

DID JESUS REALLY SAY *EPXOMAI TAXU* 'I AM COMING SOON'? INTERROGATING THE USAGE OF *TAXU* 'SOON' IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Abstract

This work challenges the motive behind the usage of *ταχύ* 'soon' in the New Testament amidst the various interpretive thoughts associated with the word as *ipsissima vox* rather than the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus. Such an *ipsissima verba* quest has made some people consider Jesus as a deceiver, who has kept his followers in deceit for centuries about the *Parousia*. A lot of people have anticipated the second coming of Jesus and lost faith. Some people mock those who still insist on the word 'soon' and it has created difficulty in the proclamation of the gospel message. Using biblical theology and historical-critical methods, this work surveys the various

positions and argues that Jesus perhaps never said 'I am coming soon' as understood in the context of imminence for the first century Christians. This work reveals possible interpretations, which underscores *ἔρχομαι ταχύ* "I am coming soon" to become an agent of evangelistic strategy by Apostle John in the intention of Jesus and raises a few implications into the present missionary involvements as the Church waits the groom.

Keywords: Jesus, *ἔρχομαι ταχύ* evangelism, New Testament, 'soon,' early church, and *Parousia*

Introduction

The word *ταχύ* 'soon' in the Bible particularly in the New Testament has created a lot of issues in the early church and it has continued to stir more concerns in the modern church. Such concerns are in the context of understanding the message and conviction of the early church Christians about the status of the exalted Christ and the *Parousia*, which Christians throughout the centuries have been waiting for. It is clear that "the present exalted status and significance of the risen Christ was inseparably linked with the conviction that he was the coming Lord of the *eschaton*."² Within the watch of the early Christians, Jesus was later venerated as the Son of God, the Messiah, the coming Lord for his people as

exposed by John in the Johannine literature. But one wonders whether Jesus meant his coming or not when the word 'soon' was linked to him by Apostle John in the Bible in the late part of the first century AD. Also, there have been attempts to interpret the word 'soon' over the centuries without a proper understanding of the intentions of Jesus, which is seen to be part of the evangelistic strategies of the early Christians.

Amidst modern questions concerning the word *ταχύ* 'soon', it is proper to clarify the intentions of John for employing such a metaphor in respect to Jesus. The word 'soon' in Jesus' messages is considered to involve a depiction of the 'future in the present tense' to hasten the evangelistic *morale* of the church. This attempt was meant to be a radical response to the issues surrounding early Christianity as the opponents of Jesus were also writing about the life of Jesus.³ This made the life of Jesus to be viewed within numerous layers. With this, Smith states that:

If we look for a figure that could account for the rise of the tradition preserved in the gospels, we find three pictures to guide us. One is the official portrait of 'Jesus Christ, the Son of God', one is the 'Jesus the magician' given by the hostile tradition, and the third is the primitive Christian picture of 'Jesus the god' which, as we have seen, lies behind the present gospel portrait.⁴

To Smith, all three portraits of Jesus above are expressions of propaganda and are incredible since they explain the phenomena of Jesus' life.⁵ Also, Hurtado states that Jesus did not think of himself, the early church Christians thought of him, in their effort to exert the

¹ This research was carried out during the sponsorship of the Alexander von Humboldt Research Foundation at Goethe Universität Frankfurt, Germany. Thanks to the foundation for providing me with the sponsorship.

² Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004), 115. W. Thüsing, *Erhöhungsvorstellung und Parusieerwartung in der ältesten nachösterlichen Christologie* (SBS 42. Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1970). H. R. Balz, *Methodische Probleme der neutestamentlichen Christologie* (WMANT 25. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967).

³ Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper and Collins, 1978), 141-2.

⁴ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 149.

⁵ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 149.

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status of veneration to qualify as Lord, which had a huge influence on Jewish monotheism.⁶

Did Jesus use the word *ταχύ* 'soon' or it was part of the effort by the early Christians to accord Jesus a status of veneration in line with the *Parousia*? This work explains the various historical interpretations of the word *ταχύ* 'soon' as used in the early church and shows how the modern church sees the word and our current attitudes towards it. This is achieved through unveiling the dichotomisation between evangelisation to save the world and the proliferation of evil, mockery, and deceit, which the world believes Jesus has initiated about his coming. Such positions would enable the consideration of implications that would shape the face of the church and revive its boundaries as to whether such a position stands unchallenged or not.

