

## A RE-EXAMINATION OF THE MILLENNIUM IN REV 20:1–6: CONSUMMATION AND RECAPITULATION

DAVE MATHEWSON\*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The question of the so-called millennial kingdom in Rev 20:1–6 continues to be a source of fascination in evangelical discussion and dialogue.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this article is to re-examine the question of the millennial kingdom as articulated in Rev 20:1–6. More specifically, this article will consider the meaning and function of 20:1–6 within Revelation as it relates to the contemporary debate about whether this section is best understood within a premillennial or amillennial framework. Hermeneutically, most of the debate has centered around how literally the reference to the one thousand years in 20:1–6 should be taken and, more importantly, the relationship between 20:1–6 and 19:11–21. Does the thousand year period in 20:1–6 refer to a more or less literal period of time?<sup>2</sup> Or should it be understood more symbolically? Does 20:1–6 follow 19:11–21 chronologically, with the one thousand years featuring a *Zwischenreich* (premillennialism), or does the final battle in 20:7–10 recapitulate the battle in 19:11–21, with the reference to the one thousand years in 20:1–6 extending all the way back to the first coming of Christ (amillennialism)?<sup>3</sup>

\* Dave Mathewson is instructor in New Testament at Oak Hills Christian College, 1600 Oak Hills Road SW, Bemidji, MN 56601.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. F. White, "Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev 20:1–10," *WTJ* 51 (1989) 319–44; H. Hoehner, "Evidence From Revelation 20," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus* (eds. D. K. Campbell and J. T. Townsend; Chicago: Moody, 1992) 235–62; S. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992); R. F. White, "Making Sense of Rev 20:1–10? Harold Hoehner Versus Recapitulation," *JETS* 37 (1994) 539–51; idem, "On the Hermeneutics and Interpretation of Revelation 20:1–3: A Preconsummationist Perspective," *JETS* 42 (1999) 53–66; D. L. Bock, ed., *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> It is often thought that premillennialists understand the one thousand years in an unqualified, literal manner. A premillennial approach to Rev 20:1–10, however, does not necessarily require a literal approach to this text. One could still hold to a future period depicted symbolically by a reference to one thousand years. See D. L. Bock, "Summary Essay," *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* 304.

<sup>3</sup> For a recent defense of a third approach, postmillennialism, see K. L. Gentry, "Postmillennialism," *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* 13–57. In a sense the term "amillennialism" (literally, no millennium) is not quite accurate. It is not the case that advocates of amillennialism do not believe in a millennium; rather, they do not interpret it as a specific period of time in the future as premillennialists do. In view of the terminological difficulty, G. K. Beale suggests the label "inaugurated millennialism" as more accurately describing what amillennialism means. See G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (JSNTSup 166; Sheffield: Academic, 1998) 356–57.

In re-examining Rev 20:1–6 contextually and exegetically, I want to argue that Rev 20:1–10 recapitulates 19:11–21, but that at the same time the reference to the millennium in 20:1–6 should be understood as occurring at the second coming of Christ. In other words, those who espouse an amillennialist approach to Rev 20:1–10 are correct in seeing recapitulation between this segment and 19:11–21, while those who espouse a premillennial approach to 20:1–10 correctly view the one thousand years as inaugurated at the second Advent. However, the rest of this essay will preserve crucial distinctions from both of these millennial views. I will attempt to flesh out this approach briefly in the ensuing argument.

## II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REV 19:11–21 AND 20:1–10 AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR THE QUESTION OF THE MILLENNIUM

