

How Should the Word *Mello* be Translated?

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There's a debate going on about the translation of the Greek word *mellō*. Depending on the context, *mellō* can mean "about to" and "on the point of being done." At times *mellō* is not translated and has the meaning of "necessity." By reading some (most?) translations, the reader unfamiliar with Greek would never know *mellō* is used in some passages since it is often untranslated. For example, in [Revelation 1:19](#), most English translations translate the verse, "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which **will take place** after these things."

Here's how *Young's Literal Translation* translates it: "Write the things that thou hast seen, and the things that are, and the things that are **about to** [*mellō*] come after these things." In his Revelation commentary, G.K. Beale has, "ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα [*ha mellei genesthai meta tauta*] ('what is about to [what must] take place *after these things*')," kind of a non-committal middle ground. A person's eschatological position will often determine how a passage with *mellō* should be translated. I believe that's the wrong approach.

Here's how *mellō* is translated in some Greek-English interlinear translations:

◀ Revelation 1:19 ▶

Revelation 1 - Click for Chapter

1125 [e]	3757 [e]	3739 [e]	3708 [e]	2532 [e]	3739 [e]	1510 [e]	2532 [e]	3739 [e]	3195 [e]	1096 [e]	3326 [e]	3778 [e]
Grapson	oun	ha	eides	kai	ha	eisin	kai	ha	mellei	genesthai	meta	tauta
19 Γράψον	οὖν	ἃ	εἶδες ,	καὶ	ἃ	εἰσὶν ,	καὶ	ἃ	μέλλει	γενέσθαι	μετὰ	ταῦτα ,
Write	therefore	the things that	you have seen	and	the things that	are	and	the things that	are about	to take place	after	these
V-AMA-2S	Conj	RelPro-ANP	V-AIA-2S	Conj	RelPro-NNP	V-PIA-3P	Conj	RelPro-NNP	V-PIA-3S	V-ANM/P	Prep	DPro-ANP

ΜΕΛΛΕΙ	19 Write the things which thou
mellei	hast seen, and the things which
G3195	are, and the things which shall
vi Pres Act 3 Sg	be hereafter;
IS-ABOUT	
is-being-about	

Greek-English interlinears consistently translate *mellō* as “about to,” but this translation is often not reflected in the translations that accompany the Greek. For example, in this one below, you can see that *mellei* is

translated as “are about to” in the Greek but is untranslated in the English:

The same is true for Paul R. McReynold’s *Word Study Greek English New Testament* where he uses the New Revised Standard translation—“what is to take place after this”— but translates *mellō* as “about to.”

At this point, it’s up to the translators to reflect the contextual meaning of *mellō*. Should it be left untranslated, or should it reflect a time indicator? Does it matter? I believe it does. “**Will take place** after these things” could mean thousands of years for some interpreters who believe Revelation is unfulfilled prophecy. But how would have the first readers of Revelation understood the meaning of *mellō* after reading “must shortly [τάχει] take place” (1:1) because “the time is near [ἐγγύς]” (1:3)? When τάχει and ἐγγύς and their cognates are used in the NT, they always mean “shortly”/“quickly” and “at hand”/“near.” I have not found any exceptions. Because of

<u>3195</u>	<u>1096</u>	<u>3326</u>
mellei	ginesthai	meta
μέλλει	γινέσθαι	μετὰ
<u>V-3SPAI</u>	<u>V-PDN</u>	<u>Prep</u>
are about	to happen	after

μέλλει	γινεσθαι
it is about to	to be(come)
verb	verb
pres-act-ind	pres-mi/pDe-inf
3rd-p si	

3195	1096
μέλλει	γινεσθαι
are about	to take place

these time words (also 22:10), “about to” is the best translation of *mellō* in 1:19 when it is followed by 2:10 where *mellō* is used twice and 3:10 that even the NASB translates as “about to.”