This work evaluates and challenges in the usage of *ταχύ* 'soon' in the New Testament iteration of Jesus' second coming as being a Johannine extra material in the book of Revelation; hence, such a phrase was not found elsewhere in the Synoptic Gospels and even John. The work discusses the overall intentions for using 'soon' as associated with the *Parousia* and the early church perception of 'soon' was also considered. It also analyses the modern church and contemporary insistence on the coming of Jesus and all the predictions made to provide solutions to biblical prophecies. Lastly, the work explores some evangelistic implications and the imminent nature of the *Parousia* in search of a way forward rather than retarding the gospel message of the *Parousia*.

Biblical Intentions of *ταχύ* 'Soon' associated to the *Parousia*

The phrase "Jesus is coming soon" is a common expression used by Christians to refer to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, which is one of the most important doctrines of the New Testament. This phrase has been commonly used among Christians, particularly within the context of evangelism. The Bible contains many references to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:27, 24:1-51, 25:31-46; 1 Thess. 4:16-17, 5:2; Tit. 2:13). The concern of this study mind is whether Jesus has said such.

A careful search has revealed that there are about 105 references to *ταχύ* 'soon' in the NIV Bible. There are 65 references to the word in the Old Testament and 40 usages in the New Testament. Such a careful study of these references revealed the intentions behind the usage

of the word and many of such usages correspond to the intended meaning being searched in this work.

The Grammatical Usage of the Word 'Soon': There are many references to the word *ταχύ* 'soon' in the New Testament. These references refer to the sudden occurrence of historical events in narratives. The first reference is in Matthew 2:8, "As *soon* as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." There are about 19 references to the usage of soon within the historical happenings of events, with a clear expression of time.

'Soon' in Respect to Humans: The New Testament contains expressions of the future in the present by humans. In this sense, the writer of a book of the Bible, when writing to the Church or readers would express intentions of visiting them soon. But whether he fulfilled those promises was a concern since there was no reply or follow-up letters to show that these people kept to their promises. Festus was going to meet Paul in Caesarea soon (Acts 25:4). Paul also revealed the intention to visit the Corinthians soon (1 Cor. 4:19), to visit and send Timothy to the Philippians (Phil. 2:19, 23, 24). The Ephesians church also received promises from Paul in respect to issues of visit (1 Tim. 3:14). The writer of Hebrews planned to visit the recipients of Hebrews soon when Timothy comes (Heb. 13:19, 23). Apostle John also had intentions to visit his readers and talk with them to make their joy complete (3 Jn 14). These usages have given a clear direction as to the usage concerning humans and their intentions to fellow humans.

The Future Sense in Respect to Jesus: There are promises made by the Lord himself in the New Testament as revealed by the Gospel writers. Such references are held in high esteem in the Bible. However, the fulfillment of those promises has created issues concerning the end times. These eschatological passages speak about the *Parousia* and the end of evil, which have been the focal points of hope for all Christians.

Unlike John who declared, *ἔρχεται δὺ ὁ ὑπερῷον ἐμοῦ* "Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am..." (Luke 3:16), Jesus' usage of the word *ταχύ* 'soon' has created curiosity. But the usage of the word 'soon' has revealed the drawing of the future into the present life. Many people thought Jesus was coming immediately in fulfilment of his promises. It started when Jesus was alive as reported by Apostle John as it reads:

In my father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to

⁶Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, 9.

prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.⁷

Jesus made it plain that he was coming back for his followers. This promise was reinstated after his death, and he commanded them to remain faithful and wait for the Holy Spirit. However, what amazed many scholars is that the Synoptic Gospels did not clearly state these promises of Jesus in clear terms. Most of these promises are found in the works of Apostle John unveiling the promises of the second return (The Gospels and Revelation). In some portions of the epistles, God promises to crush Satan soon (Rom. 16:20) which has strong connection with the return of Jesus. The old covenant will soon disappear (Heb. 8:13) and the installation of the new was going to be effectual. This second coming will usher Christians into a new life with a new body ready for rapture. Of course, these bodies will be put aside soon by the Lord (2 Pet. 1:14).