Before considering the relationship between Rev 19:11–21 and 20:1–10, it is necessary to say something about the communicative nature of Revelation. There now appears to be a consensus that Revelation communicates at a symbolic level and therefore should be interpreted symbolically (see Rev 1:1).<sup>4</sup> Following V. S. Poythress, G. K. Beale distinguishes three levels of communication in Revelation: (1) the visionary level, which consists of what John actually saw in his visionary experience (beasts, locusts, bride, etc.); (2) the referential level, which consists of what John's symbols represented or to what events and persons they make reference; (3) the symbolic level, which consists of what the symbols *connote* about the realities to which they refer.<sup>5</sup> Two crucial implications follow from this for approaching Rev 20:1–6. First, given these three levels of communication, the interpreter cannot *a priori* rule in favor of one millennial approach to this text over another. In other words, the reader cannot simply collapse the visionary—(1) above—and the referential—(2) above—levels and conclude that the one thousand years must refer to a literal, or a specific, future period of time. Conceivably, at the symbolic level the one thousand year period envisioned in Rev 20:1–6 could *refer to* a period of any duration, past, present or future.

Second, and related to this, the interpreter cannot assume that the visionary sequence as given in Rev 19:11–20:15 corresponds to the actual temporal sequence of the events envisioned. Once again there is a danger of collapsing the visionary and referential levels of John's communication. For example, R. Mounce argues that "the recurring 'and I saw' of 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 12; and 21:1 strongly implies a sequence of visions that carries through from the appearance of the Rider on the white horse (19:11) to the

<sup>4</sup> This is argued convincingly by G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999) 50–69. See also V. S. Poythress, "Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev 20:1–6," *JETS* 36 (1993) 41–54. *Contra* R. L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7* (Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary; Chicago: Moody, 1993) 29–39.

<sup>5</sup> Beale, *John's Use* 357; Poythress, "Genre" 41–42. Beale slightly modifies the suggestions of Poythress.

establishment of the new heaven and new earth (21:1ff.).<sup>6</sup> Mounce then takes this to reflect a temporal progression in the text. The problem with this reasoning is that it collapses the visionary and referential levels of John's visions, and glibly assumes a one-to-one correspondence between visionary sequence and temporal sequence. This is not to conclude that John's sequence of visions in 19:11–20:15 does not or cannot reflect a chronological progression. But a temporal sequence in these sections cannot be merely "read off" of the visionary sequence. The rest of this paper will proceed with these three levels of communication firmly in mind.

Given the preceding discussion, the question then becomes, are there contextual indicators that would clarify the temporal relationship between Rev 19:11–21 and 20:1–10? At this point I would basically agree with those who detect recapitulation in Rev 19:11–21 and 20:1–10. More specifically, the judgment scene which concludes the vision in 20:7–10 is a repetition of the judgment envisaged in 19:11–21. This has been argued convincingly from various angles.

1. *The presence of recapitulation in Revelation in general.* The presence of recapitulation in Rev 19:11–20:10 is supported by its presence elsewhere in John's Apocalypse. One of the clearest examples of recapitulation in the book of Revelation appears to be the seal, trumpet, and bowl sequences. The fact that all three series end in final, end-time judgment (see 6:12–17; 11:15; 16:12–16, 17–21) suggests that the three series do not manifest a chronological progression, but involve significant repetition.<sup>7</sup> While the presence of recapitulation elsewhere in Revelation does not guarantee its presence in Rev 19:11–20:10, it at least invites further investigation.

2. *The differences between Rev 19:11–21 and 20:1–3.* The presence of recapitulation (at a temporal-sequential level) is suggested by the discrepancies between the reference to the nations in both Rev 19:11–21 and 20:1–3, 7–10. According to 19:18, 21 the nations are overtly destroyed in the final battle by the sword that proceeds from Christ's mouth. Consequently, the emergence of the nations in 20:1–3, 7–10 becomes problematic on a historical-sequential reading of the two texts. Where did the nations come from if they have been completely destroyed in Rev 19:11–21? It will not do to limit the number of casualties by suggesting that while the *armies* are defeated in 19:11–21, the *nations* survive into chap. 20.<sup>8</sup> This assumes the presence of literal armies which are distinct from the nations, as opposed to seeing the armies as symbolically representing all humanity in rebellion against God. More damaging to this line of argumentation is that 19:18 ends with all people, "the flesh of kings and the flesh of generals, the flesh of strong men,

<sup>6</sup> R. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 361. Cf. also J. F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966) 289; G. E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 261; A. F. Johnson, "Revelation," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (ed. F. E. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 580.

