

Essay on Mārānāthā

by Zacharias Thundy

You and I have heard the word “Mārānāthā” in the sermons preached in churches. The preachers tell us that “Marannatha, when pronounced two different ways means the following: (1) “Come, Lord” and (2) “Our Lord has come.

Let me put it this way: That claim is disputable in my view as a linguist. Let me explain:

Mārānāthā is the Greek form of the Aramaic phrase **Maran Etha**. That means first, **Mārānāthā** is not a Greek word or phrase. Second, the Greek writer made the Aramaic phrase to look like a single word.

Now the Aramaic phrase, made up of two words, “**Maran Etha**” has only one meaning: “Our Lord has already come.”

Now why is this phrase important in the Christian perspective of the first century of the Common or Christian Era? The answer: The Greek or Western followers of Jesus were becoming numerous and prosperous in the Roman Empire spread all over North Africa, Italy, present-day Turkey, and Greece already by the end of the first century. They hailed Jesus as their spiritual leader, king, and savior. It is like the way Indians used to hail Mahatma Gandhi who suffered and died for the freedom and independence of India from the imperial rule of England. Yes, indeed, we are finally free, Christians chanted because Jesus has come and secured our freedom from the clutches of all our Satanic enemies, including the devil and the persecuting pagan Roman Emperor.

In fact, St. Paul proclaimed this faith in 1 Corinthians 16:22 “Marannatha,” as did the Greek *Didache* 10:14. That was fine for Paul and the nascent Western church, which was then flourishing.

This initial euphoria did not last very long. Very soon Christians were persecuted by many Roman emperors and local imperial subalterns in parts of the vast empire. It was among these persecuted Christians that the author of the Book of Revelations or Apocalypse lived and labored.

The author wrote this popular book known as “Apocalypse or Revelation” to comfort the Christians persecuted at the hands of the Roman Emperors like the notorious Nero. The author also had to deal with some dissident Christians who wanted to compromise with the cult of the emperor, who claimed to be divine. The author portrays him as the seven-headed beast coming out of the sea, as the first beast of the book. The second beast comes out of the earth and orders all the peoples of the earth to worship the first beast. Interestingly both beasts are aligned with the dragon portrayed as the “whore of Babylon” sitting on the back of the seven-headed beast. But the visionary in the Apocalypse foresees Christ vanquishing the enemies of the Church and throwing them into the lake of fire. He wants that terrible day of reckoning or the day of victory to come soon. And he attests, “He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” (22:20).

So far so good. But I, as a linguist, have a caveat here. It is this: We cannot claim that *Mārānāthā* also means “Come, Lord,” where the word *come* is in the imperative mood and in the imperative mood the word for *come* is *THA*, which is used at the beginning of the sentence in Aramaic. That is why the Aramaic expression in the Apocalypse is “*THA MARIYA ISHO.*”

But, as it usually happens, extrapolation started when preachers and translators viewed and compared Paul’s statement that “the Lord has already come” in conjunction with “come, Lord Jesus” as found in the Book of Apocalypse or Revelation. They then formulated the popular mantra “Mārānāthā.” They started viewing the phrase to mean also a Second Coming. So in preacherly fashion, even though linguistically

incorrect, they combined the Aramaic “**Maran Etha**” with the traditional Christian prayer of “Thy kingdom come” as found in the Lord’s Prayer, by giving the word “*Mārānāthā*” a new meaning.

Now, are the preachers wrong when they combined “Come, Lord Jesus” with “The Lord has come”? Not at all, because we find variants of the prayer, “Come, Lord Jesus” elsewhere in the New Testament, especially as in the Lord’s Prayer.

So in fine, can you then say “*Mārānāthā*” as "the ideal Christian **mantra**", meaning "Come Lord", repeated silently interiorly as four equally stressed syllables *Ma-ra-na-tha*? Yes, of course, as a prayerful mantra while meditating on Jesus.



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