The return of Jesus looks imminent. Also, John recorded the revelation of the Lord Jesus concerning future events and echoed the words of Jesus, which must be fulfilled. John stated that the revelation of Jesus must soon take place (Rev. 1:1; 22:6). This was in the first century and the church has survived to the 21st century and it seems those stated events are yet to be fulfilled. In addition, John recorded that Jesus would soon come and fight those who refused to repent (Rev. 2:16).

The soonest appearance of Jesus for the second time is also captured by John when he writes that Jesus is coming soon (Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). This 'soon' was thought to be imminent, and many people were faithfully waiting for Jesus to return. The words translated "I am coming soon" are the Greek, ἔρχομαι ταχύ as used in Revelation 3:11; 22:7, 12, 22). ἔρχομαι is a verb indicative present middle 1st person singular from ἔρχομαι and it carries the sense of come in the literal meaning. It could also mean appearing or coming before the public. Sometimes the word could also mean go as in Matthew 16:24; Mark 11:13; Luke 15:20 and John 21:3. ἔρχομαι is

a singular/solely Latin reading. It is only in Revelation 22:7, ὄρχονται used in Sinaiticus B rather than ὄρχομαι in Sinaiticus A, sc, and other manuscripts.

Ταχύ is an adverb from ταχύς. It could take the sense of an adjective to mean quick, swift but the neuter singular as adverb quickly, without delay, soon. This word can also take the form of ταχύως which has been expressly identified as quickly, without delay, soon (Lk. 14:21; 16:6; 1 Cor. 4:19; Phil 2:19), too quickly, too easily and hastily as in Galatians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 1 Timothy 5:22. This same word can take the form of τύχιον with a genitive comparative to mean more quickly, faster (Heb. 13:19) and without comparison meaning quickly, soon, without delay (John 13:27; 1 Tim. 3:14; Heb. 13:23).

Manuscript evidence for the usage of ἔρχομαι ταχύ is found in codices Sinaiticus (ⲛ) and Alexandrianus (A). Codices Vaticanus (B), Washingtonianus (W), Bazaar (D), and Boernerianus (G) do not have manuscript evidence to support the usage in the Johannine thought. Of all these manuscripts, evidence can be seen that they all are dated between the fourth and the tenth centuries. Textual criticism is yet to find a manuscript in the first century apart from the alleged efforts put in by modern textual scholars.⁸ The available second-century manuscript is P⁵² which is a fragment of the Gospel of John containing John 18:31-33, 37-38. It then means that there is no extant first-century manuscript to support the inclusiveness of the passages in the Johannine works. The remaining portions of the New Testament have attested to the second coming of Jesus but whether such an imminent nature of coming as used by John (ταχύ - soon) has been questioned in this work.

More so, one can also observe that the soon coming of Jesus is used and associated with holding fast to what one has so that the crown won't be taken away from the believer (Rev. 3:11); with blessedness for those who take heed of the prophecy in the book (Rev. 22:7); with reward, which Jesus is willing to give every man for what he has done (Rev. 22:12); with agreement, attestation and affirmation to the coming of the Lord Jesus by John (Rev. 22:20). It can be stated that all these words are associated with the futuristic coming of Jesus rather than the earlier visit to the world.

It will be good to state here that the concept of ταχύ 'soon' about Jesus' return was an act to stir the future and make it connect with the present. John had a focus. It was a definite promise by Jesus, which must be fulfilled. But He also had an intention. Jesus' focus was on being witnesses particularly to revert the distorted state of humanity. The perfect plan of God in salvation was thwarted. It can be said that salvation is a biblical

⁷ John 14:2-4.