<sup>7</sup> See the arguments in Beale, *Revelation* 121–32.

<sup>8</sup> See C. A. Blaising, "Premillennialism," *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* 220 n. 92.

and the flesh of horses and those seated upon them, and the flesh of all, both free and slave, great and small," being consumed, not just the armies. Moreover, according to 19:21 "the rest" (οἱ λοιποὶ) are put to death with the sword, suggesting complete destruction by and victory of the Lamb.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the problem cannot be resolved by concluding that those in 20:3 are the saved of the nations from chap. 19.<sup>10</sup> As R. F. White has shown, in all but four instances (15:4; 21:24, 26; 22:2) ἔθνη consistently refers to the godless, wicked nations in Revelation (2:26; 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:2, 9, 18; 12:5; 13:7; 14:6, 8; 16:19; 17:15; 18:3, 23; 19:15; 20:8), and 20:3 is sandwiched between two of these instances.<sup>11</sup> The burden of proof is upon those who would see John shifting to a different reference in 20:3, and then back again (20:8). The same criticisms could be leveled against the suggestion that the nations who are gathered for battle in 20:7–10 are the offspring of the saved nations who enter and populate the millennium.<sup>12</sup> The unsaved of these offspring would then constitute Satan's rebellious army in 20:7–10. This likewise overlooks John's use of ἔθνη and provides an answer which is not suggested by the context.

3. *The OT Vorbild behind Rev 19:17–21 and 20:7–10.* The intertextual allusion to the single battle depicted in Ezekiel 38–39 in both Rev 19:17–21 and 20:7–11 "points to the likelihood that 20:8–10 is a recapitulation of the same battle scene narrated in 19:17–21."<sup>13</sup> This receives further corroboration from observing that John consistently respects to some degree the original context of his OT *Vorbilder*.<sup>14</sup> However, while interpreters agree that the same battle is envisioned in Ezekiel 38–39 and Rev 19:11–21, some still wish to find in 20:7–10 a separate battle based on the apparent discrepancies between 19:11–21 and 20:7–10 and between 20:7–10 and Ezekiel 38–39, most of them problematic only on a literal reading of the text.

Thus, scholars frequently point to the alleged discrepancies in the way the enemies are defeated in Rev 20:7–10 in contrast to 19:17–21 and Ezekiel 38–39. For instance, while the enemies are defeated by a sword on earth in Ezek 39:4, God disposes of his enemies with fire from heaven in Rev 20:9; in Rev 19:17–20 the conquered foe provides a feast for the birds (19:17, 18, 21), while in 20:7–10 they are consumed by fire; in 19:11–21 Christ intervenes, while in 20:7–10 fire comes from heaven.<sup>15</sup> However, the force of these arguments is mitigated by observing that in the accounts of the battle nar-

<sup>9</sup> Beale, *John's Use* 368–69.

<sup>10</sup> Hoehner, "Evidence" 252.

<sup>11</sup> White, "Making Sense" 540–41. See also Beale, *John's Use* 369. White is responding to the arguments of Hoehner, "Evidence" 252.

<sup>12</sup> R. L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22* (Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary; Chicago: Moody, 1995) 411, 423; D. J. MacLeod, "The Fifth 'Last Thing': The Release of Satan and Man's Final Rebellion," *BSac* 157 (2000) 207.

<sup>13</sup> Beale, *John's Use* 361. See also White, "Making Sense" 542–45.

