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REVELATION 20: EXEGETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

William J. Webb

1. *Introduction*

In a previous article Jerry Colwell and I discussed some of the "hermeneutical baggage" that interpreters bring with them (consciously or unconsciously) as they approach a text such as Revelation 20.[1] It was our intent in that article to ask the broader kinds of questions which strategically influence one's understanding of the text, yet are often neglected when actually working with a particular passage. Having given some reflection on my own hermeneutical approach (with its corresponding strengths and weaknesses), it is now time to work with the text at hand. In this exegetical treatment of Revelation 20 I will endeavor to develop a premillennial interpretation of the passage, as well as continue to interact with the article by Don Garlington, "Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 in Its Salvation-Historical Setting."[2]

2. *Context: Recapitulation or Progression?*

The primary contextual issue confronting the interpreter of Revelation 20 is whether the chronological movement is one of recapitulation (i.e., a shift in time-frame that moves *backwards*) or progression (i.e., a shift *forwards*). Both sides agree that chapter 19 describes the second coming of Christ.[3] The disagreement is whether

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[1] The first article was co-authored: Jerry D. Colwell and William J. Webb, "Revelation 20: Hermeneutical Considerations", *The Baptist Review of Theology*, 4, No.1 (Spring 1994), 38-55.

[2] Don Garlington, "Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 in Its Salvation-Historical Setting", *The Baptist Review of Theology*, 4, No. 1 (Spring 1994), 4-37.

[3] Here amillennialists and premillennialists generally agree (against postmillennialists) that 19:11-16 refers to the second coming of Christ to the earth. For an exception/example of an amillennialist who does not take 19:11-16 as the second coming, see Jay Adams,

the story-line at chapter 20 moves backwards in time (amillennialism) or forwards (premillennialism). With respect to 20:1-6, the contextual discussion may be divided into two areas: the larger literary context (4:1-22:6) and the immediate context (19:11-21; 20:7-10).

A. *The Broad Literary Context (Revelation 4:1-22:6)*

The larger literary context of 4:1-22:6 provides some insight into the issue of story-line movement by establishing a broad pattern. Amillennialists generally argue that recapitulation (or progressive parallelism) is a dominant literary feature throughout chapters 4-22.[4] A. A. Hoekema, for example, organizes the entire book around seven units of progressive parallelism.[5] With the exception of the first section, "each of the seven ends with an indication that the end-time

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The Time is at Hand (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969). Neither this article nor the former one are intended to interact directly with postmillennialism.

[4] For a recent development of recapitulation see C. H. Giblin, "Recapitulation and the Literary Coherence of John's Apocalypse", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 56 (1994), 81-95. Giblin's article provides numerous examples of *thematic* recapitulation (i.e., where the narrative picks up on a previously developed theme). Unfortunately, Giblin assumes that *thematic* recapitulation automatically infers *chronological* recapitulation. I would agree that the seals, trumpets, and bowls are *thematic* recapitulations (just as 20:4-6 is a *thematic* recapitulation of "flashback" to 6:9-11) as he would suggest. However, one must always ask the question of whether these "second episodes" show any narrative progression from the previous or "initial episodes."

[5] The seven units are as follows: Christ among the lampstands (1-3), the seven seals (4-7), the seven trumpets (8-11), the woman-in-birth and the opposition of the dragon (12-14), the seven bowls (15-16), the fall of Babylon and the beasts (17-19), and the doom of Satan (20-22) [*The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1991), 223-226]. Cf. W. Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1940), 22-64; Garlington, "Reigning", 20-21.

has come."[6] However, amillennialists often concede that there is progression *within* these seven units and even a certain amount of progression *between* units as the last section "takes us further into the future."[7]

On the other hand, premillennialists generally see a greater degree of narrative progression characterizing the Apocalypse. The book is frequently organized around the four visions.[8] Within the second vision, for example, the seals, trumpets, and bowls are viewed as being somewhat "expandingly progressive" and escalating in the severity of judgment (rather than three parallel, recapitulating descriptions of the same event).[9] Nevertheless, premillennialists concede to frequent "interludes"[10] and several cases of chronological "recapitulation"[11] within the flow.

In broad terms, then, amillennialists find in the larger context a greater degree of recapitulation (while allowing for some progression), while premillennialists affirm more narrative progression (while allowing for some recapitulation). Perhaps the degree to which recapitulation or progression takes place in the larger context might set the probability for its occurrence in chapter

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[6] Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 224.

[7] *Ibid.*, 224.

[8] The four major visions are introduced by John being given or found "in the Spirit": the vision of the Son of Man on Patmos (1-3), the vision from the heavenly temple (4-16), the vision from the desert/Babylon (17-21:8), and the vision from the high mountain/Jerusalem (21:9-22:6).

[9] For an excellent treatment of the progressive element in the seals, trumpets, and bowls, see D. R. Davis, "Relationship Between the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls in Revelation", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 16 (1973), 149-158.

[10] E.g., Rev 7:1-17; 10:1-11:13; and the larger digression of 12:1-14:20.

[11] Clearly Rev 12:1ff is a recapitulation with its history-to-eschaton review of the conflict between the two kingdoms. Also, the presentation of Babylon (17:1-18) probably "backtracks" into earlier chapters and the hymn of Babylon's destruction (18:1-19:10) is clearly anticipatory or "proleptic" of the war-like events in 19:11-21.

20. However, the concession on both sides of a mixture of progression and recapitulation in the broader context should disallow the use of this data from playing a determinative role in approaching the specific case of chapter 20.

B. *The Immediate Context (Revelation 19:11-21 and 20:7-10)*

The immediate context offers more suitable grounds for our quest to find either progression or recapitulation. At least four issues impact the discussion in this area: the Gog-and-Magog tradition, the nations discrepancy, the story-line continuity, and the sequencing of 20:7-10. The first two favor an amillennial interpretation; the latter two support a premillennial interpretation.

The Gog-and-Magog tradition. Probably the strongest case for amillennialism within the immediate context is the duplication of the Gog-and-Magog tradition in 19:11-21[12] and 20:7-10.[13] In both of these texts, the writer of the Apocalypse paints an eschatological battle using verbal material which is drawn from the Gog-and-Magog tradition of Ezekiel 38-39. Here is how the argument develops.[14] Since no one disputes the chronological connection between 20:1-6 and 20:7-10,[15] the millennial reign obviously *precedes* the battle of Gog and Magog. Now, if the return of Christ in 19:11-21 is *also* the battle of Gog and Magog (as the shared Old Testament/tradition source would seem to indicate), then the millennial-reign passage of 20:1-6 recapitulates to an earlier time preceding the return of Christ.

While the duplication of the Gog-and-Magog tradition is a most intriguing piece of evidence, there are a number of reasons why it falls short of being conclusive. Each of these reasons relates to the

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[12] Rev 19:17-18 (cf. Ezek 39:17-20).

[13] Rev 20:8 (cf. Ezek 38:2); 20:9-10 (cf. Ezek 38:22; 39:6).

[14] The argument has been developed in a very convincing fashion by R. F. White, "Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev. 20:1-10", *Westminster Theological Journal*, 51 (1989), 319-344.