⁸ Gideon Y. Tambiyi, "The Text of the New Testament: Why the Long Silence?" *Jalingo Journal of Christian Religious Studies and Societal Research: A Publication of Christian Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, Taraba State University, Jalingo*. Vol. 3, No. 1 (2018), pp. 211-233 (211-233). Gideon Y. Tambiyi, "Recovering Matthean Text of the Holy Family in Africa: A Coptic and Greek Textual Analysis." PhD Thesis at the University of Jos, Nigeria, 2018.

phenomenon and the perfect work of Christ. That is the reason behind the incarnation process. Jesus incarnated as a man to save man from the dominion of sin and Satan. This fact was highly envisaged by Simeon when the baby Jesus was presented in the Temple (Lk 2:29-32) in line with the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:3).

Such intention can also be seen in the key verse in the Book of Acts, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Instead of fulfilling their mission, the early church believers were busy with the signs, day, and time for the coming of the Lord. Jesus made it clear to them that the whole concept is about witnessing, and many Christians have been faithful to this, knowing that we are all witnesses to our Lord Jesus Christ.⁹ Yet, they misconstrued the *Parousia* and treated it with a disdainful attitude towards the Gentiles.

The Early Church Understanding of *ταχύ* 'Soon' in the Parousiatic Perception

From the above statements, it is obvious that there was a serious misconception of the word 'soon' among the first-century Christians, particularly the Jewish Christians. Such a misconception was to the gospel's advantage, as Jesus intended for it to spread. The revival of the early church resulted from the word 'soon', which Jesus used about the *Parousia*.¹⁰ The church became very busy attempting to conquer the world for Jesus since the Master said he was coming immediately. One sees why the disciples decided to remain in Jerusalem and were unwilling to follow the Lord Jesus's instructions (Acts 1:13). The disciples were concerned about the salvation of their fellow Jews. They all waited in Jerusalem in line with the command of the Lord (Acts 1:4). But when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 2:1), they continued to wait when they were supposed to go. They were not willing to embrace the Gentiles into the faith.

The understanding of the word 'soon' during the early church was thought to be an imminent enterprise, in fact, something that could happen next month. Jesus made references to the *Parousia* to happen soon. It can be said that the disciples of Jesus thought it was going to be

an immediate future not a distant future. The Jewish apostles of the first century misunderstood Jesus and thought that salvation was meant to be for the Jews only. Although they engaged in preaching the gospel, they were preaching the Gospel only to Jews in Jerusalem.

The Bible reveals how one could access this once-and-for-all saving work of Jesus - through confessing with one's mouth and believing in one's heart. During the confession process, the Holy Spirit indwells the person and controls the total being or person of the believer. The Spirit-filled Christian is led through matters of truth as revealed in the Bible. He helps the Christian discern what is wrong and what is right in the Church (Acts 16:16-18; 1 Cor. 14:29; 12:2, 3, 10; 1 Jn 4:1-3).¹¹

The early persecution of the church was a divine intervention for them to fulfil the mandate of the Lord concerning the entire world. However, even during the persecution, they had only Jews in mind (Acts 11:19). With the persecution, Phillip went to Samaria (Acts 8:5) and later Peter and John were sent down there (8:14). Phillip also preached to the African continent through the Ethiopian minister (8:26-39). Paul after his conversion went to Damascus (9:19-22). Peter went to Caesarea (10:23-48). Some disciples went to Antioch (11:20-28) and the expansion continued as far as Asia Minor (Acts 13-23) through Paul and his colleagues.

Despite these, Paul usually goes to the Jews at the synagogues and when the gospel is rejected by the Jews, he then turns to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were considered 2nd class citizens (Acts 11:18 "even the Gentiles"). Why would Paul engage in such since he understood that he was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles? (Acts 22:21; 26:17-18). Why should the gospel be a left-over to the Gentiles and first preached to the Jews (Acts 13:5, 14:1, 17:2, 10, 17, 18:4; 19:8)? Did Paul have a clear picture that he was sent to the Gentiles? Was he afraid and was attempting to please the Jews? Did he prefer cultural customs more than the ultimate truth? Such segregation and sentiments resulted in several factors in Africa and Europe between the 'whites' and the 'blacks.'

The persecution caused them to fulfil Acts 1:8. This scattered them across Judea and Samaria and among the Gentiles as intended (Acts 1:8). Such unwilling understanding prompted the proclamation of the gospel into different regions of Asia Minor, Rome, Africa, India and the end of the world as the Book of Acts instructed (Acts 1:8). This made the gospel message not to be only for the Jewish community but to the world including Africa.

