee to Caesar to save our job, or will we remain faithful to Jesus? That was a choice that the first century church faced daily, and it is a choice that we face daily as well. The difference is that we (at least in this country) are not making that choice with a gun pointed at our head. We should look to the first century martyrs, remember the terrible trials they faced, and follow their example of remaining faithful unto death. All throughout this book we have seen the number two appear over and over. That number two certainly points to Rome (as we discussed), but the number two also points to this choice between two paths, and it points to the two groups of people that are created by that choice — those on God’s side, and those on the side of the dragon.

Another theme we saw all throughout the book was that ***things are not always what they seem!*** To see something as it really is, we must see that thing as God sees it. All throughout this book, God has been calling upon us to put on our spiritual eyeglasses. God wants us to see things as he sees them, and the way to do that is to view things through the word of God. The Bible is our spiritual set of eyeglasses! God wants us to see ourselves as we really are, to see the

world and its kingdoms as they really are, and to see the church, the eternal kingdom, as it really is. When we do, this book of revelation, will become a book of revolution!

A third theme we have seen all throughout this book is that **God knows**. Each letter to the seven churches in Chapters 2-3 began with the phrase, “I know” spoken by Jesus. God knows what is happening to his people here on earth. We do not worship and serve a distant and uncaring God; we worship and serve a God who is near and who knows and cares about what is happening in our lives. God hears our prayers and moves mountains in responding to those prayers. And, most importantly, “the Lord knoweth them that are his” (2 Timothy 2:19)! God knows!

A fourth theme we have seen throughout the book is that **God reigns**. All throughout this book we have seen the throne of God, from “the seven Spirits which are before his throne” in Revelation 1:4 to “the throne of God and of the Lamb” in Revelation 22:3. This theme reminds us that God is the true king, not Caesar. And it also reminds us that these events are not happening by accident, but rather they are part of the sovereign plan of God. “The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Daniel 4:32).

A fifth theme we have seen is that **God alone is worthy of worship**. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). That is true worship, but we have also seen many examples of false worship in this book — worship of the dragon, worship of the beast, and worship of the image of the beast. We have even seen John falling down to worship an angel. In each case, the command is the same: worship God! Only God is worthy of our worship. We must always worship the Creator rather than the creation. The reason for the judgments in this book is the persecution of God’s people — and the reason for that persecution was that God’s people refused to worship Caesar. Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout history have been put to death because they followed this command: worship God! And, of course, by telling us who we must worship, the Bible at the same time tells us who we must not worship — which is everybody and everything else.

What is the key to understanding the book of Revelation? I think there are three keys.

The first key to understanding Revelation is to recognize the time frame in Revelation 1:1. If we fail to understand the very first verse of the book, we have little hope of understanding the rest of the book.

The second key to understanding Revelation is to recognize the *spiritual* nature of the deliverance in Revelation 2:10. That verse promised a crown of life to those who were faithful unto death. That verse tells us that the promised deliverance was a spiritual deliverance rather than a physical deliverance. Likewise, the judgment of Rome was a spiritual judgment rather than a physical judgment.

The third key to understanding Revelation is to understand *why* the book was written, and we find that in Revelation 6:10. Now that we are at the end of our study, let's read that verse again.

**Revelation 6:9-10** — *I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*

That cry from the martyrs in verse 10 is what prompted these judgments, and God's repeated answer to their question "how long?" was "quickly!" God said it would happen quickly, and it did happen quickly. God said the time was at hand, and it was.

The martyrs in verses 9-10 play a central role in this book. Their cry for judgment and vengeance is what prompted these events. Who were these martyrs? Most of them are unknown to us by name — but not all of them.

We know the names of some of these martyrs, and there are two in particular I think of when I read these verses. Tradition tells us that the Apostle Paul was beheaded by order of the emperor Nero in AD 64 or 65. Tradition also tells us that Peter was crucified in Rome around that same time. Paul was most likely saved from crucifixion by his Roman citizenship.

**Revelation 17:6** — *And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.*

That is Paul's blood. That is Peter's blood.

**Revelation 6:9** — *And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.*

Peter and Paul were under that altar. Peter and Paul were among those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. Peter and Paul were asking the question “How long?” in verse 10.

**Revelation 18:20** — *Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.*

That’s addressed to the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter. That’s telling them that their prayer from Chapter 6 had been answered.

**Revelation 21:14** — *And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

That’s Paul’s name and Peter’s name.

This vivid book becomes even more vivid when we put a face on these martyrs. Yes, Jesus loves his church more than we can ever know or understand, and we can read this book as Jesus’ response to Rome’s attack against the church. But this book was also Jesus’ response to Rome’s murder of Paul. This book was Jesus’ response to Rome’s murder of Peter.

What was Paul thinking about as he was led to the executioner’s block? I suspect Paul was thinking about what he had told Timothy. Paul knew he had remained faithful unto death, and Paul was looking forward to receiving his promised crown.

**2 Timothy 4:6-8** — *For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

But I also suspect that Paul was thinking about something he had written to the very Christians who were suffering and would suffer with him at the hands of Nero and his evil cohorts. Something that other Christian martyrs no doubt also recalled as they were being put to death by Rome. Something that is a beautiful summary of the entire book of Revelation, and that is the best commentary ever written about the book of Revelation. Something that we will use to end our class.

**Romans 8:31-39** — *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

***In those nine verses is the entire book of Revelation!*** We are more than conquerors through him who loved us! That is the message of Revelation!

Thank you for your attention and for your patience as we have worked our way through this wonderful book, and thank you for the opportunity you have given me to study it and to teach it!

Eric Hall (2019)