

Quickly, Quickly

by Daniel E. Harden

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Revelation 1:1-3 (LEB) – *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his slaves the things which must take place in a short time [ἐν τάχει (*en tachei*)], and communicated it by sending it through his angel to his slave John, who testified about the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud and blessed are those who hear the words of the prophecy and observe the things written in it, because the time is near [ἐγγύς (*engus*)]!*

THERE ARE ANY NUMBER of words in Greek used in the New Testament that serve as adverbs or related forms to such adverbs. Adverbs, as defined in our English grammar, serve as modifiers to verbs, and thereby clarify the action in terms of how, when, where, in what manner, or to what extent—to name a few. Where this becomes a bit tricky is that some adverbs can function in more than one way, depending on the verb they modify and the context of its usage.

One such adverb is *quickly*. If somebody tells you to “come quickly”, are they telling you to come as *soon* as you can, or are they telling you to come *in a speedy manner*? In truth, the distinction between the two is a bit blurry.

The words we see in Greek in the New Testament function in much the same way. When it comes to *quickly*, we have to decide if the intent of the author is in determining *how* or *when* something is to occur, and even if there is a sufficient distinction between the two.

Many modern Christians feel that the book of Revelation is either not completely fulfilled or not fulfilled at all. For them, the use of *quickly* (*en tachei*) in the opening verse of Revelation causes a problem. The word *tachei* is a form of the Greek word τάχος (*tachos*). The rendering of ‘*quickly*’ as a *time* descriptor indicates that the “*things which must take place*” were to happen shortly after John wrote the book of Revelation. Notice above that even the Lexham English Bible (LEB) renders *en tachei* as “in a short time.” Furthermore, this *quickness* of the occurrence of the events taking place is reiterated in Revelation 22:6, again using *en tachei*, which strongly indicates a bookend of sorts—that is, that all the revealed “*things which must take place*” would be included.

In an effort to dance around this nuance, some well-known theologians have taken the stance that *en tachei* refers to *how* these things take place (rapidly), rather than *when* they take place (promptly, soon).

When or How?

But can the idea of time really be excluded from this adverb? Here are brief explanations from three famous theologians who attempt to do just that, relying on using the *how* method of interpreting the adverb used in Rev. 1:1.

John F. Walvoord:

That which Daniel declared would occur “in the latter days” is here described as “shortly” (Gr., *en tachei*), that is, “quickly or suddenly coming to pass,” indicating rapidity of execution after the beginning takes place. The idea is not that the event may occur soon, but that when it does, it will be sudden (cf. Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Rom. 16:20).¹

Charles C Ryrie:

The words translated “shortly” (*en tachei*) mean that when the time for judgment comes there will be no delay in its execution (see Luke 18:8 and other occurrences of this phrase in Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 22:6–7). The time of the fulfillment may seem distant, but, when it starts, the events will transpire rapidly.²

Lange:

Ebrard correctly interprets it as referring to the rapidity of the course of the events prophesied.³

But is this really the case? Is this really a viable or logical way to handle *en tachei*? Or is it merely a soft shoe shuffle and dance around a problem without really solving the issue?

There are a number of Greek words used in the New Testament which are closely related to *tachei*. For example, John also uses one such related word, *tachu* (ταχύ), at various times in Revelation to describe the coming of Christ (see Rev 2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20). These two words, *tachos* and *tachu*, are distinctly related. The first is found in both Revelation 1:1 and 22:6, with the form *en tachei*, which is best translated as “in quickness,” while *tachu* is best translated simply as “quickly.” As such, both words should be approached similarly, with a determination on whether they refer to *method* (how) or *timing* (when). And just as with *en tachei*, with the word *tachu* it is not unusual to see biblical interpretations favor the *method* rather than the *timing* of the action of the verb. Even HELPS Word Studies adds a similar note, indicating that this word “does not mean ‘immediately’ or necessarily ‘in a very short time’ but rather ‘without any delay.’”⁴

Yet a thorough investigation of the use of the Greek word *tachu* throughout the entirety of the New Testament indicates that it is not possible to segregate the *method* of the action in an effort to distinguish it from the *timing* of the action. For example, in John 11:29, when Martha told her sister Mary that Christ wanted to see her, did Mary rise up and go quickly with regard to *how* (when she did rise, she did so quickly) or did she do so with regard to *when* (she went to Christ as soon as possible)? The answer is that both were true. But it should also be self-evident that the timing of Mary’s actions was of more

importance than the method. Certainly, the idea of time cannot be dismissed—Mary rushed to Christ’s side immediately and in a very short time, as well as without any delay.