[15] The transition in the text at Rev 20:7 is chronological/progressive: "when the thousand years were over . . . Gog and Magog." Therefore, the thousand-year reign clearly comes *before* Gog and Magog.

author's use of Old Testament materials. First, the free-handed alteration of Old Testament traditions in Revelation suggests a rather "loose" framework for fulfillment. John uses Old Testament traditions more to paint and color his visions, than to provide a precise "this is that" kind of fulfillment. R. H. Mounce notes this free-and-easy use of sources: "The author of Revelation . . . is not bound to his sources. With sovereign freedom he blends together a kaleidoscope of images, in order to portray a message that bears no essential relationship to the original contexts of its literary source."[16] Similarly, a recent study by T. E. McComiskey confirms that John freely changes the Old Testament imagery from the original source.[17] Now if this is the case on the whole, then it should at least make the interpreter suspect of such a phenomenon with the Gog-and-Magog material. Pursuing this possibility, one does find significant differences between the Ezekiel material in its original context and how it is used in Revelation.[18] Such differences suggest a broad infusion of imagery (not some kind of specific, detailed fulfillment). This does not mean that John has a different source or some other Gog and Magog in mind;[19] rather, it simply infers that any carry over of meaning from the source should perhaps be limited to an extremely broad level.

Second, John is fond of using Old Testament imagery in a paradigmatic way. For example, he portrays the evil dominion of Rome in a interchangeable way with Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon.[20]

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[16] *What Are We Waiting For? A Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1992), 40.

[17] "Alteration of OT Imagery in the Book of Revelation: Its Hermeneutical and Theological Significance", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 36 (1993), 307-316.

[18] E.g., in Ezek 38:2 Gog and Magog are identified as only a local northern power; whereas in Rev they represent all the nations. For a listing of the differences, see H. W. Hoehner, "Evidence from Revelation 20" in *A Case for Premillennialism. A New Consensus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 258.

[19] *Contra* Hoehner ("Evidence from Revelation 20", 258) who concludes that "Gog and Magog of Ezekiel 38-39 are different from the Gog and Magog of Revelation 20."

[20] Rev 11:8; 16:19; 17:18.

But all of these are "classic" enemies of God's people throughout salvation history. They are paradigmatic uses of the traditions without any tight fulfillment formulas. John similarly labels the final battlefield as Armageddon (Har-Mageddon, "the mountain of Meggido") probably because Meggido was a major place of battle between Israel and her enemies.[21] The choice of location is not to assure the reader of the geographical location for the eschatological battle. Rather, the name conveys meaning through its "classic" connotations of a well-known region for military conquest, similar to the way that we use the terms "Waterloo" and "Alamo" to colour descriptions of present-day conflicts. Thus, with the Gog-and-Magog imagery (and names) John may be saying (and *only* saying) that these are the enemies of God's people. To argue that John utilizes these traditions beyond a paradigmatic meaning is much more difficult to prove.

Third, the argument for recapitulation based on the Gog-and-Magog traditions assumes that *only* one fulfillment pattern within Revelation is possible. Recapitulation is a plausible hypothesis only if one assumes that the fulfillment is a one-time event (thus requiring Revelation 19:11-21 and 20:7-10 to be a singular battle). Aside from this being a difficult postulate to sustain within Old Testament fulfillment patterns on the whole,[22] it is also difficult within Revelation itself. For instance, John sees a dimension of fulfillment from Daniel 7 and 10 in both the immediate vision on the Island of Patmos[23] and the removed/final eschatological battle.[24] Likewise, John sees the promised "implementer of messianic justice" from

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[21]The city of Meggido and surrounding territory acted as a buffer zone for Israel's northern region. It was a chariot city during Solomon's era. As a key military city, it often changed hands in battle (more than twenty-five times since its foundation).

[22] As argued in the earlier article, fulfillment of pattern within salvation history always unfolds in a manner that is *far more complex* than the initial prediction or pattern can indicate. Cf. Colwell and Webb, "Hermeneutical Considerations", 43-47.

[23] Rev 1:13 (cf. Dan 7:13; 10:5, 16); 1:14 (cf. Dan 7:9; 10:6); 1:15 (cf. Dan 10:6); cf. 2:18.

[24] Rev 19:12 (cf. Dan 10:6); 19:16 (cf. Dan 10:17; cf. 2:47).

Isaiah[25] fighting evil within the present churches of Asia[26] as well as fighting against the forces of evil in the future at Christ's coming.[27] The discovery of the shared Old Testament traditions between two different passages within Revelation is not sufficient grounds for establishing that these two passages refer to the same event or episode. When this consideration is combined with John's paradigmatic use of place-names[28] and people-names,[29] the force of the Gog-and-Magog argument weakens considerably.

Nations discrepancy. Another argument for recapitulation is derived from the seeming discrepancy between what happens to the nations in Revelation 19 and what happens to them in chapter 20. Amillennialists point out that in 19:11-21 "the nations" have (already) been destroyed; whereas in 20:1-3 Satan is kept from deceiving "the nations."[30] Consequently, 20:1-3 represents a retracking in the story to an earlier time when the nations could potentially be deceived (i.e., some time *before* the second coming of Christ). If all the nations are destroyed at the second coming (19:11-21), Satan could hardly be deceiving them after that point. So the deception of chapter 20 must refer to a previous period of time (20:3; cf. 20:8).

While some have found this to be an attractive proposal, it is not overly persuasive for several reasons. First, it may be that not all the people from the nations are destroyed in the final battle. Perhaps only those who gather for the final battle are destroyed — i.e., the kings of the earth and their armies (19:19). In the letters to the seven churches John anticipates a seemingly post-parousia scenario where the saints

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[25] Isa 11:4; 49:2 (cf. 1:20); 63:1-3.

[26] Rev 1:16; 2:12, 16.

[27] Rev 19:11, 13, 15.

[28] John could have just as easily chosen Edom and Bozrah (Isa 34:6; 63:1) as a collective and paradigmatic naming of the enemies of God (with whom God/Christ contends in the eschatological battle). See above discussion.

[29] E.g., see the use of Balaam, Balak, and Jezebel in Rev 2:14, 20.

[30] E.g., White, "Evidence for Recapitulation", 321-325.

will be given authority to rule over "the nations."[31] Second, it may be that there are believing survivors from every nation, tribe, and tongue (to use John's language) who will constitute the nations after the battle of chapter 19. John certainly has this "reformed" view of the nations in the new heavens and new earth when he describes the leaves of the tree of life being "for the healing of the nations."[32] Along these lines, the nations *as an evil entity* in both of these contexts[33]may well be more literary or hypothetical than real. Third, even if all the nations are destroyed, it does not automatically rule out a premillennial interpretation. Progression between chapters 19 and 20 is still quite feasible. A recent proposal by J. W. Mealy, which might be labeled as "pristine premillennialism,"[34] concedes the complete destruction of the nations at the end of chapter 19. The Devil is bound in the abyss for a thousand years so that he can no longer deceive the nations who are themselves now imprisoned in the underworld. At the end of the thousand years, he is released to lead a final rebellion of the nations. Satan leads the nations up from the underworld through the four corners of the earth (the connection between the underworld and the earth in ancient cosmology). While I find the above two possibilities more feasible ways of handling the nations discrepancy than pristine premillennialism, Mealy's proposal

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[31] Rev 2:26-27; cf. 3:21. At this juncture "the nations" appear to have something of an evil connotation.

[32] Rev 22:2; cf. 21:24, 26.

[33] Rev 20:3 and Rev 21:24, 26; 22:2. The nations terminology functions somewhat as "forward projected" anachronism (a "kata-chronism"?), retaining something of its former evil connotation but obviously out of place with the surrounding environment.

