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## The Promise “I Am Coming Soon” in Revelation

Rabach Symon Odek  
University of Eastern Africa  
Baraton, Kenya

### Introduction

The understanding of the promise “I am coming soon” ἔρχομαι ταχύ in Revelation revolves around the interpretation of the adverb ταχύ.<sup>1</sup> There are several views on the interpretation of the adverb:

1. A focus on the temporal aspect of the adverb, in which ταχύ is taken to indicate only a literal temporal proximity.<sup>2</sup> According to this interpretation the promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ is viewed to mean near only to John’s time in which the original audience expected the prophecies to be fulfilled in their lifetime.<sup>3</sup> One option in this view is that Jesus would come to his followers during their crisis, the persecution of the church in the first

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), 3 ed. Revised and edited Frederick W. Danker (2000) s.v. ταχύ, observes the ambiguity of the word. See also Johannes P. Louw, and Eugene A. Nida, eds, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, Vol. 2 (1989), s.v. ταχύ, Henry George Lindell, and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Revised and augmented by Henry (1996), s.v. ταχύ. Some like David Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 535, argue that the ambiguity of the term is on whether it refers either to certainty or immediacy.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., “The Preterist View of Revelation,” *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed., C. Marvin Pate, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 41.

<sup>3</sup> Morris Ashcraft “Revelation,” *Broadman Bible Commentary Series*, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1972), 256; William Milligan, *The Book of Revelation* (New York, NY: George H. Doran Company, 1905), 2; Gentry, *Four Views*, 41.

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century.<sup>4</sup> The other is that the promise was intended for John's time, but failed.<sup>5</sup>

2. An emphasis on the adverbial aspect of manner, the rapid rate of an activity or event. Parousia in this view will rapidly and suddenly unfold whenever it will be. Nearness is not held as the emphasis of the promise.<sup>6</sup>

3. A qualified temporal use of the adverb, which views it as temporal not chronologically, but from an apocalyptic and eschatological perspective.<sup>7</sup> The promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ is understood as temporal, but from the context of the near-end motif of the Bible, an ever present promise to God's people.<sup>8</sup> Another understanding of a qualified temporal view is from the salvation history perspective.<sup>9</sup> According to this view after Pentecost the next major event in the salvation history is parousia, therefore

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<sup>4</sup> George Bradford Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Blacks New Testament Commentaries (BNTC) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1966), 12, 283.

<sup>5</sup> Eugene M. Boring, *Revelation*, Interpretation (Louisville, TN: John Knox Press, 1989), 73, argues that this prophecy failed just like other apocalyptic prophecies of the period.

<sup>6</sup> John Walvoord, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1966), 35; Craig S. Keeener, *Revelation*, The NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids Zondervan, 2000), 61; Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Revelation an Expository Commentary: "God's Last Word"* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan) 1976,18; see also Gregory Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NICGT, 1135 who argues for swiftness as the meaning of ταχύ. Thus suddenness of the fulfillment but is open to a temporal understanding of the term in the sense of the next redemptive event; Thomas Ice, *"Preterists Timed Texts' End Time Controversy*, ed., Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Irvine, CA: Harvest House, 2005), 102-105

<sup>7</sup> Allan Johnson, "Revelation," *The Expositor Bible Commentary* Vol.12 ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1981), 416-417; Hitchcock Mark L., "A Critique of the Preterist View of "Soon" and "Near" in Revelation, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (2006)476-478; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmann,1990), 16; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* New International Commentary of the New Testament (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 65, 120 observes that imminence should be understood as an eschatological consummation with the word soon taken at the face value, as "foreshortened time of the end"; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans,1972), 22, also allows for this understanding; argues that the promise should be understood from God's perspective of time in the light of the statement 2 Peter 3:8-9.

<sup>8</sup> Hitchcock, 476-478.

<sup>9</sup> Beale, 1135.