⁹Henrietta C. Mears, *What the Bible is All About* (California: Regal Books, 1976), 427-440.

¹⁰"The Second Coming of Jesus Christ" <https://www.bibleinfo.com/en/topics/second-coming-jesus-christ> Accessed 12th September 2023.

¹¹Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*, NSBT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011), 109-10 (pp. 178-179).

The Modern Church Depictions of the *Parousia*

The second coming of Jesus is one of the most important teachings of the New Testament. It is said that at the end of the Tribulation, Jesus Christ will return with the hosts of heaven as well as the Church to establish the Messianic Kingdom on earth.¹² God's Kingdom will last for a thousand years. At this Second Coming, it is said that the Antichrist will be cast into the Lake of Fire and Satan will be bound for a thousand years to deal with evil. The nations will be judged, and Israel will be restored to her land, never more to be removed. There is an ongoing plan associated with the word 'soon' to dethrone evil in the face of the earth.

Quite a few people have always believed that Jesus will come immediately. However, the word 'soon' about the second coming of Jesus has attracted the attention of the modern people in the Church. It has always been an issue as many people have always thought Jesus would come in their days and virtually every generation possesses the second coming of Jesus. This has always been viewed this way as evil increases on the face of the earth.

The delay in the second coming of Jesus has created many variables. The first group of people believe that the word 'soon' opens the door for evangelism as Jesus probably intended. The second group of people waited for the Lord's return and that Jesus had not kept his promise. These people have been on the extreme as they become the most difficult people to reach with the gospel message about Jesus. They have waited and are tired of waiting and would like to continue in their evil ways. These are the dangerous ones.

The coming of Jesus has been said would be like the coming of a thief (1 Thess. 5:2; 1 Pet. 4:15; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3, 16:15). It would be like in the days of Noah when people were enjoying and catching fun and then the flood came and swept them away (Matt. 24:37-39). The Bible said it would be a sudden event (Matt. 24:39). It means that it would come when we are not expecting it.

¹² Richard Bauckham, "The Messianic Interpretation of Isaiah 10:34," in *The Jewish World around the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 36.

¹³ Nathaniel M. Fabula, "The Biblical Basis of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ" https://repository.cpu.edu.ph/bitstream/handle/20.500.12852/2169/01_UC_FabulaNM_1992.pdf?sequence=1 Accessed 25th September, 2023, 2-4.

¹⁴ Jeremy Myers, "The Date Jesus will Return is finally Revealed" <https://redeeminggod.com/date-jesus-will-return/> Accessed 12th September 2023.

¹⁵ "Family Radio" www.familyradio.org. Accessed 6th September 2010.

¹⁶ Gideon Y. Tambiyi, *The African Church under Fire: Problems and Prospect* (Kaduna: Tubase, 2014), 152-3.

There are many people in the history of the church who have predicted the coming of the Lord. Throughout church history, there have been those who have become so mindful of heaven and earthly irrelevance. They quit their jobs, sell their property, and sit waiting for Jesus to return. All of them have been embarrassed, of course, because it is unbiblical to set dates for His coming. It is also unbiblical to become careless and lazy just because one believes Jesus is coming soon. Paul faced this problem with some of the believers in Thessalonica (2 Thess. 3).¹³ Some famous modern examples in modern times are worth citing. Jesus was said will come in 2000 following some prophetic insights in 1999 about the millennium. Many people sold their properties and belongings as they awaited the coming of the Lord. The year 2000 came and went and life continued, and 2014 was also set as an option, which also came and went.¹⁴

Similarly, the Family Radio was started by the late Harold Camping in 1958, and it has been a means of evangelising the world with the gospel message. It broadcasts in more than 30 world languages where the actual message of the Bible is heard. This is sent out by radio broadcasts and the Internet, etc. The Radio has revealed that the end of the world is almost at hand for the Holy God will bring Judgment on May 21st, 2011. They asserted that the Bible has given the "correct and accurate information about that Day." The Radio believed that God had given the year 2011 as the year for Judgment Day.¹⁵