[34] "Pristine premillennialism" is an appropriate label for Mealy's view, since only regenerate saints will be on earth for the millennial period and the thousand years is simply the first phase of the new heavens and new earth. See J. Webb Mealy, *After the Thousand Years. Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).

on the whole presents a more cogent option than an amillennial alternative.[35]

Story-line continuity: completing the capture of the evil triad. One of the strongest contextual arguments for progression between chapters 19 and 20 is the need to complete the capture of the evil triad. Throughout the book of Revelation, the beast, the false prophet, and the Dragon/Satan are portrayed as an evil trilogy, a devilish *troika*,[36] seeking to destroy the people of God. As the story-line unfolds, the rider on the white horse and his armies have attacked the rebellious armies led by the evil trilogy. By the end of chapter 19 the armies of the kings of the earth have been destroyed and two of the key leaders (the beast and false prophet) have been captured. Now the anticipated question which the narrative raises is, what will happen to Satan, the "leading figure" of the triad? Will he too be captured? Sure enough, Revelation 20:1-3 depicts just that, the capture of Satan. There is no need to stop the narrative flow at the end of chapter 19 and retrack.[37]

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[35] For a critique of Mealy's view see, G. K. Beale, "Review Article: J. W. Mealy, *After the Thousand Years"*, *Evangelical Quarterly*, 66 (1994), 229-249.

[36] Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 97.

[37] One might also note that the beast and false prophet in 20:10 have *already* been thrown into the lake of fire some time before Satan is thrown into the same location. Granted, the duration of the "time lapse" is not specified. It may have been moments or it may have been a lengthy interval. However, if Rev 20:7-10 is the same battle as the parousia battle of chapter 19 and all three players in the triad get captured in the same battle (as amillennialists suggest), one might ask why John does not simply have all three players thrown into the lake of fire at the same time. An amillennialist might respond that the delay accentuates the capture of the key player in the triad. At first glance this appears feasible. Yet, such a response is credible *in a narrative setting* (apocalyptic story) only if there was more "filler" to account for the extended nature of the battle — i.e., a battle where the details of a multi-staged defeat were fleshed out. Without that kind of narrative "filler" to support the delay, an amillennial reading of the text suffers. From a (straight) recapitulation perspective one would expect in Rev 20:10 to read something like, "After the battle of

This story-line continuity is further confirmed through certain word-links which draw together chapters 19 and 20. For example, the beast and false prophet were "captured" (ἐπιάσθη) and "thrown" (ἐβλήθησαν) into the fiery lake.[38] This is followed by Satan being "seized" (ἐκράτησεν — a very similar semantic field to ἐπιάσθη)[39] and "thrown" (ἔβαλεν) into the abyss.[40] While the locations are different, both are a part of the underworld. So each member of the triad is "captured/seized" and "thrown" into a place of confinement, while the plot for the ringleader comes with a little prolonged intrigue. The repeated motif of the "capture" and "throwing" of prisoners into confinement strongly suggests that the fate of Satan in Revelation 20:1-3 is a continuation of the battle context of chapter 19.

Another significant word-link between chapters 19 and 20 is found in the reiterated focus on the deceiving of the nations. In 19:20, after the capture and confinement of the beast and false prophet, the narrator comments on their cooperative careers to "deceive" (ἐπλάνησεν) the beast-worshipers, i.e., people who in the context are referred to as "the kings of the earth and their armies" (19:19) or otherwise known as "the nations" (τὰ ἔθνη in 19:15). By implication, the capture and confinement of the beast and false prophet would mean the end of their ability to "deceive the nations." Interestingly enough, we find a similar focus on "deceiving the nations" with Satan. In 20:3, after the capture and confinement of Satan the narrator once again draws the reader's attention to the issue of deception: Satan will no longer be able to "deceive the nations" (πλανήσῃ...τὰ ἔθνη). The parallel focus on the apprehension and confinement of the criminals, followed by comments related to

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Gog and Magog, Satan was thrown into the lake of fire *along with* the beast and false prophet."

[38] Rev 19:20.

[39] For the almost interchangeble nature of πιάζω and κρατέω, see the examples listed in J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 221, 485.

[40] Rev 20:3.

their careers of "deceiving the nations,"[41] strongly suggests a continuity in the narrative.

A third word, "any longer/yet/still" (ἔτι), links together chapters 19 and 20. It is not that this word occurs in both chapters. Rather, through its usage in chapter 20, ἔτι infers a backwards referent to the discussion found in chapter 19. In 20:3, John states that the Devil is thrown into the abyss, "to keep him from deceiving the nations *any longer* (ἔτι)." The ἔτι assumes that the Devil was at some time *before* his imprisonment involved in the task of deceiving the nations. In view of the way in which the evil triad functions in a cooperative venture to deceive the nations (see above discussion), the most reasonable antecedent for ἔτι (20:3) would be the deceptive action of Satan *through or in conjunction with* the deceptive ministry of the beast and false prophet (19:20).

The sequencing of Revelation 20:7-10. From a contextual standpoint, the Achilles' heel of an Augustinian approach is that it sets up a reign-then-martyrdom sequence within the text. The issue revolves around the relationship of 20:7-10 with 20:4-6. Some amillennialists (following an Augustinian model) interpret 20:7-10 as a symbolic perspective on the career of the beast, coming up out of the abyss to deceive the nations into making war on the saints (cf. 13:1-7; 11:7). However, as Mealy notes, there is "a simple and unavoidable problem with this idea: when Rev. 20:7-10 is then related to 20:4-6, it appears that the saints martyred by the beast are incongruously resurrected to reign with Christ in 20:4-6 before the beast ever gets a chance to kill them."[42]

Consequently, many amillennialists today acknowledge the weakness in Augustine's model and so take 20:7-10 to refer *only* to the final defeat of Satan and his armies at the parousia-battle, as

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[41] In view of the way in which the evil triad functions together to deceive the nations into false worship within Revelation (12:9; 13:14; 18:23; cf. 19:20; 20:3), it seems rather forced to disassociate the "deception of the nations" by two players of the triad (the beast and the false prophet) mentioned in chapter 19 from the "deception of the nations" by the third major player of the triad (Satan) in chapter 20.

[42] *After the Thousand Years*, 19.

depicted in 19:11-21.[43] However, this modification (aligning 20:7-10 with 19:11-21) runs into sequencing difficulties of its own. For on this view Satan's release from prison *begins* with the parousia or shortly before it (20:7-10), while the beast's career *ends* at the parousia (19:20). Their respective careers of deception would overlap for only a brief moment in time — i.e., only in the task of gathering the nations against the people of God for the final battle. On the surface this appears like a feasible solution to the Augustinian dilemma. However, Satan's deception of the nations within Revelation is much broader than this final moment before the eclipse of an era. The entirety of the beast's career (not simply the last battle) is portrayed as Satan's great triumph in deceiving the human race.[44] Furthermore, if the beast and false prophet find some degree of fulfillment within first-century Rome and its enforced emperor worship of that time (as most amillennialists acknowledge), then surely it is difficult to limit Satan's deceptive action as developed *within the theology of Revelation* to the final parousia-battle.

C. *Summary*

The clearest support for recapitulation is the duplicate Gog-and-Magog tradition. To a much lesser extent the nations discrepancy between chapters 19 and 20 provides a plausible (though not persuasive) piece of data favoring recapitulation. On the other hand, the strongest material supporting progression or non-recapitulation is the continuity in the story-line (completing the capture of the evil

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[43] E.g., J. A. Hughes, "Revelation 20:4-6 and the Question of the Millennium", *Westminister Theological Journal*, 35 (1973), 281-302; L. Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1978), 233-235.

[44] In Rev 12:9, Satan is described as the one who "deceives the whole world." Satan's deception unfolds in the graphic portrayal of chapter 13, where it is by no means restricted to militaristic ends. Cf. the continued focus on deception (13:14). Note also the connection between the "woe" to the *earth* and the *sea* because Satan is thrown down there (12:12) followed by a portrayal of a beast from the *sea* (13:1) and a beast from the *earth* (13:11). The literary connection intentionally unites Satan's deceptive activities (the woe) with those of the two beasts.

triad) and the related word-links which tie the story together. Also, the sequencing between 20:4-6 and 20:7-10 (and subsequent problems for an amillennial model) lends considerable support for progression. In sum, the task of choosing between the competing data is not an easy one. Nonetheless, in light of the above discussion it would appear that the evidence for narrative progression outweighs the data favoring recapitulation.