<sup>14</sup> See especially Beale, *Revelation 76–99; John's Use*; J. Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation* (JSNTSup 93; Sheffield: JSOT, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> For these objections see Hoehner, "Evidence" 258; Blaising, "Premillennialism" 220; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22* 560 respectively.

rated in Ezekiel 38–39 the enemy is destroyed by both sword and fire (Ezek 38:22; 39:6), and both birds and fire are involved in their destruction in Ezek 38:22; 39:4, 6, so that the same tensions are evident even in Ezekiel.<sup>16</sup> It appears that the two references to the end-time battle in Rev 19:11–21 and 20:7–10 build up a web of intertextual references to the same battle narrated in Ezekiel 38–39. The two accounts of battle in Rev 19:11–21 and 20:7–10, then, do not narrate separate battles, but are metaphorical depictions of the same event.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, it has been argued that there is a discrepancy in the participants in the battles in Ezekiel 38–39 and Rev 20:8, since in the former Gog comes from the North and in the latter Gog and Magog are identified as the nations of the earth.<sup>18</sup> As White has shown, however, this argument becomes a two-edged sword when it is recognized that the enemies in Rev 19:15–21, which all agree is the same battle as Ezekiel 38–39, are also referred to as the nations but are not designated as from the north.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the same evidence that works against identifying Rev 20:7–10 with the battle of Ezekiel 38–39 also works against Rev 19:17–21.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, it is not unusual for John to universalize the more limited perspective of his OT sources.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the reference to Gog and Magog as coming from the “four corners of the earth” in Rev 20:8 may find its inspiration in Ezek 38:2–13. This section lists Gog’s allies which conspire against Israel. According to D. I. Block, the allies in Ezekiel’s list come from the extreme North and South (vv. 3–6) and the extreme East and West (vv. 10–13) of the world known to Israel. When seen together, these groups “represent all four points of the compass. The entire world conspires against . . . Israel.”<sup>22</sup> This would readily account for John’s similar identification of Gog and Magog with the nations from the four points of the compass who conspire against God’s people in Rev 20:8.

4. *The finality of God’s wrath in Rev 15:1.* As White has argued, 19:19–21 concludes the plot line begun and then dropped in 16:16, placing the battle of 19:19–21 within the last bowl plague in 16:17–21. According to 15:1, however, the series of plagues, including the final battle in 16:17–21 (and 19:17–20), completes the wrath of God against the nations. Therefore,

<sup>16</sup> White, “Making Sense” 543.

<sup>17</sup> It could be argued that the reader is confronted in Rev 19:17–21; 20:7–10 with multiple fulfillments of the battle in Ezekiel 38–39. However, the battle in 19:17–21 is complete and final (all rebellious humanity is destroyed), and when John envisions more than one fulfillment of an OT text, it is inaugurated at the first coming of Christ and climaxes in a consummate fulfillment. This is vastly different from finding multiple fulfillments at the time of the consummation. If fact, if this principle is applied to Rev 16:14, then the reader would have to conclude that there will be three final battles. See Beale, *John’s Use* 363–64.

<sup>18</sup> Walvoord, *Revelation* 303; Hoehner, “Evidence” 258.

<sup>19</sup> White, “Making Sense” 543.

<sup>20</sup> Beale, *John’s Use* 363.

<sup>21</sup> Beale, *Revelation* 91–92; A. Vanhoye, “L’utilisation du livre d’Ezéchiel dans l’Apocalypse,” *Bib* 43 (1962) 461–72.

<sup>22</sup> D. I. Block, “Gog and Magog in Ezekiel’s Eschatological Vision,” in *Eschatology in Bible and Theology* (eds. K. E. Brower and M. W. Elliott; Downers Grove: IVP, 1997) 102.

the battle in 20:7–10 cannot be a further expression of God's wrath against the nations, but must be a further account of the final battle previewed in 16:17–21 and more graphically depicted in 19:17–20.<sup>23</sup>

In conclusion, I find these arguments compelling for taking the battle of Rev 20:7–10 as a repetition or recapitulation of the battle depicted in 19:17–20. On this single point, I am in agreement with those who interpret Rev 20:1–10 within an amillennial framework. However, it is at this point that I also find myself in disagreement with the amillennial approach to this passage. After arguing for recapitulation between 19:17–20 and 20:7–10, amillennialists then usually suggest that, given the failure of the premillennialist scheme of two separate battles, the one thousand year period in vv. 4–6 must refer to a period *before* the end-time battle at Christ's second coming in 19:11–21 and 20:7–10. Usually this period is seen to symbolize the entire interadvent period when the deceased saints are vindicated and reign in heaven. My question, though, is this: does amillennialism follow inexorably upon a demonstration that 20:7–10 recapitulates 19:17–20? Or can an insistence on the millennium in 20:1–6 occurring at the second coming of Christ be reconciled with the clear indications of recapitulation?