The Family Radio is a worldwide broadcast that is heard even in Africa. The Radio has branches in Africa (South Africa and in Nigeria). The Radio has posted wrong information on the internet that is not only Western but worldwide which is currently used by African Christians. It claims to be an authentic voice within the Christian faith – a faith that is equally African. It brainwashes African Christians from the orthodox teachings about Judgment Day, and its treatment of biblical texts is a menace to the Christian faith in Africa. The Radio shares and uses the same Bible as the African Christian.¹⁶

It is needful to state that their beliefs that "the Bible has given the correct and accurate information about that Day," and that we now have the exact time and many details of God's destruction plan that is to come upon the earth are faulty. They should have told the world that the chapters and verses divisions of the Bible are not inspired when they observed that "Each book is divided into chapters, and each chapter is divided into verses." The chapter divisions were done by Professor Stephen Langton of the University of Paris in A.D. 1227 and the modern verses divisions were done by Robert Stephanus,

a printer who did so to fascinate cross-referencing and public reading. He was a busy businessman in 1557.¹⁷

The Family Radio has observed that “Holy God is far, far greater than our human minds can even explain or understand” yet it has attempted to reveal falsely the secret of God which no one knows, not even the elect angels in heaven nor the Son knows, only the Father (Mk 13:32). Their interpretation of the word “plaques” in Revelation 22:18-19 to refer to the punishment of death and destruction that will come upon all those who sin and correlating it with Ezekiel 18:28, “the soul that sinned shall die” and Romans 3:10, “there is none righteous, no, not one”, is inaccurate. The Radio has affirmed that the Bible says no one knows the Day or the Hour for they wrote that “Indeed the Bible did teach that” yet they have questioned that with a heading “no man knows the day or the hour?” To them, it was an assertion for the Early Church since there was the concern of the end time. They have even attested to the fact that “anyone who claimed he knew the time of the end was always wrong” yet they claim to be the right people for the task. To them, “Therefore, since it was not God's plan to open anyone's understanding of many truths of the Bible until very near the end of the world, it is only now that exceedingly important Biblical truths are being understood.” The question is if God has decided to reveal this to mankind, must it be them? Why not another person or people? Must it be our generation? The Radio has falsely criticised the churches for not teaching what the Bible says.¹⁸

To them, the ministers of conventional churches do not realise that they are in spiritual night-times and will be destroyed on Judgment Day. The Family Radio expositors are victims of spiritual pride, for, to them, they are the true believers who know the time (the hour) and

much about Judgment (the Day). They are not in the night-times of spiritual darkness. They have reduced the concept of true believers to only knowing the time and the hour of God's Judgment which was to come on May 21st, 2012. The Family Radio is extremely wrong for dating the Judgment Day to be May 21st, 2011; and all their propounding proofs about that Day. It conflicted with Bible prophecy and advocated for fore-telling prophecies despite that the Bible is a complete document for the Church and has revealed all that Christians need to know about God, the society and the culmination of the world. It has conflicted with Christological claims of not knowing the Day or the hour of the return of the Son of man in Mark 13:32. It also defied the truth that only God the Father knows of the Day and the Hour of the Judgment Day in Mark 13:32.¹⁹

Apart from the Family Radio, the Mayans predicted the end of 2012 specifically 21st December 2012 to be the end of the world based on their calendar and calculative predictions. This has been documented to be preparatory ground for other prophetic voices that will come.²⁰ Such predictive calculations have contributed to leaving many people in the dark rather than providing light at the end of the tunnel of the quest.

Jesus' return has been a thing of concern today. Many people have denied the existence of Jesus. Such has been translated into the painted picture of Jesus about his return which has been paraded by many people. The church is suffering as life is becoming hard, and evil is fast increasing. People are becoming lawless because they believe there is nothing like the second coming of Jesus. They believe many have waited and got tired of waiting from the first century to the present. Almost every generation always believes Jesus would come in their days. But such wait comes to an end as that generation comes, and the next generation continues with the waiting.²¹