Indeed, wherever *tachu* is used, it is always to denote something that needs to be done immediately, not just something that needs to be done in a hurried manner once it has begun. This is generally not an issue. But when it comes to eschatology, many find this a problem. The **only** time theologians try to segregate the *method* (hurriedly) from the *timing* (soon) of the action modified by *tachu*, in such a way as to actually exclude the timing altogether, is when it refers to the eschatological coming of Christ.

The same holds true for *en tachei*, which literally means “in quickness.” For example, in Acts 12:7, it was of utmost importance that Paul not delay in order to escape his prison cell, and as such the *timing* was every bit as important as the *method*—if not more so. In Acts 22:18, it was again imperative for Paul to leave Jerusalem *as soon as possible*. There is no indication that Paul could stay as long as he wanted to, but that when he did decide to go, he had to go really, really fast. In fact, where method was concerned, it was more important for Paul to go discretely. Stealth requires caution. It certainly takes longer to leave a place stealthily than it does to leave it at a dead run.

In addition, the same phrase is used in 1 Timothy 3:14: “*I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you in a short time [en tachei].*” Paul was totally concerned with timing, not method. He wasn’t telling Timothy that he hoped to run to him fast, but that he hoped to come to him soon. Most commentaries agree on this.

“I am coming quickly”

Christ did not equivocate. Indeed, in the book of Revelation alone, it was stated no less than six times that Christ would come “*quickly*.” The quotes by Walvoord, Ryrie, and Lange indicate that this means that once it was time for Christ to return, He would not delay. Yet it is highly unlikely that the common first-century saints in the seven churches of Asia Minor would have followed that line of thought when reading what John wrote.

Others have added to this argument, repeating the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:2, which states that the Lord would come “*like a thief in the night*.” Yet once again this line of reasoning is curious, not being well thought out. When a thief comes, he does so with as much stealth and deliberation as possible. He doesn’t approach “quickly” but deliberately, so as not to alert the owners. The whole point of Paul’s words was to tell the Thessalonians to be diligent and not be caught off guard. Those who weren’t watching for Him were about to be taken by surprise.

The events that are to come “quickly”

In the odd interpretation given by Walvoord, Ryrie, Lange, and others, we are told that the events would unfold rapidly, rather than soon, and that this would culminate in the coming of the Lord. Yet what are those events? In the Olivet Discourse, the events include:

- False Messiahs
- Wars and rumors of wars. Nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom
- Famines
- Earthquakes
- Persecution
- Betrayal
- False prophets
- Lawlessness
- Turning from the faith
- Gospel spread to the earth

All of these are mentioned in Matthew 24:4-8 as precursors to the end.

When John said “*the things which must occur quickly,*” he then wrote down messages to the seven churches (chapters 2-3) followed by the visions of what was to occur (chapters 4-22). And every single item from the Olivet Discourse can be found in the pages of Revelation. In fact, there are even more events listed, such as:

- The beasts and the mark of the beast
- Fire
- Fouled rivers
- Two witnesses

Some of these events didn’t happen in a rapid manner at all. For example, the two witnesses prophesied for three and a half years, after which they were killed in the streets. Yet these events were nonetheless part of the “*things that would happen quickly.*” And these aren’t the only events that were included. They would be followed by:

- Judgment
- The coming of Christ
- The Resurrection of the Dead
- The removal of the Old Kingdom in favor of the New Kingdom

This brings up a very interesting point. Every single one of those events was included within the bookends of the visions in Revelation, yet the events didn’t all happen suddenly, rapidly, hurriedly, or hastily. They would all occur within the period of time leading up to and including the “end.” But the inclusion of all

these events took time, and wouldn't all occur in a single day, or even within a single year, which is the clear implication of relying on the *method* of 'quickly' rather than the *timing*.