Although White is primarily attempting to answer objections to finding recapitulation between 20:7–10 and 19:17–20, his recent article could leave the reader with the impression that his (compelling) arguments for recapitulation between the two battle scenes forecloses the question in favor of amillennialism.<sup>24</sup> However, the case for seeing the one thousand years in 20:1–6 as occurring before the second coming of Christ and as extending all the way back to cover the entire interadvent period must be exegetically demonstrated and cannot merely be assumed. Beale appears to recognize this and argues exegetically for what he calls "inaugurated millennialism."<sup>25</sup> My point here is simply to stress that demonstrating the presence of recapitulation and concluding in favor of amillennialism are two different, though integrally related, issues. In the rest of this article I want to put forward for consideration the possibility that while recapitulation is clearly present between 19:17–20 and 20:7–10, the one thousand years in 20:1–6 should still be understood as occurring at the second coming of Christ.<sup>26</sup>

### III. A RECONSIDERATION OF THE ONE THOUSAND YEARS IN 20:1–6

In my judgment, it makes good sense to understand the thousand years in Rev 20:1–6 as being inaugurated at the second coming of Christ as premillennialists maintain, although it will become clear that I differ significantly on the precise role premillennialism gives to the millennium temporally. In its context Rev 20:1–10 falls within a larger section which narrates a series of visions depicting the coming of Christ at the end of history and its

<sup>23</sup> White, "Making Sense" 547–48; see also Beale, *John's Use* 370.

<sup>24</sup> White, "Making Sense" 550–51.

<sup>25</sup> Beale, *John's Use* 371–93; *Revelation* 984–1021.

<sup>26</sup> At least on this point, I am in agreement with premillennialists.

attendant results (19:11–21:8). This section is comprised of a mosaic of seven visionary units marked off by the recurring  $\kappa\alpha\iota\ \epsilon\tilde{\iota}\delta\omicron\nu$  (19:11–16, 17–18, 19–21; 20:1–3, 4–10, 11–15; 21:1–8).<sup>27</sup> While it is still possible that in the midst of these visions depicting the second coming of Christ the reference to the millennium in 20:1–6 extends all the way back to the first coming of Christ, the present context of the Parousia of Christ in 19:11–20:15 and the visionary sequence in which 20:1–6 falls favors viewing the millennium as taking place at the Parousia. Furthermore, the song of the twenty-four elders in the seventh trumpet in 11:18 announces that “the time has come for the dead to be judged, and to give the servants and the prophets and the saints and all those who fear your name their reward . . . and to destroy those who destroy the earth.” This corresponds to the primary thematic elements articulated in 19:11–20:15: the judgment of the dead (20:11–15); the reward of the saints (20:4–6); and the destruction of the earth’s destroyers (19:11–21; 20:7–10). Rev 20:1–10, then, is actually an extension of the seventh trumpet, which occurs at the Parousia.<sup>28</sup> Thus, “[t]his section [19:11–21:8] of John’s book of visions describes a single event, Christ’s return to earth, and its various results, concluding with the establishment of the eschatological community in the garden of the city of God.”<sup>29</sup>

The vision of the one thousand year reign in 20:1–6 has close links with previous sections of Revelation, indicating that it functions as a climax to these sections, both literarily and temporally. Especially significant are the references to the promises in 2:26–27 and 3:21, where Christ promises the one who overcomes the right to sit with him on his throne in the future. In 1:6 and 5:10 the same reference to kings and priests found in 20:6 (an allusion to Exod 19:6) occurs with reference to the destiny secured for God’s people through the sacrificial death of the Lamb. As most scholars have recognized, the reign of the saints in Rev 20:4–6 provides an answer to the cry of the saints in 6:10: “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” (NIV).<sup>30</sup> They are then told to wait a little while longer until their full number has been completed (v. 11). Both texts are linked by the parallel description of the saints as those who were slain/beheaded on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (6:9; 20:4).<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the millennium functions as a fulfillment of these promises and as a response to the cry of the saints for vindication.