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it is near.<sup>10</sup> Still some view it as temporal, but from God’s perspective of time.<sup>11</sup>

4. The meaning of the adverb *ταχύ* is also held as mainly didactic<sup>12</sup> with no historical fulfillment either in the near or distant future, but now.<sup>13</sup> The emphasis is on the glorious manifestation of Jesus now in the present.<sup>14</sup>

#### The Usage of *ταχύ* and Cognates in the Bible

The first three interpretations of the adverb *ταχύ* are based on the possible lexical and contextual meaning of the word. However, in the fourth interpretation the usage is mainly symbolic. Therefore, *the crux interpretum* of the adverb lies with the first three interpretations, which are basically two. It is whether as used in the promise the adverb is temporal or focuses on the manner of the action.

The basis of understanding *ταχύ* as emphasizing speed is both lexical and contextual. Lexically, *ταχύ* and its cognates in Revelation are primarily viewed as emphasizing speed.<sup>15</sup> Contextually, works such as the LXX and

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (BECNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 781.

<sup>12</sup> Wilfrid Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 16 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 44 observes that nearness is used as a motivation for hearing and keeping the words of the prophecy. See also, Boring, 73, argues that the apocalyptic garb of nearness is to be discarded while appreciating the message of urgent expectancy.

<sup>13</sup> Pablo Richard, *Apocalypse, A People’s Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 39.

<sup>14</sup> Milligan, 2; Pablo, 39, 170 argues that the texts with the expression do not indicate the coming at the end of time but his glorious manifestation now. See Sam Hamstra, Jr., “An Idealist View of Revelation,” *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate, (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1998), 126, observes that the nearness envisaged in John is about heavenly realities having penetrated the temporal order in Christ’s first advent.

<sup>15</sup> Bauer, s.v. *ταχύ* observes speed as the basic meaning, however, he leaves room for a temporal understanding. Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans., rev., and enlarged by Joseph Henry Thayer (1977), s.v. *ταχύ* observes quickly and speedily, and “without delay” in parenthesis as the basic meaning of the entries for *ταχύ* in Revelation; Abbot Smith, *Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (1981), s.v. *ταχύ* suggests speedily, quickly, and forthwith as the meaning of *ταχύ* in Revelation; William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, (1993), s.v. *ταχύ* provides both speed and time as options for the meaning of *ταχύ* in Revelation; Lindell Scott, s.v. *ταχος, ταχως* has speed as the major use of the term in extra-biblical literature.

the New Testament allow the term to be understood as indicating the rapid nature of an action. Some New Testament examples seem to support this point.<sup>16</sup> Some references from the LXX have been used to support the adverbial aspect of manner in the use of the term.<sup>17</sup> This understanding of the adverbial meaning of ταχύ leads to the view that swiftness and suddenness of parousia is the intended meaning of the promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ.

The argument for the temporal adverbial emphasis of ταχύ in Revelation is based on the usage of its cognates. The cognates such as εγγύς, μέλλω, and the phrase ἐν τάχει, are viewed as temporal.<sup>18</sup> Lexically, there is a possibility of such an understanding.<sup>19</sup> The connection between ἐν ταχει and ἐγγύς in Rev 1:3; 22:6 is an indication that the temporal meaning could be in view. Nevertheless, the temporal interpretation of the adverb becomes problematic when viewed chronologically. Many prophecies in Revelation lay in the future, beyond the period of John. A literal, temporal view of the word ταχύ has led some to either discount the promise of parousia or limit its fulfilment to the time of John.<sup>20</sup>

The usage of the adverb ταχύ and its cognates depends mainly on the context. The employment of the term and its cognates in the context of God's visitation in the Old Testament, the Apocrypha and Pseudopigrapha indicate that temporal focus is in view.<sup>21</sup> The temporal nuance of the adverb ταχύ is found in instances, where it could be translated as "so soon,"<sup>22</sup> describing the brevity of wicked men (Ps 36:2), or brevity of the time to restoration (Isa 49:17; 58:8) and in describing the Day of the Lord.<sup>23</sup> The

<sup>16</sup> See Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22: 18; 25:4; Rom 16:20; 1 Tim 4:14. See Walvoord, 35. However these texts could also be interpreted as temporal as "at once," "without delay," "shortly," and not necessarily as quickly.

<sup>17</sup> Isa 13:22; 51:5; Zeph 1:7,14; Obad 15; Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14. See Thomas Ice, "Has Bible Prophecy Already Been Fulfilled? (Part 2)," *Conservative Theological Journal* 4 (December 2000): 306.