It seems the waiting is taking long for the church. The temptation has always been to return to our old ways of life in the spirit of apostasy. The church aims to convert the world and make the world repent because the kingdom of God is at hand (Matt. 1:15; Lk 10:9, 11; 21:31). Efforts have been made by faithful witnesses of the gospel to engage the world through converting the iniquities in the world into obedience to Jesus. But the church seems to be confused as eschatological promises seem to be far from fulfilment. But it does not mean the Church can relent and allow unrighteousness to sweep our territories. The church needs to be involved and rely on the forthcoming glory that awaits the followers of Jesus.²²

¹⁷ (Tambiyi 153-6)

¹⁸ Gideon Yohanna, “History and Doctrinal Beliefs of the Family Radio and the Jehovah Witnesses (Watchtower): An Analysis for the ECWA Members in Light of the Bible” (A Lecture Presented to the Youth of ECWA Church Hwoll, Jos during the Occasion of Youth Fellowship on 5th October, 2010), 1-13.

¹⁹ Tambiyi, *The African Church under Fire: Problems and Prospect*, 152-9. Yohanna, “History and Doctrinal Beliefs of the Family Radio and the Jehovah Witnesses (Watchtower): An Analysis for the ECWA Members in Light of the Bible,” 1-13.

²⁰ Mark Hitchcock and Alton Gansky, *The Mayan Apocalypse* (Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2010), pp. 68-73.

²¹ Brian Collins, “The Futurist Interpretation of Revelation: Intertextual Evidence from the Prologue” JBTW 2:1 (2021), pp. 41.

²² Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “Eschatology in the Old Testament” Stephen Homes and Russell Rook (eds), *What are we waiting for? Christian Hope and Contemporary Culture*. Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2008, pp. 13-23.

However, there are three references to the closing paragraphs of the Book of Revelation that the promise is made, "Behold, I am coming soon" (Rev. 22:7). It could seem eternity is far off but for most people the return of Jesus and the events foretold in Revelation have immediate connotation. The word *ταχύ* "Soon" maybe tomorrow! *It may be now!* These paragraphs also make it clear that we are to learn to live with this sense of imminence for it is written "Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (Rev. 22:7).

Evangelistic Implications and the Imminent Nature of the *Parousia*

The concept of *ταχύ* 'soon' in the New Testament has been challenging for most people, particularly in the aspect of sharing the gospel message with unbelievers and even as a consolation to suffering Christians in the church. It is obvious that Jesus' usage of the word *ταχύ* 'soon' indicates that the events portrayed in the visions will take place within the lifetime of John, a relatively short time (Rev 2:16; 3:11; 22:6). The final events (Rev. 20:7-22:5) are to take place after the period of one thousand years (Rev. 20:1-6). And the book closes with the Lord's promise "I am coming soon" (Rev. 22:12, 20).

The delay is for people to repent and return to the Lord before the coming of the Son of man. The fulfilment of the word *ταχύ* 'soon' has always the characteristic of being imminent however delayed, may be by our measurements. Peter captured the entire idea:

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.²³

Secondly, the word *ταχύ* 'soon' should make people to be faithful unto the Lord. The vision of a glorified Christ, stepping into history to judge, will have an impact on every reader. It is an evangelistic impact: no one can be frightened into heaven. The good news that brings salvation is the story of the love and forgiveness God

offers human beings in Jesus.

Thirdly, the word *ταχύ* 'soon' should make Christians live in the future. The future life should be the focus. This life will fade away. Christians are called to live in the future, in the promise of the Lord that someday a brighter day will surface, and many will be judged and rewarded according to what they have done.

Fourthly, spreading the gospel is a necessity. Jesus has commanded that we should evangelise the entire world (Matt. 28:19-20). To preach the gospel message is imperative for all Christians irrespective of what they believe about the coming of Jesus. Christians should not be discouraged that the Lord said he would come, and he has not come. A day is like a thousand days for the Lord and a thousand days is like a day (2 Pet. 3:8). Christians are to be faithful in keeping the command of the Lord and patiently wait for the coming of the Lord.