3. *The Content of Revelation 20:1-6*

After exploring the contextual framework and its interpretive implications, the next step is to venture into the actual content of Revelation 20:1-6. A variety of crux issues will be highlighted and discussed. These have been organized simply in the order in which a reader would encounter them while moving through the text. Where the issues are interrelated, I will refer back by section division.

A. *The Binding of Satan (Revelation 20:1-3)*

Within biblical theology one finds two lines of thinking: (1) a present binding/defeat of Satan[45] and (2) a present rule of Satan along with deceptive activity (implying a more extensive, future binding/defeat).[46] Both streams are clearly present within the New Testament. So when interpreters examine the binding-of-Satan picture in Revelation 20, they understandably appeal to either perspective in order to support their view.

The crucial issue, however, is which stream is John drawing from in the apocalypse. For several reasons, a future-binding perspective is more likely within John's thinking. First, the prison or the abyss, into which Satan is thrown, is not on the earth. Aligning itself with ancient cosmology, Revelation depicts the classic picture of a three-tiered universe: (1) in heaven, (2) on the earth, and (3) below the

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[45] E.g., Matt 12:29; Luke 10:17-18; John 12:31-32; cf. Acts 14:16; 17:30. Garlington ("Reigning with Christ", 21-24) has done an admirable job in developing this theme, particularly within the Gospels and Acts.

[46] E.g,. 2 Cor 3:15; 11:2-4, 13-15; 1 Thess 2:18; 2 Thess 2:9-10; 1 Pet 5:8; note especially Rev 2:9, 13, 3:9.

earth.[47] Within the cosmology of apocalyptic literature "the abyss" is spatially removed from the earth, inhibiting direct contact with the earth.[48] In fact, angels who have been incarcerated in the abyss (or similar prisons) require release in order to torment or influence humankind on the earth. Likewise, the abyss within Revelation is presented as part of another world *under the earth* (with a shaft leading up to the earth).[49] Within our text the abyss is sealed "over" (ἐπάνω) top of Satan, inferring his confinement in a down-under location. By way of contrast, the present-binding passages consistently portray Satan's binding on earth.[50]

Second, the strength of John's language would appear to limit any contact between Satan and the earthdwellers. After Satan is chained and thrown into the abyss, the abyss is said to be "locked" and "sealed" over him. Either John is using an extreme form of hyperbole, or the series of verbs conveys something of the complete non-contact and non-influence of Satan during the thousand-year period with those whom John calls "earthdwellers" (τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς).[51] In Revelation 9:1-2, for example,

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[47] E.g., Rev 5:3, 13.

[48] Angelic beings are often portrayed as being trapped in a nether world (having been banished from the earth) and awaiting the divine summons for judgment. E.g., see 1 Enoch 10:4-6; 18:11-18; 21-22; 90:24-27; 108:2-6; *Jub* 5:6-10 (cf. Isa 24:20-23).

[49] Rev 9:1-2; 11:7; 17:18; 20:1-3. In Rev 9:1-2 angels imprisoned in the abyss can only influence earthdwellers through being released from the abyss and traveling up a shaft to earth.

[50] E.g., in Luke 10:17-18 Satan falls from heaven to the earth. Even John 12:31-32, which could arguably be closer, does not have Satan being thrown into the abyss. It simply portrays an exchange — the lifting up of a new prince of this world and a dethroning of the old. However, one has to ask if this kind of realized eschatology is anywhere close to the perspective of Revelation, where the world seems to be ruled by evil forces (cf. Rev. 2:9, 13, 3:9).

[51] Τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (Rev 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:2, 8) provides one of several key phrases for understanding the cosmology of Revelation. The whole point of locking someone (an angel or the Devil) in the abyss (below the earth) is so that they cannot bring any harm against those who dwell

demonic creatures imprisoned in the abyss can only influence earthdwellers through being released from the abyss and traveling up to the earth through a shaft. This broader portrayal of the abyss, along with the intense language of Revelation 20, does not appear to be saying that abyss creatures have a mere reduction in influence. Rather, it would seem to infer their complete removal from contact with earthdwellers.

Third, Satan's imprisonment in the abyss must be understood with a sensitivity to the original readers and to the opening "letters" which are directed to them.[52] To the church at Smyrna John writes, "the devil will put some of you in prison . . . for ten days."[53] To the church at Pergamum he writes, "I know where you live, where Satan has his throne."[54] So in a collective sense, John is saying to his fellow

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on the earth. The abyss is not simply a metaphorical "reduction in influence" as amillennialists suggest. Thus an amillennial perspective breaks down when the abyss is considered more broadly throughout the book of Revelation. Also, confinement in the abyss stands in *direct contrast* to the outcome of Satan being thrown out of heaven to the earth. The narrator of the Apocalypse declares Satan's arrival upon the earth as one of the three great "woes" to its inhabitants: "woe, woe, woe, to those who dwell on the earth (τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς)" (8:13; cf. 12:12-13). Within Revelation demonic confinement in the abyss brings *safety* to the earthdwellers. In contrast, demonic beings thrown down to the earth (from heaven) or released to go up to the earth (from the abyss) brings *harm* to the earthdwellers.

[52] Employment of a reader-oriented hermeneutic (which focuses at least on the *original* reader) is extremely helpful at this point.

[53] There was a large and hostile Jewish population in Smyrna. This Jewish population (and the synagogues in general) enjoyed an exemption from Rome's demands for emperor worship. So when Christians were being thrown out of the synagogue, it meant that they were "fair game" for imprisonment and execution by Rome (if they did not embrace the imperial cult). See C. J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 65-70.

[54] Satan was "enthroned" in Pergamum in the sense that city was the official centre for emperor worship in Asia. Satan ruled from Rome

Christians: "You are going to be thrown into prison and Satan has set his throne up in your very midst (he has his throne on earth and rules supreme)!" Only now can we come close to seeing (and feeling the impact of) what chapter 20 would mean to the reader who was struggling with the injustice of chapter 2. In chapter 2 we get one kind of picture: Satan is enthroned and Christians are being thrown into prison. In chapter 20, however, the tables are turned: Satan is imprisoned and Christians are being enthroned![55] The literary (and theological) point of Revelation 20 is the theme of reversal. For people who were struggling with extreme injustice, John paints for them a vision of a just world.

One might ask if this literary twist could not be equally accounted for from an amillennial perspective. After all, the saints who were once suffering on earth are now reigning in heaven. Reversal is a major part of an amillennial perspective as well. Admittedly, this is so. Yet, ultimately a realized eschatology fails miserably at capturing the strength of the connection between the vision of 20:1-6 and the "earlier letters." For the imprisoned Christians, it would certainly not come as much comfort to know that the one who threw them into prison was likewise himself in prison right now! Such a message would at best sound rather anemic and hollow. If Satan was imprisoned at present, it bore little comparison (if any) to their imprisonment. Furthermore, an amillennial model sets up an inconsistency between the "reversal scenario" for Satan and the "reversal scenario" for the Christian: Satan's enthronement and his imprisonment happen at the same time (paradoxically?), but the Christian's enthronement and imprisonment do not happen at the same time (one follows the other). It is understandable, then, why most amillennialists overlook these verbal and conceptual "echoes"

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in the West and Pergamum in the East. Again, see Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 78-105.