In his defense of the early date of Revelation in his book *Before Jerusalem Fell*, Kenneth Gentry wrote the following about *mellō* in [Revelation 1:19](#):

[N]one of the major translations cited above [p.137-138—NASB, NKJV, ASV, Weymouth, RSV, NIV, NEB, Phillips, Williams, Moffatt, Amplified, TEV, Beck] translates [Revelation 1:19](#) in a literal fashion. Although, interestingly, several [n.20—AV, NASB, Weymouth, and Williams.] do translate the same verb in a more literal fashion when it appears in [Revelation 3:10](#), Berry’s *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, Young’s *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*, and Marshall’s *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, however, are quite literal in both instances. The relevant phrases read: ‘the things which are about to occur’ ([Rev. 1:19](#)) and “being about to come” ([Rev. 3:10](#)).... Certainly it is true that the verb μέλλω can indicate simply “destined,” or it can be employed in a weakened sense as a periphrasis for the future tense.

Nevertheless, when used with the aorist infinitive —as in [Revelation 1:19](#)—the word’s preponderate usage and preferred meaning is: “be on the point of, be about to.” The same is true when the word is used with the present infinitive, as in [Rev. 3:10](#). The basic meaning in both Thayer and Abbott-Smith is: “to be about to.” Indeed, “Μέλλειν with the infinitive expresses imminence (like the future).”... All of this is particularly significant when the contexts of these two occurrences of μέλλω in Revelation are considered: the words appear in near proximity with statements made up of the two other word groups indicating nearness.”

[Revelation 1:19](#) is preceded by [Revelation 1:1](#) and [1:3](#) (which contain representatives of both the τάχος and ἐγγύς word groups). [Revelation 3:10](#) is followed by [Revelation 3:11](#) (which contains a representative of the τάχος word group). Clearly, then, the [Revelation 1:19](#) and [3:10](#) references hold forth an excited expectation of soon occurrence.[\[1\]](#)

He followed a similar interpretation in his book *The Beast of Revelation*: “The final term we can note is *mello*, which means ‘about to’ ([Rev. 1:19](#); [3:10](#)). When found in both of the verb forms appearing in [Revelation 1:19](#) and [3:10](#), this term means

‘be on the point of, be about to.’ A number of Bible translations confuse the matter when they translate the word properly in [Revelation 3:10](#) but improperly in [Revelation 1:19](#). According to Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible, [Revelation 1:19](#) reads: ‘Write the things that thou hast seen, and the things that are, and the things that are *about to come* [*mello*] after these things.’ The leading interlinear versions of the New Testament concur. This is surely the proper translation of the verse.”

In his two-volume Revelation commentary yet to be published, Gentry takes the opposite position on [Revelation 1:19](#), contradicting his earlier position:

When Jesus speaks of “the things which will take place after these things,” he uses the verb *mellō*, which can mean “are about to,” in the sense of nearness in time. Yet this term often implies mere futurity, sometimes with the connotation of divine determination (BAGD 500, 501).^[2] This is the preferred interpretation among translators (KJV, NKJV, NAB, NASB, NIV, NJB, RSV, NRSV, ESV) and commentators (Swete 21; Caird 26; Mounce 62; Beale 156; Witherington 82; Osborne 97; Boxall 44). Though John’s basic concern in Revelation is with the near term (see Excursus 1 at 1:1), we probably should not translate the word *mellō* as emphasizing nearness, since it seems intentionally to be avoiding the clearer language already appearing in the context (1:1, 3).^[3]

In [Revelation 2:10](#), *mellō* is used twice and is consistently translated as “about to”: “Do not fear what you **are about to** suffer. Behold, the devil **is about to** cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” Elsewhere in Revelation *mellō*, Gentry consistently translates *mellō* as “about to” (3:2,^[4] 10,^[5] 16; 6:11;^[6] 8:13;^[7] 10:4,^[8] 7;^[9] 12:4,^[10] 5;^[11] 17:8^[12]) with the exception of 12:5 even though he translates it as “about to” in 12:4.

I’m raising this issue to demonstrate that there is some interpretive latitude on how *mellō* can/should be translated. It becomes an issue on the more eschatological passages like [Acts 17:31](#) and [24:15](#).