<sup>18</sup> See Rev 1:1; 2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:6, 7, 12, 20 for ταχύ and ἐν τάχει; Rev 1:19; 3:10 for μέλλω; Rev 1:3; 22:10 for εγγύς. See Gentry, 43.

<sup>19</sup> Bauer s.v. ταχύ ; Louw and Nida, s.v. ταχύ; Thayer, s.v. ταχύ.

<sup>20</sup> Cairds 12; Boring 72.

<sup>21</sup> See for example Isa 13:22; 49:17; Isa 51:5; 58:8; Jer 31:16; Zeph 1:14 for ταχύ ; Isa 5:19; Bar 4:22, 23-25 for ἐν τάχει.

<sup>22</sup> Gen 27:30; Exod 32:20; Jud 2:17.

<sup>23</sup> Isa 13:22; Jer 31:16; Zeph 1:14; See also Isa 51:5a.

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word also carries the meaning of swiftness and suddenness when describing God’s judgment upon the wicked.<sup>24</sup> The word ταχύ modifies the verb ἔρχομαι twice in the LXX (Isa 5:25; 13:23). In Isa 13:23 the focus is temporal, an emphasis on the imminence of the Day of the Lord. This is also characteristic of the usage in other “Day of the Lord” passages (Zeph 1:14; Jer 31:16). In both passages the accusative adverb form ταχύ is not used, but the nominative form ταχεῖα is employed. However, words denoting imminence “near” ἐγγύς and “speed” σφόδρα are used. In both instances the elements of time and speed are implied. Therefore, the adverb ταχύ in the LXX has a nuance of imminence as well as suddenness when used with ἔρχομαι. The same meaning is implied in its use in the context of eschaton.

In the New Testament the usage of ταχύ and its cognates also depends largely on the context. There are instances where the focus is on the speed of the action,<sup>25</sup> or is temporal,<sup>26</sup> or where the distinction is difficult to make.<sup>27</sup> The adverb ταχύ with ἔρχομαι is used only in the book of Revelation. However, the usage of its cognate in the rest of the New Testament with ἔρχομαι has a temporal focus.<sup>28</sup> The adverb and its cognates also convey a temporal meaning when used with the verbs with futuristic meaning or in future tense.<sup>29</sup>

A certain pattern emerges from the use of ταχύ and its cognates in the Bible. In the cases of God’s visitation, and with verbs in future tense imminence is the focus. The usage of the cognates with the verb ἔρχομαι in the New Testament is also consistently temporal. It can be concluded that with the verb ἔρχομαι, and in prophetic passages near time is the main emphasis of the adverb ταχύ. Speed may be implied in the usage, but speed alone is never the meaning. Therefore, the usage of the adverb ταχύ in the promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ points mainly to imminence.

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<sup>24</sup> Deut 11:17; Isa 5:25; Jer 30:13; Mal 3:5.

<sup>25</sup> See John 20:4 for ταχέως; Acts 12:7 for ἐν τάχει; James 1:19 for τάχως.

<sup>26</sup> See 1 Cor 4:19, Gal 1:6; Phil 2:19, 24;; 2 Tim 4:9; Heb 13:19, 23 for ταχέως; Acts 25:4; Rom 16:20; 1 Tim 3:14 for ἐν τάχει; Mark 9:39 for ταχύ.

<sup>27</sup> Luke 14:21; 16:16; John 11:31; Acts 17:15; 2 Thess 2:2 for ταχέως; 2 Peter 1:14; 2:1 for ταχίνοος; Matthew 5:28; 28:7, 8; Luke 15:22; John 11:29 for ταχύ.

<sup>28</sup> ταχός (1 Tim 3:14), and ταχέως (Acts 17:15; 1 Cor 4:19; Phil 2:24; 2 Tim 4:9; Heb 13:24).

<sup>29</sup> See Luke 18:8; Rom 16:30; Phil 2:19, 24.

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With the understanding that the promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ means the imminence of the Lord's return, how then could imminence be understood in the light of lapse of time since the promise was made? This study attempts to explore the contexts of the promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ in Revelation for answers to this question. The promise appears only in the letter frame of the book. Twice it occurs in the messages to the seven churches (Rev 2:16; 3:11) and thrice in the epilogue (Rev 22:7, 12, 20). The implication of the usage of the promise in these two contexts is valuable in understanding its meaning.