[55] To paraphrase John, we might further add, "Oh and by the way, you [Christians] may be imprisoned for ten days, but the one who threw you into prison will himself be thrown into prison (not just for ten days, not for a thousand days, but for...a thousand years — a long, long, time)."

from the seven letters in the text of 20:1-6. However, for the original reader this "poetic justice" would surely not have gone unnoticed.[56]

Fourth, there is an overlapping connection between Satan being imprisoned for a thousand years (20:1-3) and the saints being able to reign for the same thousand-year period (20:4-6).[57] The timing and overlap of Satan's imprisonment and the saints' enthronement is not merely coincidental. Rather, it is the banishment of Satan which *allows for* the saints to rule. The inference is that it is *the removal of Satan's rule* which permits the saints to rule over the territory that Satan once ruled. Within the Apocalypse, Satan is not viewed as ruling heaven. It is not as if Satan had to be thrown into the abyss, so that the saints could reign in heaven! Thus, amillennialism provides no rationale for the overlapping interface between what happens to the saints and what happens to Satan.[58]

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[56]One could also argue from a positive perspective that only a reversal of fortunes proportionate to the eschatological "Day of the Lord" adequately accounts for this literary twist.

[57] The Satan-imprisonment pericope (20:1-3) contains two references to the "one thousand years", while the saints-reigning pericope (20:4-6) has three references: "he seized the dragon...and bound him for a *thousand years*" (20:2); "he threw him into the abyss...until the *thousand years* were ended" (20:3); "they...reigned with Christ for a *thousand years*" (20:4); "the rest of the dead did not come to life until the *thousand years* were ended" (20:5); "they...will reign with Christ for a *thousand years*" (20:6). It would appear from the connection between the two pericopae through this overlap in time frame (and the repeated emphasis in both on thousand years) that there is some correlation between what happens to Satan and what happens to the saints.

[58] In apocalyptic literature (as in the New Testament) God always rules in the heavens. Amillennialism cannot answer why Satan's imprisonment overlaps with the saints' rule in heaven for a thousand years. Premillennialism, on the other hand, accounts very well for this overlap between what happens to Satan and what happens to the saints — Satan's tyranny over the earth is removed so that the saints may claim that territory. Interestingly, postmillennialism does a credible job at this juncture: Satan is removed *from the earth* in order to facilitate Christians ruling *on the earth* through the advance of the gospel and kingdom ethics (cf. Matt 28 and its overtones from Dan

Fifth, amillennialists (wrongly) assume that Satan being "thrown down" in 20:1-3 is equivalent with his being "thrown down" in 12:7-12.[59] However, this is not the case. The two journeys have different points of origin and destination. In the one the Devil is captured in heaven and thrown down to the earth (Revelation 12); in the other he is captured on earth and thrown down into the abyss (Revelation 20). Also, the result of Satan being "thrown down" in each case is dramatically different. When Satan is thrown down from heaven to the earth (Revelation 12), there is an *amplification* of his deception activities among humankind.[60] When thrown down from the earth into the abyss (Revelation 20), there is a *restriction* in his deceiving powers.[61] In fact, it is this very difference which makes for a more interesting story within the Apocalypse, since it depicts the progressive unraveling of Satan's dominion.

B. *Deception of the Nations (Revelation 20:3b)*

The end of Satan "deceiving the nations" in 20:3b can hardly refer to some transition between the Old and New Testaments which resulted in a lesser degree (but not complete nullification) of the influence that Satan has on leading the nations into idolatry.[62] This is an entirely imported or foreign category to the theology of Revelation. The significant word-links between chapters 19 and 20 indicate that the "deception of the nations" comments are directly related to the termination of the careers of the big three players and the cooperative efforts of this evil triad to have the nations worship the beast. See discussion above on the continuous story-line (§2.B).

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7). Unfortunately, postmillennialism is completely out of step with the qualified "pessimism" of apocalyptic literature such as Revelation.

[59] E.g., Garlington, "Reigning with Christ", 25.

[60] That is why the heavens "rejoice" (because Satan has left the heavens). And, that is why there is a "woe" to the earth and the sea, because "Satan has gone down to you" (12:12). Being cast out of heaven intensifies Satan's efforts on earth against the people of God.

[61] Cf. footnote 51 (above).

[62] *Contra* Garlington, "Reigning with Christ", 23-24.

Furthermore, any interpretation of Satan's deception should balance the "before" and "after" imprisonment picture. The purpose for the thousand-year imprisonment is explicitly stated, "to keep him [Satan] from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended" (20:3). Then 20:7 resumes this focus, "when the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations..." The picture is a balanced one: deceiving the nations — (imprisonment) — deceiving the nations. Whatever is taken away by the imprisonment is given back upon release; the power to deceive the nations is first removed from Satan and then subsequently restored. Now, if one accepts Garlington's definition of "binding" (with its epochal, salvation-historical dimensions), it seems more than a little incongruous that the gospel/knowledge of God which was formerly restricted to the nation of Israel (yet spread to the nations with the binding of Satan at the cross event) will be taken away from the nations at large and *once again* restricted to one nation (Israel?). Such an approach fails to define its terms within Revelation.

C. *The 1000 Years (Revelation 20:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) and the delayed(?) parousia*

Premillennialists have often argued for a literal "one thousand years."[63] Such a line of argument seems rather strained in light of the

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[63] E.g., J. L. Townsend, "Is the Present Age the Millennium?", *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 140 (1983), 213-214; Hoehner, "Evidence from Revelation 20", 249; J. F. Walvoord, "The Theological Significance of Revelation 20:1-6" in S. D. Toussaint and C. H. Dyer, eds., *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 231. Appeal is frequently made to the six occurrences of the phrase "one thousand years" in the text, the contrast to the "short time" in 20:3, and the occurrence of events *after* the thousand years (which implies a specific duration). However, the most that one can say with any certainty from this data is that John wants to communicate the idea of a "long time" and a time which has a "specific duration" (i.e., it cannot be equated with eternity since there are events that follow after the thousand years...).

symbolic/figurative use of numbers within Revelation.[64] Even more tenuous are attempts to eliminate eschatological options based on this literalistic formula. Of course it is *possible* that a literal thousand-year period is intended;[65] nevertheless, the numerology of Revelation should cause the interpreter of any eschatological persuasion to refrain from pressing this data.[66]

However, what can be said about the thousand years with a fair degree of confidence is that χίλια ἔτη communicated to the original readers *a very long period/epoch in time*. The expression χίλια ἔτη stands in direct contrast to a "short time" (μικρὸν χρόνον in 20:3)[67]

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[64] Some numbers appear to carry only a symbolic meaning (without requiring any *exact* physical or literal correspondence). E.g., note that the dimensions of the new Jerusalem are *12,000 stadia* in length, width, and height (cf. the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles) and its wall is *144 cubits* thick (cf. the 144,000). The 12,000 stadia and the 144 cubits are almost certainly figurative or symbolic dimensions. Cf. the phrase "seven spirits" (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6).

[65] Some numbers do carry *both* a symbolic and literal dimension in Revelation: e.g., the seven churches (1:4, 11, 20). These churches appear be *both* literal churches in Asia Minor as well as representative churches of the larger Christian community. That John is referring to literally identifiable churches can be clearly established through historical studies. For example, see Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia.* On the other hand, the seven churches appear to have been chosen in a representative manner (i.e., of the kinds of Asian, and early Christian, churches in general) to speak to a larger audience in view of the specific number chosen (seven) and the plural form of "churches" in the repeated hearing formula: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

[66] At this point I would agree with Garlington ("Reigning with Christ", 33, n. 77), while allowing for at least the possibility that χίλια ἔτη *may* be both symbolic and literal (cf. n.65 above).