Say again?

Others have recognized this issue, seeing that there is a problem with the explanation that points to a reliance on the *method* with the exclusion of *time*, yet maintain an unwillingness to see the bookends of the book of Revelation as having been entirely completed shortly after John wrote the book. Consequently, the desire to escape the bookends in Revelation results in some rather bizarre double-talk as a matter of rationalization. For example:

“. . . *quickly* means that the event is approaching rapidly without implying any limitation upon the time frame in which it must occur. Therefore, verse 1 is saying only that God is causing the fulfillment of these prophecies to approach *quickly*. Regardless of how long it takes, we are not to construe the apparently long delay as idleness on God's part.”⁵

The sad thing is that this line of reasoning is accepted as being logical, when it is anything but. How can the events be “approaching rapidly” for 2000 years?

There is a call in the book of Revelation, as well as throughout the New Testament, to be diligent and watchful. Paul warns the Thessalonians not to be caught unaware. This indicates not just a remote possibility, but a certainty that something was about to happen *in their time*. The call for diligence not only implies, but actually demands an impending action.

Yet another failed attempt—the dancing continues

Another modern writer, Stephen Whitsett, tries a similar explanation to mollify Christ's claims that He is “*coming quickly*” in Revelation:

While the word is translated “quickly” into English, it does an injustice to the whole nuance of the word. This phrase being used “I am coming quickly” should never be translated “soon”, as in every other place it is used it means quickly. What is being communicated is that His coming will be quick, in the blink of an eye, he is not being delayed or held up by anything, and his coming is sure to happen at the right time.

Again, “I quickly ran to the store” – “I am quickly coming,” is not a reference to time but speaks to how his coming is to happen. I.e. his coming will happen fast, at the right time, and he is not being delayed.

Which implies that all the events within the Revelation which include past, present, and future statements reveal a nuance of being fulfilled over time as concerning certain parts of prophecy lead to

the culmination of his return. What has happened in the past is that the Kingdom of God had come, Christ was now ruling on the throne in heaven, and he will come again.⁶

This is quite a lot of dancing just to get around the clear implication of the words being used. Whitsett's explanation is highly inadequate. It convolutes common everyday language usage. For example, he uses the phrase "I quickly ran to the store" as an illustration, but that just serves to highlight his short-sightedness. Such a phrase is always used in proximity to something. One never says, "Four years ago, I quickly ran to the store." Even less does one use it in the future tense—"Next year, I will quickly run to the store." It is always used in proximity to the cause: "My wife was in the middle of cooking an important dinner, but was missing a key ingredient, so I quickly ran to the store." And what is the implication? Not that the speaker drove 100 miles an hour to get to the store (method), but that the speaker left for the store as soon as it was discovered that an ingredient was missing (timing). Even in the illustration Whitsett gives, the nuance of *when* is more important than the nuance of *how*. In fact, if somebody calls and tells you to "come quickly!," the importance of your response isn't *how* you come, but that you come immediately, arriving as soon as possible. There are definitely times, for example, where one can arrive at a destination in less time by taking slower backroads, than by detouring out of the way to take the interstate. Using the interstate might be a faster *method*, but using the backroads results in arriving sooner. And when asked to "come quickly!," arriving as soon as possible is the goal, regardless of what method is employed. Timing trumps method.

The same holds true for every case in the New Testament where either *tachos* or *tachu* is used. It is entirely invalid to attempt to focus on the *method* to the exclusion of the *timing* of the action. With the Greek words used in the New Testament, there is always a focus on timing, regardless of whether or not there is any intent on method.