### **The Promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ in Rev 2-3**

A study of the context of the promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ in Rev 2-3 reveals that there are anticipated responses to the promise in this section. The promise occurs in Rev 2:16 and 3:11, nevertheless, the verb ἔρχομαι and its cognate ἦξω are used without the adverb ταχύ in all other letters to the churches except to the church of Smyrna.<sup>30</sup>

### **Anticipated Responses**

The responses anticipated from the proclamation of the promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ in Rev 2-3 are expressed in the imperative verbs μετανόησον in Rev 2:16 and κράτει in Rev 3:11. The consistent use of the imperatives in connection with the promise conveys urgency.<sup>31</sup> The present imperative κράτει in Rev 3:11 denotes a continuous "holding on." The centrality of the motif of perseverance is expressed in a concentric structure.

### *Expected Responses to the Promise of Parousia in Rev 2-3: A Concentric Structure*

**A** Ephesus (Rev 2:5) Remember, Repent, do

**B** Smyrna (Rev 2:10) Hold on?<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See ἔρχομαι in Rev 2:5, 3:19 and ἦξω in Rev 2:25; 3:3.

<sup>31</sup> See μνημόνευε μετανόησον ποίησον (Rev 2:5), μετανόησον (Rev 2:16), κρατήσατε (Rev 2:25), μνημόνευε μετανόησον γρηγορήσης (Rev 3:3), κράτει λάβη Rev 3:11, ζήλευε μετανόησον (Rev 3:19-20), aorist imperatives imply urgency and solemnity (Wallace, 719).

<sup>32</sup> In the concentric structure there are correspondences of all the expected responses except for B and B<sup>!</sup>. There is no promise of parousia to the church at Smyrna. Nevertheless, there are parallels between the messages of the church of Smyrna and Philadelphia to

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**C** Pergamum (Rev 2:16) Repent

**D** Thyatira (Rev 2:25) Hold on

**C<sup>1</sup>** Sardis (Rev 3:3) Remember, Repent, Watch

**B<sup>1</sup>** Philadelphia (Rev 3:11) Hold on

**A<sup>1</sup>** Laodicea (Rev 3:20) Be Zealous, Repent, do

The concentric structure is framed with the imperative “repent” (AA<sup>1</sup>). The second section (BB<sup>1</sup>) highlights the need for perseverance in the light of Christ’s return. The third section (CC<sup>1</sup>) deals with repentance. This section elaborates further the actions that accompany repentance. In Rev 3:2-3 (C<sup>1</sup>) the words “watch” and “keep” are used. Though in the corresponding section (C) these words are not used they are alluded to by a link to Rev 19:15.<sup>33</sup> The motif of watchfulness in the light of the second coming of Jesus is highlighted in this section.

At the center of the structure is the imperative “hold on,” the focal point of the anticipated responses. This is expressed in the verb κρατήσατε “hold on” (Rev 2:25).<sup>34</sup> The structure indicates a movement from repentance (AA<sup>1</sup>), perseverance (BB<sup>1</sup>), to watchfulness (CC<sup>1</sup>) and on to an emphasis on “holding on,” at the center (D). The anticipated responses reveal urgency, and an ongoing fixation of the church on the promise of the Lord’s return. The life of the church revolves around the promise. The church in Rev 2-3 is notoriously eschatological.

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indicate that the same promise and expected response could be in view. These are: “synagogue of Satan” (Rev 2:9; 3:9), “tribulation” (Rev 2:10; 3:10), and “crown” (Rev 2:10; 3:11). The “crown” promised to the church at Philadelphia is attached to the promise of parousia. On the other hand the church at Smyrna is urged to be faithful until death in order to receive the crown of life. The call to “be faithful till death” to Smyrna could correspond with “hold on” to Philadelphia.

<sup>33</sup> The phrase the “sword of my mouth” (Rev 2:16; 19:15) points to consummation, and Jesus is presented as a warrior. In the context of Rev 19:15 there is a gathering in Rev 19:16. This corresponds to a gathering in Rev 16:16 in which context Jesus is coming as a thief. These two comings (Rev 16:15 and 19:15) could be viewed as parallels. The motif of watching appears in Rev 16:15.