Fifthly, Jesus never used the word *ταχύ* 'soon'. The word could be used as an adjective, but the neuter singular is mostly used as an adverb. It means quickly, without delay, or soon. Jesus never used the word *ταχύ* as an adverb to refer to his coming as searched through the Synoptic Gospels and John. It was a later idea of the church particularly in the Revelation of Jesus to John (Rev. 3:11; 22:7). It became clear that the early church thought highly of Jesus as Jesus thought of himself. The early church said much of Jesus more than Jesus said of himself during his ministry. The great biblical and early church scholar Larry W. Hurtado observed:

I do not think it is necessary for Jesus to have thought and spoken of himself in the same terms that his followers thought and spoke of him in the decades subsequent to his crucifixion in order for the convictions of these followers to be treated as valid by Christians today. A good number may disagree, both among those who assert and among those who oppose traditional Christian beliefs. Most Christians will likely think that some degree of continuity between what Jesus thought of himself and what early Christians claimed about him is at least desirable and perhaps necessary for these claims to have religious validity.²⁴

Such an assertion clears the air for understanding the early Christian perceptions and intentions about Jesus not just concerning his personally but also his words as being argued in this work. The disparity between the two positions seems to be clear also in terms of the *ipsissima verba* (the very words) and *ipsissima vox* (the very voice) of Jesus as recorded by the writers in the Gospels and the

²³ 2 Peter 3:8-10.

²⁴ Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), 9.

entire New Testament. This *ipsissima verba* quest can be inferred from the “soon” quest in the New Testament in search for some degree of continuity between the voice of Jesus and the voice of the apostles in the early church. If Jesus had used 'soon', the other gospel writers (Matthew, Mark and Luke) would have captured the portion. This lack of multiple attestations would make one to conclude that Jesus told them he will come anytime unlike the imminent sense in which John presented and has been the basis for evangelistic activities today in the church.

Lastly, being prepared for the second coming rather than relying on “soon” should be the driving-force for any proposed radical evangelism. The exact date of Jesus' return is not known to many religious scholars. Jesus himself warned his followers that they would not know the day or hour of his return, perhaps what informed John's usage of soon in the New Testament.²⁵ The Bible provides many references to the second coming of Jesus Christ, but it does not provide a specific date or time. Some people have attempted to predict the date of Jesus' return based on various calculations and interpretations of biblical prophecies and their proposals and predictions have failed the test of accuracy and have been viewed with scepticism and disdain. Instead of focusing on the exact date of Jesus' return, it is more important to focus on being prepared for his return. The Bible teaches that Christians need to be always ready for the second coming as it could happen at any moment and this should always be the focus for any meaningful evangelism for many Christians.

Conclusion

This work challenged the usage of *ταχύ* “soon” with respect to the second coming of Jesus in the New Testament and argued that for lack of multiple attestations, particularly in the Synoptic Gospels. Likely, Jesus never used the word *ταχύ* as an adverb about his second coming. It seems to be a later idea of the church particularly in the book of Revelation (Rev. 3:11; 22:7); the early church thought highly and said much about Jesus Christ than Jesus thought and said about himself particularly comparing the works of John and the Synoptic Gospels. To understand the usage of 'soon' in the New Testament, one must reckon with the fact that the New Testament does use the language of imminence. “Surely I am coming soon,” said the risen Lord to the seer (Rev. 22:20), and similar words cannot be found

elsewhere, particularly in the biographies (Synoptic Gospels) of Jesus. Such words, of course, could mean that the *Parousia* is near our ordinary time scale. But it is also possible that the language of imminence is used of the *Parousia* because it refers to an action of God rather than an action of man, and the imminence is on God's time scale, not man's. To live with the conviction that the *Parousia* is imminent does not mean to be in a continuous ecstasy of enthusiasm. It means to have a deep-seated hope and to occupy oneself in doing what pleases the Master so that when He comes His servants will be found ready. Instead of searching for the coming of the Lord through the words of John, Christians would do well to rely on the signs and their fulfilments in Matthew 24 and any other related verses of scriptures in the Synoptic Gospels. Modern translators should translate *ταχύ* within the context of 'without delay' rather than 'soon.' Such an understanding would allay the concerns of the thirsty minds of modern Christians regarding the delayed coming of the Lord.

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²⁵ Clarence L. Haynes Jr., “When is Jesus Coming Back? Is it Soon?” <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/end-times/is-jesus-coming-back-soon.html> Accessed 12th September, 2023.

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