[67] Rev 20:3 refers to a short "slice" of time *after* the long time of the thousand-year period. So aside from being confident that χίλια ἔτη communicates a lengthy period of time, one can also infer that it is not an indefinite period (i.e., it cannot in this context refer to eternity as a whole).

and so clearly represents a comparatively long, long time. Also, the broader depiction of the readers' suffering at the hands of their oppressors for a "short period" appears to be intentionally juxtaposed to this long, blissful reign of the saints.[68] Even from the perspective of systematic theology this lengthy-epoch understanding of χίλια ἔτη can hardly be a debated point, since amillennialists require approximately two thousand years should Christ return by the close of this millennium.[69]

Now the implication from χίλια ἔτη is simply this: according to an amillennial model, the author of Revelation would be saying that Christ's return was *delayed or postponed* for a long, long time (while the saints reigned from heaven for a thousand years). Christ's return as the white-horse rider of chapter 19 would be delayed for a long, long time (after which the final battle will be fought). Certainly a "delayed parousia" perspective is possible within the New Testament.[70] However, the real issue is whether or not the writer of the Apocalypse wanted his original readers to perceive a "short-time" coming parousia or a "long-time" much-delayed parousia.

A survey of Revelation's theology indicates a uniform perspective that Christ would return "soon," as echoed in the closing promise: "Behold, I am coming soon" (22:7, 12, 20).[71] Similarly, in Revelation 6:10 the souls under the altar cry out, "How long Sovereign Lord...until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" It would seem a strange answer indeed (within the theology

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[68] For example, in Rev 2:10 the church in Smyrna is promised suffering for "ten days" (ἡμερῶν δέκα). Cf. the "hour" (ὥρας) of trial/testing (3:10). Both of these expressions likely indicate a short duration in time.

[69] Postmillennialists would require perhaps three thousand years or more(?).

[70] At several points dominical tradition leaves room for a delayed second coming (e.g., Matt 25:5; Luke 12:41-48; 19:11). For a discussion, see Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 109-128.

[71] Cf. Rev 1:1, 3; 2:16; 3:11; 22:6, 10. Note also the short period assigned to Satan's kingdom (12:12). For a helpful discussion of the time-perspective in Revelation relative to coming judgment and the parousia, see E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation. Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 48-50.

of Revelation) if they were to be told, "Sorry, my return and judgment upon your enemies is not for a long, long time!" Instead, what they are told in 6:11 is to wait "a little longer" (ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν). This short-time statement (χρόνον μικρόν) of 6:10 is precisely the expression we find *contrasted* with χίλια ἔτη in 20:3.[72] The avenger of blood will be coming quickly (Revelation 6:10-11; 19:13; cf. Isaiah 63:1-3). Within the Apocalypse a long-delayed parousia in 20:1-6 simply does not fit with the short-return perspective of the book as a whole. Consequently, only a premillennial interpretation adequately accounts for the immediacy of the coming judgment (and the lack of a delayed-parousia perspective) in Revelation.[73]

Aside from an appeal to the broader tension in New Testament eschatology (which I have discussed above), an amillennialist might be inclined to answer this discrepancy between Revelation 6 and 20 in one of two ways.[74] On the one hand, an amillennialist might argue that the "short time" in Revelation 6 is a reference to the time of suffering a believer will endure before the relief of death, while the "long time" in Revelation 20 refers to the after-death reign with Christ in heaven. However, χρόνον μικρόν in 6:10 cannot be understood in such a manner. In context, the expression refers to the length of time God will delay judgment upon the evil earthdwellers and avenge the blood of the saints — a time which is clearly

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[72] See note on χρόνον μικρόν in above paragraph.

[73] Furthermore, an appeal to the tension in biblical eschatology is inappropriate since we find the delayed-parousia perspective primarily in the Gospels (Matt 25:5; Luke 12:41-48; 19:11), literature which, unlike Revelation, is characterized by a much greater complexity through multiple-settings to each discourse (where one would expect a greater diversity of perspective).

[74] I am only postulating a hypothetical response here, since I have not seen the delayed-parousia argument developed by premillennialists, nor responded to by amillennialists. The reason I stumbled across the idea seems to be the result of taking ψυχαί in 20:4 to refer to disembodied souls (*contra* most premillennialists) and my corresponding view of 20:4 as an intentional literary allusion back to the scene in 6:9-11 (which many premillennialists overlook). In addition, taking the thousand years in primarily a literary sense of a "long time" (instead of in a strictly literal sense) certainly helped incubate the idea. See discussion below (§3.D).

presented as coming at the parousia through the blood-avenging conquest of Christ (Revelation 19:13; cf. Isaiah 63:1-3). Furthermore, the qualification in 6:11 ("until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed") places the timing at the parousia and clearly on a collective level, not one of individual martyrdom.

On the other hand, an amillennialist might be inclined to argue that the millennial picture in Revelation 20 is not intended to teach a delayed-parousia perspective. Instead, its *explicit* intent is to communicate how long the saints will reign. Granted, the explicit statements in 20:4-6 focus on the saints reigning for a thousand years. However, an obvious inference follows from an amillennial model: if the thousand years refers to the reign of the saints in heaven, then Christ's return is to be delayed for a long, long time. You cannot have the one without the other.[75] Furthermore, an *explicit* statement about a delayed parousia would come from 20:7-10, "When the thousand years are over...Gog and Magog...". If 20:7-10 represents the parousia-battle of 19:11-21 (as amillennialists propose), then 20:7-10 would explicitly teach that there will be a one-thousand-year time period (a long, long time) before Christ comes back as the white-horse rider who brings justice and judgment. The avenger of the saint's blood would be a long, long time in coming. Yet, this scenario is not plausible in view of the "short-time" answer found in 6:10 and in the book as a whole.

D. *Thrones/ruling with Christ (Revelation 20:4)*

Interpretive discussions regarding the "thrones" and "reigning" in 20:4 revolve around three issues:[76] (1) *who* are seated on these

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[75] A delayed-parousia inference would probably have been obvious to the "souls under the altar" (or to readers who could identify with their plight) — the ones counting the number of martyred saints in order to benchmark the "short time" answer to their question about coming justice.

[76] I will simply assume (for the sake of space) that those on the thrones are roughly the same as the souls John sees ruling with Christ. This may not be the case. However, the point is a moot one relative to any particular millennial position.

thrones? (2) *where* are the saints ruling? and (3) *when* are the saints reigning?

Who: disembodied souls or resurrected/embodied persons? There is considerable debate over who John saw sitting on the thrones and ruling with Christ. As one might expect, (1) amillennialists contend that "disembodied souls" are seated on the thrones, and (2) premillennialists generally argue for "embodied/resurrected" persons sitting on the thrones. Amillennialists cite uses which indicate that ψυχαί can refer to "disembodied souls,"[77] while premillennialists search for uses where ψυχαί refers to "embodied/whole persons."[78] However, listing semantic options cannot be substituted for a clear development of the rationale for choosing between them.

For several reasons the evidence favours an understanding of ψυχαί as "disembodied souls" (*contra* most premillennialists). First, the use of ψυχαί followed by a genitive (often a wholative genitive[79]) in the New Testament frequently indicates that some component part of the whole person(s) is being emphasized.[80] Second, in contexts of martyrdom or the threat of physical death ψυχαί readily emphasizes the component that extends beyond the grave and is not itself vulnerable to death (in contrast to the body).[81] Third, and most important, ψυχαί is used earlier in Revelation 6:9 of disembodied souls (in a context which carries important implications for 20:4-5). The verbal and conceptual ties between the two passages are quite weighty:

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[77] E.g., see Hughes, "Revelation 20:4-6", 288-289.

[78] E.g., J. S. Deere, "Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4-6", *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 135 (1978), 66-67; Hoehner, "Evidence from Revelation 20", 254.

[79] Some grammarians use the expression "partitive genitive" for the same grammatical feature.

[80] Ironically, Deere ("Premillennialism", 67) lists Rev 18:13 as an example of ψυχαί with the genitive ἀνθρώπων to refer to the whole person. Unfortunately, he quotes only enough of the verse to make his (faulty!) point. Anyone who checks the reference would be convinced otherwise (since ψυχάς in the context is distinguished from σωμάτων).