<sup>34</sup> See also the present form κρατεί in Rev 3:11.

**The Promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ in Epilogue**

The promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ appears three times in the epilogue (Rev 22:7, 12, 20). The epilogue could be structured as indicated below:<sup>35</sup> The motifs stated in the first unit (Rev 22:6-11) are amplified in the second (Rev 22:12-19).<sup>36</sup> The emphasis is on the promise. The promise has links with the beatitudes. Jesus Himself proclaims it and John responds to it at the end. The promise could therefore be appreciated from the context of the beatitudes, as proclamations of the coming Jesus and in the light of John’s response.

*Literary Structure of Rev 22:6-21*

1. 22:7 “Behold I am coming soon <b>(Proclamation)</b>	1. 22:14 “Behold I am coming soon” ( <b>Proclamation</b> )
2. 22:7b “ <b>Blessed</b> is he who keeps the words of prophecy”	2. 22:14 “ <b>Blessed</b> are those who wash their clothes” a basis of entry and exclusion to the city.
3. 22:8 “ <b>I John...</b> ” “Fell down to worship the angel” “Saw the things”	3. 22:16 “ <b>I Jesus...</b> ” “Sent the angel” “Testify the things”
4. 22:9b John and the Angel “Fellow servants”	4.22:17 The Spirit and the Bride
5. 22.10-11 <b>The Book</b> Do not seal, Time is near, the filthy	5. 22:18-19 <b>The Book</b> To the one who adds

<sup>35</sup> There are parallels in most of the units except the correspondence between 22:9b and 22:17 where there are no explicit parallels, but there could be thematic links, there are three personalities in both passages. In 22:9b there is the angel, John, and those who keep the words of the prophecy of the book. In 22:17 the personalities are the Spirit, the bride, and whosoever hears. Both passages express a call in the imperative in Rev 22:9b, “worship,” and in Rev 22:19 “come.”

<sup>36</sup> The beatitude in the second unit goes further to state the elements of blessing (22:14), and the curses that would befall those who are not blessed (22:15). The certainty of the words of the prophecy of the book is also expanded in the second section. There seems to be a movement from the proclamation, then the beatitudes, followed by an affirmation, a call, the certainty of the prophecies and finally a proclamation of the promise and a response.



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The righteous	To the one who takes away
22:20	
Rev 22:20 “Yes I am coming soon” ( <b>Proclamation</b> ) “Amen come Lord Jesus” ( <b>Response</b> )	

**The Beatitudes and the Promise in Revelation**

Twice in Revelation the promise *ἔρχομαι ταχύ* is directly linked to the beatitudes (Rev 22:7, 12-14), twice there are verbal parallels (Rev 1:3, 16:15),<sup>37</sup> and thrice there are thematic links (Rev 14:13; 19:9; 20:6).<sup>38</sup> The use of the beatitudes indicates that the Apocalypse is a practical and pastoral book. Revelation is not “merely to impart information about the future but to help God’s people in the present.”<sup>39</sup> They show the link between eschatology and ethics. The imminence of the return of Jesus impacts the lives of the believers.

The relationship between the promise of parousia and the beatitudes reveals the attitude of anticipating parousia as the next most immediate event for the believers. This is emphasized in the parallels in the beatitudes. The beatitudes in Revelation could be structured as indicated below:<sup>40</sup>

- A “Blessed are those who keep (First Beatitude Rev 1:3)
- B “Blessed are those who die” (Second Beatitude Rev 14:13)
- C “Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments (Third Beatitude Rev 16:15)

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<sup>37</sup> There is a link between the phrase *καιρὸς ἐγγύς* (Rev 1:3; 22:10) and the promise *ἔρχομαι ταχύ* in Rev 22:7 (see the statement the “words of the prophecy of this book” in Rev 22:7, 10). The statement “I am coming like a thief” *ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέτης* in (Rev 16:15) is associated with parousia (1 Thess 5:2).

<sup>38</sup> These beatitudes are linked to parousia. The phrase “the dead in Christ” (Rev 14:13) has parallels with “the dead in Christ” who will rise first at parousia (1 Thess 4:16). The immediate literary context of Rev 14:13 also points to parousia (Rev 14:14). The phrases “marriage supper of the lamb” in Rev 19:9 and “having part in the first resurrection” (Rev 20:6) imply parousia.