Getting to the "Hart" of the matter

One New Testament interpreter who endeavors to interpret each Greek word into English as closely as possible to the original intent while maintaining the original nuance of the Greek words employed is David Bentley Hart. Here's how he renders the passages in Revelation:

Rev 1:1 – *A revelation from Jesus the Anointed, which God gave him, to show his slaves what things must occur extremely soon, and he signified this by sending it out through his angel to his slave John . . .*

Rev 2:16 – *Therefore change your hearts; and, if not, I am coming to you quickly, and will wage war on them with the sword in my mouth.*

Rev 3:11 – *"I am coming very quickly; hold fast to what you have so that no one take your chaplet."*

Rev 11:14 – *The second woe has passed—look: The third woe comes quickly.*

Rev 22:6-7 *And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true, and the Lord God of the spirits of the prophets sent his angel to show his slaves things that must occur shortly.” “And look: I am coming quickly. How blissful the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”*

Rev 22:12 – *“Look: I am coming quickly, and with me is the recompense I have to render to each, according to what his work is.”*

Rev 22:20 – *The one who attests these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly.” Amen, come, Lord Jesus.*

The implication is clear—the nuance of these prophecies and of the words *tachos* and *tachu* includes the idea of timing. Hart interprets them as “extremely soon,” “very quickly,” “shortly,” etc. Certainly, John’s exhortation in the last verse is totally lost if he is simply referring to a far-future, eventual coming of the Lord. “Come, Lord Jesus.”

In fact, there are a number of Greek words used in the New Testament that have the same root, *tach-* (or *tax-*), and this root, even according to HELPS Word Studies, carries the nuance of “‘promptly,’ without unjustified time-lapse.” These related words all carry the same idea of immediacy, inherited directly from the root:

τάχα (*tacha*) – promptly (adverb)

ταχέως (*tacheós*) – swiftly, at once (adverb)

ταχινός (*tachinos*) – swift, imminent (adjective)

τάχιον (*tachion*) – more swiftly (adverb)

τάχιστα (*tachista*) – most swiftly (adverb)

τάχος (*tachos*) – speedily, immediately (adverb)

ταχύ (*tachu*) – promptly, without delay (adverb)

ταχύς (*tachus*) – quick (adjective)

A “taxing problem” for Dispensationalism

While dispensationalists would like you to believe that there is a distinction that can be applied between *when* (time) and *how* (method) for these words, such is not the case. It is impossible to extract the time while leaving only the method. Even the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* by Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich & Danker recognizes this issue, as even with the word *tachus*, it is “not always possible to make a distinction” between the method (speed of the event) and the timing of the event.

Gary DeMar recognizes the fallacy of the distinction that dispensationalism makes. In *Prophecy Wars*, DeMar calls the method that the dispensationalists use nothing more than “Exegetical Gerrymandering of the Time Texts.” In *Last Days Madness*, DeMar tackles the equivocating methods taken by dispensationalists who state that “imminency” is nothing more than merely “certainly” with no regard to

time. He lists a wide-ranging number of New Testament verses, including the ones already alluded to in this article, to show that the dispensationalist explanation is inadequate.

There is nothing in the above texts that would support this definition. . . . The biblical writers are straightforward in their claim that the events described were to happen “soon” who first read the prophecies. No other interpretation is possible if the words are taken in their “plain, primary, ordinary, usual, or normal sense.” If the biblical authors had wanted to be tentative in the way they described future events, they would have equivocated in the words expressing probability.⁷

Later, when addressing dispensationalism in particular, he stresses this point:

Those who believe in a pre-tribulational rapture teach that Jesus’ coming has always been “soon,” that is, He could come at any moment. This is nonsense. “Soon” means “near in time,” before the generation of the apostles who were with Jesus passed away (Matthew 24:34). Sound Bible interpretations cannot maintain that “near” can mean “any moment” when nearly two thousand years have passed. (Ibid., pp 194-195)

Elsewhere, DeMar does a study where he checks the various words that John uses for “*soon*,” “*near*,” and “*quickly*” in the book of Revelation to see how John also uses them in his Gospel. What DeMar finds is that John is consistent:

Doing something quickly (ταχὺ) in the above passages does not allow for an extended period of time. The action that was done quickly happened in a short period of time. Quickly does not mean that when a person decides to do something—whether in a short or long period of time—that it will be done fast when a person decides to do something. If an employee says, “I’ll do what you ask soon,” and then waits three months, he or she has not done the assigned task. When the employer inquires, “You said you would do it soon. Why hasn’t it been done?” The employee answers: “Soon means that when I act, it will be done quickly. The time in between the assignment and the job does not figure into the meaning of ‘soon’ and ‘quickly.’ When I eventually do the job, I will do it fast.”⁸

He goes on later in the same manuscript to show how silly such reasoning is. Furthermore, he states:

Every time the Greek words translated “soon” or “quickly” are used in the New Testament they always mean that the coming event or time is to happen within a proximate period of time.⁹

He is absolutely correct.