[81] E.g., Matt 10:28.

Revelation 6:9-11	Revelation 20:4-5
τὰς ψυχὰς [A]	τὰς ψυχὰς [A]
τῶν ἐσφαγμένων[82] [B]	τῶν πεπελεκισμένων[83] [B]
διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ [C]	διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ[D]
καὶ	καὶ
διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον [D]	διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ [C]

While most premillennialists ignore or discount the connection between 6:9-11 and 20:4-5, the four verbal/conceptual ties are sufficiently persuasive to suggest an intentional literary connection (and something of a "flashback") by the author.

On the surface, then, my exegesis of "souls" would appear to support an amillennial interpretation. However, a couple of factors actually take the data in a different direction. For one, the lexical analysis of ψυχαί simply affirms the identity of "who was resurrected" and then *subsequently* seated on the thrones. The text reads, "I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded...they [these souls] came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (20:6). It does not say, "the souls reigned with Christ." Rather, the intervening step of resurrection precedes the reigning. The resurrection may well have embodied the souls, followed by their

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[82] Τῶν ἐσφαγμένων is reiterated in 6:11 with ἀποκτέννεσθαι. In 18:24 σφάζω is used of the slaying of prophets and saints. In 13:15 ἀποκτέννω describes the fate of those who refused to worship the image of the beast (cf. 2:13; 11:7).

[83] Τῶν πεπελεκισμένων occurs only here in 20:4. The refusal to worship the beast and his image obviously take the events back to 13:11-18. Consequently, the "slain souls" of 6:9-11 are roughly synonymous with the "beheaded souls" of 20:4-5.

being seated on thrones.[84] In this case, we have the disembodied souls (of beheaded saints), a representation of all unjustly-treated believers, resurrected and ruling in their resurrected bodies. The meaning of ψυχαί, then, is not in itself determinative for formulating either an amillennial or premillennial position.

Nevertheless, if my interpretation of ψυχαί and the literary connection between 6:9-11 and 20:4-5 is accepted, it serves to accentuate an earlier point. If 20:4-6 is an intentional literary "flashback" of the saints beneath the altar in 6:9-11 (as I have argued), then it underscores the extreme discrepancy that an amillennial perspective has between the "short time" answer the martyred souls get in chapter 6 and the "long time" answer they receive in chapter 20. This literary connection heightens the amillennial problem of a delayed parousia (cf. above under §3.C).

Where: reigning in heaven or on earth? Part of the difficulty in assessing 20:4-6 is in trying to determine whether the saints are reigning in heaven (amillennialism) or on earth (premillennialism). Aside from recapitulation, the only data supporting a heavenly location for the 20:4-6 pericope is the reference to "souls." However, as we have just argued, the ψυχαί are said to "come to life" and to be a part of the "first resurrection," which leaves open the *possibility* that these formerly-martryed persons are resurrected to reign on earth.

On the other hand, at least two factors (beyond the scope of our discussion thus far) should be raised at this juncture in support of an earthly location. First, the pericope before and after 20:4-6 takes place on earth. In 20:1-3 an angel comes down from heaven, seemingly to earth,[85] where he apprehends Satan and throws him into the abyss. In 20:7-10 Satan leads a battle on the earth against the

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[84] It would appear that Ladd likewise allows for the possibility that ψυχαί refers to disembodied souls [in R. G. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977), 38, 189].

[85] The capture of Satan seems to take place on earth since (1) the angel has to come down from heaven in order to make the arrest (inferring earth as the location of the arrest), and (2) Satan is in the process of deceiving the earthdwellers at the time of his apprehension.

people of God. While it is possible that a "shift" may have taken place with the intervening material, it should be noted (other considerations aside) that the immediate context on either side of 20:4-6 suggests a location on earth.

Second, in Revelation 5:10 a promise is given to the saints that they will reign "on the earth": "You [Christ] have made them [the saints] to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign *on the earth* (ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς)." Of course this promise of reigning on the earth *could* be fulfilled in the new heavens and new earth.[86] Yet the striking verbal correspondence with 20:6 warrants a closer look at the intended focus of fulfillment. Both verses will be quoted to highlight the verbal interplay:

> You [Christ] have made them to be a kingdom (βασιλείαν) and priests to serve our God (τῷ θεῷ...ἱερεῖς), and they [the saints] will reign (βασιλεύσουσιν) on the earth (5:10).
>
> They [the saints] will be priests of God and of Christ (ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ) and will reign (βασιλεύσουσιν) with him for a thousand years (20:6).

In 5:10 and 20:6 we have two significant concepts drawn together: the saints are serving as priests and reigning with Christ and God. This bi-fold description of the priestly and kingly functions of believers is mentioned explicitly (in a verbal way) in only three passages: 1:6; 5:10; and 20:6. It is not mentioned explicitly (i.e., through any clear verbal connection) in the new-heavens-and-new-earth material. Since 20:6 is the only place where the priestly-service and kingly-reign theme is *explicitly* reiterated within Revelation (and in wording that echoes 5:10), perhaps it ought to be given some

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[86] Amillennialists have few other convincing alternatives than to adopt a new-heavens-and-new-earth time-frame for fulfilling the earthly dimension of this reign-on-earth promise in 5:10. E.g., P. E. Hughes, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1990), 82-83.

preference as the writer's focal point for fulfilling the reign-on-earth promise of 5:10.[87]

One might also note the expectations of Jewish apocalyptic literature which foresaw an *earthly,* intermediary kingdom — i.e., a messianic kingdom after this present age and before the final new heavens and new earth. For example, 4 Ezra depicts a four-hundred-year reign of the Messiah, while 2 Enoch anticipates a thousand-year reign following this age.[88] It may well be the case that John has simply "Christianized"[89] this popular Jewish hope. If so, then an additional advantage to viewing Revelation 20 as an earthly (intermediate) reign of the people of God is the presence of similar ideas about salvation history within the broader stream of apocalyptic thinking.

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[87] This is not to suggest that there will be no fulfillment of the same promise within the new heavens and the new earth. What is at issue is whether or not 20:6 should be considered as an additional (or perhaps "focal") fulfillment of 5:10. It is possibly this fulfillment which the writer does not want the reader to miss due to its close and *explicit* verbal correspondence. By way of contrast, the new heavens and new earth provide only an *implicit* setting for the fulfillment of 5:10 through its temple imagery and royalty motifs.

[88] For further examples and discussion, see H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: Beck, 1922-61), 3:823-27; J. W. Bailey, "The Temporary Messianic Reign in the Literature of Early Judaism", *Journal of Biblical Literature,* 53 (1934), 170-187; B. W. Snyder, "How Millennial is the Millennium? A Study of the Background of the 1000 Years in Revelation 20", *Evangelical Journal,* 9 (1991), 51-74; D. S. Russell, *Prophecy and the Apocalyptic Dream* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 73-74.

[89] Not all premillennialists will agree with this perspective. For instance, those of a classic dispensational persuasion often find a great deal of "Jewish" hope within chapter 20 and the book of Revelation as a whole. On the other hand, I am more inclined to think that if there is a Jewish hope within Revelation at all (and even this is questionable), it is at best a quiet undertone. Cf. Mealy, *After the Thousand Years,* 90, who posits a tentative query about Rev 12:10.

When: reigning now or in the future? The third question is whether the reign described in 20:4-6 is present (amillennial) or future (premillennial). Since the theology of Revelation portrays both a present (heavenly) reign of the saints[90] and a future (earthly) reign,[91] one cannot appeal to any monolithic picture within the book in order to evaluate the language of 20:4-6. Nothing within the language itself (other than the linkage with 5:10 as developed above) is helpful in determining which stream is being utilized in 20:4-6. So our decision will have to be based on other contextual factors.