<sup>39</sup> Ladd, 23-24.

<sup>40</sup> Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 57. He observes a similar structure to that of the beatitudes in Revelation.

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**C**<sup>1</sup> “Blessed are those called to the  
marriage supper (Fourth Beatitude Rev 19:9)

**B**<sup>1</sup> “Blessed are those who share in the first resurrection” (Fifth  
Beatitude Rev 20:6)

**A**<sup>1</sup> “Blessed is he that keeps (Sixth Beatitude Rev 22:7)

**An Emphasis:** “Blessed are they that wash their clothes” (Seventh  
Beatitude Rev 22:14)

The first beatitude has similarities with the sixth. Both call for perseverance and obedience to keep the words of the prophecy. These two beatitudes encourage the Christians to hold on to faithfulness in the light of the soon return of Jesus. The second and the fifth deal with the hope of parousia in reference to death. The second beatitude indicates that in the eventuality of death hope of reward at parousia is the focus of the believer. The fifth beatitude (Rev 20:6) pronounces blessings on those who share in the first resurrection. The link between Rev 14:13 and 6:11 and further with Heb 11:40<sup>41</sup> show that the believer lives and dies in the hope of the promise. It is what is constantly in view whether living or at the point of death.

The third and the fourth beatitudes are emphasized by the seventh beatitude.<sup>42</sup> The third beatitude (Rev 16:15) emphasizes watchfulness. The idea of preparedness is also highlighted in the fourth beatitude (Rev 19:6). Parousia is the fixation of the believer like the watchman at night in the line of duty or the bride in anticipation of the wedding. In the mental outlook of the believer it is the next most urgent and immediate event in life. The relationship between the beatitudes and parousia in Revelation reveal that the second coming of Jesus is the focus of the believer. They are eager for it.

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<sup>41</sup> See Rev 6:10 for the verb πληρωθῶσιν and Heb 11:40 for the verb τελειωθῶσιν (Louw and Nida s.v. πληρωω and τελειωω observe that both words have the same semantic nuance, complete or perfect).

<sup>42</sup> The seventh beatitude corresponds with none, but functions as an emphasis on the central idea of the beatitudes, which is preparedness.

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### **The Promise and Jesus in Revelation**

Three instances of the promise *ἔρχομαι ταχύ* in epilogue are proclamations from Jesus (Rev 22:7, 12, 20).<sup>43</sup> The title of Jesus “I Am Alpha and Omega” is attached to the promise in Rev 22:12.<sup>44</sup> The promise *ἔρχομαι ταχύ* in Revelation is uniquely linked to the risen Lord, he himself proclaims it. The risen Lord is portrayed in the visions in Revelation as: “the Son of Man” (Rev 1:13; 14:14), the lamb (Rev 5-6; 19:7-9), and the “victorious warrior” (Rev 19:11-16). All of which portray Jesus in a parousia mode. The visions and appellations of Jesus in Revelation indicate his anticipation of parousia.

The phrase “Son of Man” in Revelation has its antecedents in the Danielic and Johanine “Son of Man.” The “Son of Man” in Daniel is an eschatological divine being, referred to by the New Testament writers and Jesus himself in the context of parousia.<sup>45</sup> The Johanine “Son of Man” is often used in the passion-ascent-judgment contexts.<sup>46</sup> The usage in the ascent contexts has links with the going and coming back of Jesus, especially in John 14:1-3.<sup>47</sup> The Son of Man therefore departs in order to descend in his second coming. The last supper forms the background to John 14:1-3. Christ’s eagerness for his return is expressed in the use of the Lord’s Supper as a reminder of his passion and the anticipation of his coming.<sup>48</sup> Twice in Revelation Jesus is depicted as the son of man (Rev 1:13, 14:14). There is a connection between the vision of the “Son of Man” in Rev 1:13 with the promise *ἔρχομαι ταχύ*.<sup>49</sup> The phrase is used in Rev

<sup>43</sup> This is also the case of the promise in Rev 2:16 and 3:11 where they are linked to the vision of Jesus in Rev 1:10-20.