<sup>27</sup> This is not to suggest that I think that John intentionally intends to present “seven unnumbered visions” as A. Y. Collins argues (*The Apocalypse* [Collegeville: Liturgical, 1990] 133).

<sup>28</sup> See R. J. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993) 21.

<sup>29</sup> R. W. Wall (NIBC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991) 227; *contra* L. Morris, *Revelation* (rev. ed.; TNTC; Leicester: IVP/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 228. See also Blaising, “Premillennialism” 212, 216.

<sup>30</sup> Beale, *Revelation* 997–98; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 146; Mounce, *Revelation* 369.

<sup>31</sup> See the further parallels adduced by D. E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22* (WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998) 1087–88. However, Aune does not discuss the precise relationship between the two passages.

Given these connections, it would seem to follow that the millennium of 20:4–6 is a consummate response to these earlier promises. However, it is also possible that 20:4–6 envisions an inaugurated fulfillment of these statements in advance of their consummate fulfillment, suggesting that the millennium portrays the vindication and reign of the saints throughout the entire interadvent period. Beale builds a plausible case for taking the reference to the one thousand years in 20:4–6 as an inaugurated fulfillment on the promises articulated in 2:26–27; 3:21; 5:10; 6:9–11.<sup>32</sup> But Beale also recognizes that these promises must have a consummate fulfillment in Revelation as well (cf. 6:11; 14:13 in relation to 7:15–17; 21:4).<sup>33</sup> Given the second coming context of the visionary sequence in 19:11–20:15, I would suggest that, while the promises of living and reigning in 2:26–27; 3:21; 5:10; 6:9–11 have an inaugurated fulfillment in the church age as Beale contends (see 1:6; 14:13), the millennium of 20:4–6 depicts their *consummate* fulfillment at the Parousia of Christ (see 11:18).<sup>34</sup>

In support of finding an inaugurated fulfillment of 20:1–6, Beale points to a number of parallels between 20:4–6 and 12:7–11, the latter portraying the church's ongoing struggle with Satan. For instance, both depict a heavenly scene (12:7; 20:1), the casting down of Satan through an angel (12:7–9; 20:2–3), the reference to a short period of time as the time of Satan's activity (12:12b; 20:3), and the kingdom of Christ and the saints who held to the word of their testimony (12:10–11; 20:4).<sup>35</sup> He then concludes that this supports seeing the two accounts as depicting the same event and as mutually interpreting. While the correspondences are convincing and suggest a close relationship between the two passages, however, the interpreter need not conclude that they refer to the same event. Instead, the Parousia context of 19:11–20:15 (cf. 11:18) suggests that the parallels between 12:7–11 and 20:4–6 can better be perceived as reflecting the inaugurated-consummated structure of Revelation's eschatology. The defeat of Satan, inaugurated with the death and resurrection of Christ in 12:7–11, anticipates the consummate defeat with Satan's binding and destruction in 20:1–10.

This receives further corroboration by the difference in the way Satan's activity is portrayed in the respective accounts.<sup>36</sup> In my mind, it is still difficult to reconcile the binding of Satan in 20:1–3 so that he is no longer able to deceive (ἵνα μη πλανήσῃ) the nations with his activity in 12:9 as the one who deceives (ὁ πλανῶν) the entire inhabited world. Satan's deceptive activity is carried out in the synchronously parallel section in chap. 13, where the two beasts carry out his deceptive work (13:2, 4, 7, 8, 14). It could be

<sup>32</sup> See especially Beale, *John's Use* 371–74; *Revelation* 996, 1015–17.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 996.