E. *They "came to life" (Revelation 20:4d)/"first resurrection" (Revelation 20:5c)*

Kline's paradoxical-death view. M. G. Kline[92] (followed by Garlington[93]) understands the reference to "first resurrection" (20:5) and "second death" (20:6) and their implied counterparts in the following manner:

> first resurrection=[first death]
> [second resurrection]=second death

In addition to identifying the "first resurrection" as equivalent to the "first death" (and the "second resurrection" as equivalent to the "second death") there is a criss-cross pattern between these entities. The "first resurrection" and the "second death" are taken as

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[90] If the twenty-four elders represent the people of God (12 patriarchs and 12 apostles), then Revelation certainly has an internal picture of the saints ruling in heaven. Cf. Rev 4:4, 10; 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4.

[91] Rev 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10; cf. 19:15.

[92] "The First Resurrection", *Westminster Theological Journal*, 37 (1974-1975), 366-375. Here I will have to presume upon some previous knowledge by my readers with respect to M. G. Kline's paradoxical-death view and Garlington's development of that view. I will not articulate the support for this position, since it is available in their two publications.

[93] "Reigning with Christ", 28-32.

metaphorical in nature; whereas the "first death" and the "second resurrection" are *physical* in nature.

Although Kline's view has some tantalizing features, there are a variety of significant drawbacks to this approach. J. R. Michaels has adequately responded to Kline's proposal from a premillennial perspective,[94] so I will not duplicate his response here. Nonetheless, I would like to draw attention to one or two points. While there is clearly an ironic twist (talionic justice) within the passage,[95] understanding a believer's resurrection as their "death" is not a convincing proposal. For one, the term "resurrection" (ἀνάστασις) is used throughout the New Testament almost exclusively of the classic Christian hope of the believer's bodily resurrection.[96] Also, the term "live/come to life" (ζάω) is used several times in Revelation with a reference to physical resurrection,[97] yet never with Kline's proposed field of meaning (i.e., entering into/living in the intermediate state).

Furthermore, the combination of "souls" (ψυχαί) and "live" (ζάω) in 20:4 is a significant clue for selecting an appropriate semantic field. When ζάω is used in combination with ψυχαί in

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[94] "The First Resurrection: A Response", *Westminster Theological Journal*, 39 (1976), 100-109. Cf. also Mealy's criticisms (*After the Thousand Years*, 21-23) of Kline's position.

[95] Even with taking the "first resurrection" as a literal resurrection of the saints, there is still an ironic (talionic) twist within the passage with respect to the comparative fates of believers and unbelievers. Though believers may have been "put to death" by their adversaries, it is only the unbelievers who will encounter the more severe "second death." And, while believers await a triumphant "first resurrection" (since it leads to reigning), unbelievers await the defeat of a later, "second resurrection" (which leads to ultimate death and damnation). The rhetorical twists function well on the level of a *physical* resurrection to underscore the sense of vindication for the saints.

[96] Of the 42 uses in the NT, only Luke 2:23 departs from this semantic field (and there it is not used in a sense which depicts Kline's proposed category of meaning).

[97] Rev 1:18; 2:8; (cf. the noun form ζωή in Rev 2:10; 3:5; 11:11; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:2, 14, 19). Cf. the usage of ζάω to simply portray physical life (in contrast to death): Rev 13:14; 16:3; 19:20.

either the verbal expression, "souls live/lived"[98] or its adjectival counterpart, "living souls,"[99] it almost always infers *physical life* in contrast to dead beings. A few examples will demonstrate the point:

> [After fleeing the destruction of Sodom...] Lot said to them [the angels], "I pray Lord, since your servant has found mercy before you, and you have magnified your righteousness in what you do towards me *so that my soul lives* (τοῦ ζῆν τὴν ψυχήν μου)—yet I will not be able to escape to the mountain lest perhaps the calamity overtake me and I die" (LXX Genesis 19:18-19; cf. 19:20).
>
> And Jeremiah said to him, "Thus says the Lord; if you will indeed go forth to the captains of the king of Babylon, *your soul will live* (ζήσεται ἡ ψυχή σου) and this city shall certainly not be burnt with fire..." (LXX Jeremiah 45:17; cf. 45:20).
>
> The first Adam became a *living soul* (ψυχὴν ζῶσαν) (1 Corinthians 15:45).
>
> The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every *living being* (ψυχὴ ζῶης) [i.e., sea creatures] in the sea died (Revelation 16:3).

With the dominance of idiomatic expressions such as "living souls" and "as my soul lives," it is difficult to imagine the development of a semantic field where any combination of ψυχαί and ζάω described some kind of life-after-death scenario.[100]

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[98] LXX Gen 19:19-20; 1 Kings 1:26; 20:3; 25:26; 2 Kings 11:11; 14:19; 3 Kings 21:32; 4 Kings 2:2, 4, 6; 4:30; Judith 7:27; 12:4; Pss 68:32 [S]; 118:175; Prov 3:22; Isa 55:3; Jer 45:17, 20; Ezek 47:9.

[99] 1 Cor 15:45; Rev 16:3. Cf. LXX Gen 1:20, 21, 24, 30; 2:7, 19; 9:10, 12, 15, 16; Sirach 16:30; Ezek 47:9.

[100] Had John simply stated that "the souls...reigned with Christ one thousand years" (i.e., omitting the intervening word "lived" [ἔζησαν]) it would be much easier to accept the possibility of 20:4

Despite all of the above, I will concede that Kline's view is at least a *plausible* one. It certainly overlooks the standard lexical fields of meaning for "resurrection" and "come to life" within the New Testament, which are clearly antithetical (not equivalent) to death. But, it is always possible that this one instance departs from normal semantic usage. A word can mean anything its author (and context) wants it to mean. Nonetheless, since Kline's thesis is so narrowly focused on the interpretation of one or two words, and the passage makes good sense utilizing the standard semantic fields, I am inclined to grant Kline's option only an auxiliary spot in my thinking. It would require strong contextual data outside of the factors he is working with to move his thesis beyond a plausible status.

4. *Conclusion*

As a conclusion to an article of this sort (with its polemical overtones), one might expect some bold statement like, "Premillennialism has a distinct exegetical advantage over amillennialism." However, such statements should and will be read critically in light of the biases of the individual making them. So I will simply say that this article has argued for a premillennial reading of Revelation 20. Beyond that, I will leave it to the reader to decide the degree of persuasiveness. Admittedly, one's pre-understanding plays such a determinative role in this whole discussion that at times it seems futile to engage in the debate at an exegetical level.

In response to Don Garlington's article, I must acknowledge that his development of the passage has functioned as a positive provocation to my own thinking. I have learned much from pondering the article and have gained a greater respect for the integrity and persuasiveness of an amillennial treatment of this classic text. Nonetheless, I cannot agree with his thesis, nor with many of the subcomponents from which it is made. Salvation history is not a suitable *starting point* from which to read this passage nor any other passage for that matter. Instead, I am inclined to think that we should rescue the text from any preconceived "salvation historical" setting and gently place it back within its

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portraying an after-death, pre-resurrection, disembodied reign of believers.

"original/literary" setting within the Apocalypse (so that from that vantage point it may in turn inform our understanding of salvation history).

William J. Webb serves as Professor of New Testament in Heritage Theological Seminary at London, Ontario. He holds the Th. D. degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. His doctoral thesis, ***Returning Home: New Covenant and Second Exodus as the Context for 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1*** *(Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press) was published in 1993. This article is a follow-up of a previous article that appeared in the pages of this journal: Jerry D. Colwell and William J. Webb, "Revelation 20: Hermeneutical Considerations",* ***The Baptist Review of Theology****, 4, No.1 (Spring 1994), 38-55.*