<sup>44</sup> This title appears three times in Revelation (Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13) it refers both to God the Father and Jesus. However, in Rev 22:13 it mainly points to Jesus.

<sup>45</sup> Matt 16: 27, 28; 24:30; 25:31; 26:27; John 5:27.

<sup>46</sup> See John 3:14; 8:28; 12:23; 13:31 for the passion context, the usage in John 8:28, 12:23 and 13:31 can also be viewed as in the context of the ascent of Jesus. For Judgment context see John 5:27; 6:53; 9:35; John 3:14 can also be viewed from this category because John 3:17-21 discusses the idea of judgment. For ascent see John 6:62; 8:28; 12:23; 31:31.

<sup>47</sup> The phrases “ascend where he was before” *ἀναβαίνοντα ὅπου ἦν πρότερον* in John 6:62, “where I go” *ὅπου ἐγὼ ὑπάγω* in 8:21, “where I am there even my servant will be” *καὶ ὅπου εἰμι ἐγὼ ἐκεῖ ὁ διάκονος ὁ ἐμὸς ἔσται* in John 12:26, and “for where I go” *ὅπου ἐγὼ ὑπάγω* in John 13:33 have the “son of man” in their context. Christ’s departure is also stated in John 14:1-3 where Jesus declares “where I go you know” *ὅπου ἐγὼ ὑπάγω*.

<sup>48</sup> Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; I Cor 11:23-26.

<sup>49</sup> To all the seven churches except Smyrna Jesus proclaims his coming.

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14:14 in the context of parousia.<sup>50</sup> It can be concluded that the portrayal of Jesus as the “Son of Man” in Revelation indicates the desire of Jesus to come again. The term “soon” therefore expresses the eagerness of Jesus to come back.

The motif of the lamb in Revelation is used in eschatological contexts. The seals culminate with judgment expressed as “the wrath of the lamb.” In Rev 7 the motif of the lamb is central to the eschatological habitation of the redeemed (Rev 7:9, 10, 14, 15). The use of the motif of the lamb in Rev 19:7-9 also points to culmination. The usage of the term lamb, a favorite title for Jesus in Revelation in eschatological contexts, points to the one eager to return to vindicate and be with his people. The vision of the victorious warrior in Rev 19:11-21 depicts Jesus coming in the final judgment. Jesus is portrayed as a victorious warrior eager to fulfil his promise to the church.<sup>51</sup>

This eagerness is also expressed in the appellation “Alpha and Omega.”<sup>52</sup> It is consistently used in the contexts of consummation.<sup>53</sup> Because the title “Alpha and Omega” is only used in Revelation, therefore, the two appositional titles “the first and the last” and the “beginning and the end” may shed light on its usage and meaning. The title “First and Last” can be read as “the first and even more the last” in the light of the usage in Isaiah.<sup>54</sup> The title “the Beginning and the End” is used in the context of the statement “it is finished” and is attached to the promise of providing the water of life freely and the victors receiving their inheritance (Rev 21:6). The setting of the usage is eschatological. These two cognates of the title “Alpha and Omega” therefore indicate that the title has a focus on “the

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<sup>50</sup> See Rev 14 :15-20.

<sup>51</sup> He is the coming king. The link between the vision and the messages to the seven churches indicates a fulfilment of the promises in Rev 2-3. The phrase “the sword of his mouth” is found in Rev 2:16, a text with the promise *ἔρχομαι ταχύ*. The appellation “the Faithful and True” is also used for Jesus in the message to Laodicea (Rev 3:14). In the message to Laodicea Jesus is standing at the door.

<sup>52</sup> The title “Alpha and Omega” is used thrice in Revelation (Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13).

<sup>53</sup> In Rev 1:8 it is used after the promise in Rev 1:7, in Rev 21:6 it is used with the statement “it is finished.” In Rev 22:13 it is used with the promise *ἔρχομαι ταχύ*.

<sup>54</sup> The phrase “the first and last” in Isa 48:12 uses the particle *καὶ*. This particle is particularly used to denote an addition especially that which is greater and could be rendered “yea.” The phrase could therefore read, “I am first yea even the last.” Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. III (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 255, views the particle used as gradation. He translates the passage as “I am first and more than that I am also the last.”