<sup>34</sup> It is not necessary to deny that there is a definite inaugurated fulfillment of the promises of becoming kings and priests at the first coming of Christ in order to hold to the consummate nature of the fulfillment in the millennium in 20:4–6.

<sup>35</sup> Beale, *Revelation* 992–93. See the chart of comparisons on p. 992.

<sup>36</sup> Beale argues that there is nothing in the binding of Satan in 20:3 that requires a complete abolition of his activity. The binding could just as easily portray metaphorically the curtailment of his activity at the first coming of Christ. Cf. Matt 12:29; Mark 3:27; Luke 10:17–19; John 12:31–33; Col 2:15 (*Revelation* 985–87). From a slightly different angle see also White, "Hermeneutics."

objected that the deception in 20:3 is restricted in the context to the deception of the nations by Satan for the purpose of opposing the saints and mounting an all-out war (20:8).<sup>37</sup> This would be different from the general deceiving of the nations in 12:9. However, it is not clear that the deceiving in both cases is different; both have the express purpose of turning the nations from God to follow the dragon (see 13:2, 4, 7, 8, 14). The final deception of the nations in order to get them to follow the dragon ends, then, with an assault on the people of God (20:7–10). This is precisely the activity which is denied Satan for the one thousand years in 20:1–3.

Nor will it do to explain the binding of Satan in terms of his deceptive activity in the OT era which has now been reversed in the NT era, so that he no longer prevents the nations from responding to the truth of God as he did in the former OT era.<sup>38</sup> After the initial defeat of Satan at the death and exaltation of Christ (Rev 12:7–12), 13:2, 4, 7, 8, 14 clearly present Satan as deceiving the nations through his agents, so that the nations fail to acknowledge God's sovereignty. Again, this is not to deny a significant curbing of Satan's activity at the first coming of Christ, as is clearly indicated in chap. 12. Rather, the defeat of Satan in chap. 12 proleptically anticipates his ultimate downfall at the Parousia of Christ in 20:1–10.

A more pertinent parallel to 20:1–6 can be found in 11:11–13. Within the broader context, the author envisions the ministry of two witnesses who symbolize the church in its suffering witness, which climaxes with their death at the end of history, a depiction of the apparent defeat of the church at the hands of the beast. The two witnesses then are given life and are taken up to heaven in v. 11. This scene concludes with a reference to the end-time judgment in vv. 12–13.<sup>39</sup> The primary point of this section is that God restores his witnesses after their apparent defeat on earth, so that they are vindicated before the eyes of their enemies, an event that clearly transpires at the end of history.<sup>40</sup> Rev 20:4–6 likewise portrays the final vindication and triumph of the martyred saints at the end of history. In fact, as part of John's dependence on Ezekiel's larger end-time scenario, Revelation appears to draw on the reference to coming to life in Ezek 37:5 (LXX: πνεῦμα ζωῆς) and 10 (LXX: ἔζησαν καὶ ἔστησαν ἐπὶ τῶν ποδῶν αὐτῶν) in Rev 11:11 (πνεῦμα ζωῆς . . . εἰσῆλθεν ἐν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἔστησαν ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας αὐτῶν) and 20:4 (ἔζησαν).<sup>41</sup> In 11:11 the reference is clearly to the final resurrection at the end of history. Therefore, while the mention of the martyrs

<sup>37</sup> See A. A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); Beale, *Revelation* 986.

<sup>38</sup> Hoekema, *Future* 228.

<sup>39</sup> This is suggested by the reference to the earthquake in 11:13, which is consistently a sign of the last judgement throughout Revelation. Cf. 6:12; 8:5 (seventh seal); 11:19 (seventh trumpet).

<sup>40</sup> On 11:1–13 see Beale, *Revelation* 572–608; Bauckham, *Theology* 83–88; Morris, *Revelation* 140–48.