Crushing blows

Those who have attempted to show otherwise run into issues. Another such attempt is made by Dr. Alan Kurschner, who disagrees with DeMar. His reasoning? He appeals to the “pragmatic use of language.”¹⁰ The problem is that the pragmatic or practical use of such words as “*soon*,” “*near*,” and “*quickly*” works

against him. The New Testament was written to the common man of the day, and the “pragmatic use of language” would be to take the words in their everyday meaning, rather than to try to insert some esoteric, undecipherable meaning into these common words. The “pragmatics of apocalyptic parenesis” that Kurschner relies on are a mirage, and would serve to give the original audience false hope. In fact, this method of interpretation is something that is generally only associated with biblical prophecy, and as such is nothing short of a side-step rationalization. Kurschner goes on to appeal to Romans 16:20:

The God of peace will soon (en tachei) crush Satan under your feet.

Kurschner says “last time I checked, that did not happen in Paul’s day; in fact, after two thousand years, it still has not happened.” This begs the question—just how did he check this? How did he verify that it hadn’t happened? Did he have a personal interview with Satan?

One of the problems is that Kurschner pulls this verse out of context in an effort to try to support this faulty reasoning. But Romans 16:20 is part of the exhortations at the end of the letter to the Romans. There is no indication whatsoever in this entire section that anything is to be taken in any other way than as an immediate comfort to the Roman saints. And if the author, under inspiration, states that Satan would soon be crushed under the feet of the Roman saints, then that settles it, even if we can’t see clearly from our vantage point just how that was accomplished or what it entailed.

The book of Revelation is bookended with the remarks that “all these things” would happen quickly (Rev 1:1; 22:6)—using the exact same words (*en tachei*) as in Romans 16:20. And the events delineated within these bookends include the fall of Satan (Rev 20:10).

When it comes right down to it, the rendering of such words as merely “the pragmatics of apocalyptic parenesis” is nothing more than illusory rationalization, an attempt to dance around the clear, simple language in its everyday usage.

Keeping it simple

When we read the New Testament as a collection of simple letters, written to the common people in the first century, and try to understand them just as written simply, without resorting to some esoteric manipulation or convoluted tap dance, the meaning is clear. The message of the New Testament was—and still is—the Gospel given to the common man. Keep it simple—it was intended to be understood, even by those new saints who could not yet handle anything of substance (1 Cor 3:2; Heb 5:13; 1 Pet 2:1-2). If you employ this method with an open mind and an open heart, your eyes will be opened—quickly!

The element of *time* in these words cannot be discarded in favor of a simple reference to the *method* of the action. Such methodology is invalid and should be quickly rejected. No matter what those who try to manipulate the common language of Scripture say, the adverbs used in Revelation 1:1-3 simply do not work that way. *Quickly* always retains the nuance of time.✝

1. <https://walvoord.com/article/259>
2. *Everyman's Bible Commentary, Revelation* (1996), Revelation 1:1
3. *Lange Commentary*, Revelation 1:1
4. (HELPS Word Studies; Strongs Greek 5035; <https://biblehub.com/greek/5035.htm>)
5. <https://revelationlogic.com/articles/what-does-soon-mean/>
6. Stephen Whitsett, *The Cold Case Against Preterism*
7. Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, pp 30-31
8. Gary DeMar, *Brock Hollett's Attempt to Debunk Preterism* (unpublished manuscript)
9. Ibid.
10. <https://www.alankurschner.com/2014/03/08/preterisms-literalistic-interpretation-of-jesus-is-coming-soon-en-tachei/>