[1] *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1998), 141-142.

[2] Ernest D. Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 3rd ed. (1900; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976), 36.

[3] *The Divorce of Israel: A Redemptive-Historical Interpretation of Revelation*, 2 vols. (Dallas, GA: Tolle Lege Press, [2023]), 1:353.

[4] “*Sardis* (3:2–3a, 4): “Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.... The Sardian church as a body has little spiritual vitality; indeed it is “dead” and the few commendable things they do have are ‘about to die (3:2c).” Gentry, *Divorce of Israel*, 1:384, 4:71.

[5] “The upheaval in Rome doubtless shook the whole province of Asia Minor with the rest of the Roman world. Indeed, Christ warns that this hour is about to come upon ‘the whole world’ (3:10b). This phrase in Greek is *tēs oikoumenēs holēs*. The word *oikumenē* often means ‘the world as an administrative unit, the Roman Empire’ (BAGD 699). We see this use in [Luke 2:1](#): ‘A decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census should be taken of the *all the world* [*pasan tēn oikoumenēn*]’ ([Lk 2:1](#); cp. [Ac 24:5](#)).” Gentry, *Divorce of Israel*, 1:488.

[6] “When John states that the brethren ‘were to be killed,’ he employs the participle *mellontes*. The NASB obscures the likely near-term meaning here.” Gentry, *Divorce of Israel*, 1:772.

[7] “The eagle’s presence at the throne comports with the judgment woes it announces, woes about to befall Israel (the ‘Land-dwellers,’ *tous katoikountas epi tēs gēs*, 8:13b), woes that fulfill Revelation’s judgment theme against Israel. Here we must ‘translate *Ge* as Land, not as Earth’ (Carrington 157; cp. Russell 410; Chilton 242; Leonard 68; cf. Lupieri 159).” Gentry, *Divorce of Israel*, 1:772.

[8] “John hears seven peals of thunder (10:3) and is about to write what they uttered when a heavenly voice commands him not to do so (10:4) because ‘there will be delay no longer’ (10:6).” Gentry, *Divorce of Israel*, 1:238. “Note that John was

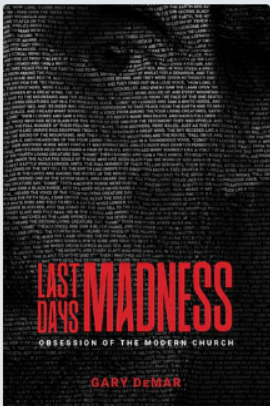
‘about to write,’ which may suggest that John recorded the visions as they came to him—not later (Stuart, 207).” *Divorce of Israel*, 2:11, note 13.

[9]“Earlier, when Jesus prophesied the temple’s destruction, he granted Israel a ‘generation’ (forty years, [Nu 32:13](#); [Ps 95:10](#)) to repent ([Mt 24:34](#); cp. [Mt 24:6b](#), 8). As time unfolds toward AD 70, that delay is almost over. As a result, ‘the mystery of God is finished’ as the seventh trumpet prepares to sound: **in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound** (10:7a).” Gentry, *Divorce of Israel*, 2:17.

[10]“**And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child** (12:4b).” Gentry, *Divorce of Israel*, 2:158.

[11]“Now he reminds his fellow believers that despite all appearance, Christ ‘is to rule [*hos mellei poimainein*] all the nations with a rod of iron’ ([Ps 2:8–9](#)). *Mellei* carries the sense of ‘to be inevitable, *be destined, inevitable*’ (BAGD 628).” Gentry does not translate *mellō* as “about to” in 12:5 even though he contends that Jesus’ ruling with a “rod of iron” was an AD 70 event: “Later in 19:15 [John] will refer to this verse once again [12:5] as he declares Christ’s first-century judgment on Israel and Rome (especially Nero).” Gentry, *Divorce of Israel*, 2:162.

[12]“John records the angel stating that **the beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go to destruction** (17:8a).” Gentry, *Divorce of Israel*, 2:441.



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