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end.” It could be read, “I am Alpha even more the Omega.” This unique title (Alpha and Omega) of Jesus in Revelation reveals an emphasis on the culmination of history. He desires to bring everything to an end.

The presentations of Jesus in the visions and titles in Revelation denote a focus on parousia. The three visions of Jesus in Revelation; the “Son of Man,” the lamb, and the victorious warrior portray Jesus in a parousia mode. His title “Alpha and Omega” depicts interest in bringing everything to an end. The portrayal of Jesus in the book of Revelation depicts his eagerness to come back. The one who proclaims the promise ἔρχομαί ταχύ is consistently presented as coming. It can be concluded that the promise ἔρχομαί ταχύ denotes the eagerness of the ascended Lord to descend back in his second coming.

#### **John’s Response**

The book of Revelation closes with a “maranatha” like response to the proclamation of the promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ. Maranatha was a watchword in the early church for the desire of the Lord’s return.<sup>55</sup> The statement reflects what is found in the Didache,<sup>56</sup> a Eucharistic prayer. Eucharistic celebration in the early church was not an end in itself, but an anticipation of the return of Jesus (1 Cor 11:26). The use of the present imperative ἔρχου and the particle of affirmation ἀμήν indicates an entreaty whose fulfilment is eagerly anticipated. The use of the vocative case κύριε points to an emotional and emphatic address.<sup>57</sup> The response of John at the end of the book of Revelation shows an all-consuming desire for the fulfilment of the promise.

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<sup>55</sup> See 1 Cor 16:22; Robert Flying, “Liturgical Elements of Later Canonical Writings” *Dictionary of the Later New Testament Developments*, eds. Ralph Martin and Peter Davids Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1997, 289. There are two views as to how maranatha could be interpreted. The first is marana tha which means “come lord Jesus” or maranatha “the lord has come.” The former is more appropriate due to the anticipation of the Lord’s return in Revelation.

<sup>56</sup> See Didache 10:6 in Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Text Translation Analysis and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 24-25.

<sup>57</sup> Wallace, 68, though the vocative here is without ω, thus naked, the context here indicates that the usage is not only a simple address.

The anticipation of the closing event in history overrides the chronological considerations.<sup>58</sup> Confronted with the proclamation “I am coming soon” John’s response is not “when?,” but a plea “Amen come Lord Jesus.” This indicates eagerness for the event that surpasses the quest for “when?” The tendency to ask the question “when?” in response to the promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ is itself not an issue for John. In light of the urgency, imminence, and certainty of the promise that will bring an end to the present order of things the question “when” recedes. It is the event that is foremost in the mind, thus the response “Amen come Lord Jesus.”

### **Conclusion**

The promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ in Revelation denotes the imminence of the second coming of Jesus. It has been an ever-near promise to the church throughout the ages and an imminent event for the end-time church. The believers are portrayed in Revelation as having a mental outlook of parousia as the most awaited event in their lives. The proclamation of the promise by the risen Lord in the context of his portrayals in Revelation conveys his eagerness to come back. The response to the promise at the end of the book likewise indicates eagerness for the fulfilment of the promise. The event evokes intense anticipation that surpasses chronological considerations. The promise ἔρχομαι ταχύ suggests a reading of the book of Revelation until we are aroused to an intense anticipation of the fulfilment of the promise. Because that is how the book ends. Amen come Lord Jesus.

**Rabach Symon Odek** is Chair of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Kenya. He holds a Ph.D. in Religion and Biblical Studies with an emphasis in New Testament from Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines.  
rabachs@ueab.ac.ke

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<sup>58</sup> The view of time from eschatological or apocalyptic perspectives has roots in the Old Testament. This nearness is from the perspective of the biblical day of the Lord. The day of the Lord motif in the Old Testament is ever near the passing of time notwithstanding. It indicates that the understanding of the day of the Lord was never in the context of chronological time but in the sense of eschatological time, a time towards which the events rolled forward to. It was the next most anticipated event for the faithful in the Old Testament. Thus, in this sense it was near. The promise in Revelation is related to the day of the Lord motif in the Old Testament (Isa 13:6; Ezek 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1 3:14 Oba 1:15; Zeph 1:7,14.) Therefore, nearness could be viewed as eschatological rather than chronological.