<sup>41</sup> For the dependence of Rev 11:11 and 20:4 on Ezek 37:1–14 see convincingly Beale, *Revelation* 597, 1012–13. For the overall dependence of Revelation 19–22 on Ezekiel 36–48, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974) 289; J. Lust, "The Order of Final Events in Revelation and in Ezekiel," in *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament* (ed. J. Lambrecht; BETL 53; Gembloux: J. Duculot/Leuven: University Press, 1980) 180; K. Kuhn, "Γῶγ καὶ Μαγῶγ," *TDNT* 1: 789–91.

coming to life in 20:4 could refer to the pre-consummate inauguration of Ezek 37:10, the parallel with Rev 11:11, along with the Parousia context of 19:11–20:15, suggests a consummate fulfillment in 20:4.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, as we have already observed, 11:18, which discloses the content of the seventh trumpet at the consummation, provides the concise thematic elements articulated more thoroughly in 20:1–10.

The above contextual observations strongly suggest that the reference to the one thousand years in Rev 20:1–6 should be understood as occurring at the second coming of Christ. But this creates a problem for the discerning reader: Given that the final battle in 20:7–10 recapitulates the battle in 19:17–21 which occurs at the second coming, how can the millennium in 20:1–6 also occur at the second coming? Or, how can 19:17–21 and 20:7–10 refer to the same end-time battle with an apparent one thousand year gap intervening?

Much depends on how literally one interprets the references to the one thousand years in 20:1–6. Some commentators still persist in finding a reference to a literal period of time in the one thousand years. For example, R. Thomas concludes: "It [the number one thousand] is the plain statement of the text six times. It is doubtful that any symbolic number, if there be such, is ever repeated that many times."<sup>43</sup> However, Thomas does not tell us why repetition precludes a number being used symbolically. Instead, he assumes that Revelation should be understood literally unless it can be conclusively proven otherwise, and therefore collapses the visionary and the referential levels of John's communication. But the apocalyptic style of Revelation and the symbolic nature of its communicative strategy (see 1:1) strongly argue against this. The symbolic nature of Revelation's communicative strategy extends not only to the obvious imagery (beast, locusts, abyss), but also to the use of numbers (e.g. four, seven, twelve).<sup>44</sup> As most commentaries recognize, what is important about the number one thousand (χίλια) is its symbolic value. It emphasizes not so much the duration of the millennium but its character: one thousand suggests *completeness* (the third

<sup>42</sup> The primary debate at this point centers around whether the resurrection in 20:4 refers to a physical or spiritual resurrection. If it is concluded that it is physical, then the interpretation will move in the direction of premillennialism (Mounce, *Revelation* 366). If the resurrection is taken as spiritual, then the resultant interpretation will favor amillennialism. Beale argues vigorously for a spiritual view of the resurrection in 20:4 (*Revelation* 1002–7). I would question, however, whether this leads inexorably to an amillennial approach. For example, Beale concludes that the resurrection in 11:11, which like 20:4 draws on Ezek 37:1–14 (spiritual restoration of Israel), is primary spiritual in nature, though he apparently does not want to rule out a physical dimension (ibid. 597, 1013). The resurrection in 11:11, however, clearly takes place at the consummation, as Beale acknowledges. But why could this not also be true of 20:4? While a physical resurrection at the end of history could be envisioned, the writer may be focusing on its spiritual dimension, as Beale maintains for 11:11.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas, *Revelation* 8–22 409. See also Walvoord, *Revelation* 294–95.

<sup>44</sup> On the symbolic nature of numbers in Revelation, see Beale, *Revelation* 58–64. For a more specialized study see A. Y. Collins, "Numerical Symbolism in Jewish and Early Christian Apocalyptic Literature," *ANRW* II.21.2 (1984) 1221–87.

power of ten, a number of completeness).<sup>45</sup> Thus, what is important is not a duration of time, but “the *thematic idea* of the ultimate victory of Christians who have suffered.”<sup>46</sup> Consequently, to conclude that the one thousand years refers to a literal period of one thousand years, or even to “a very long period of indeterminate length” is premature.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, the importance of the reference to one thousand years in 20:1–6 is to be perceived primarily in contrast to other temporal designations scattered throughout the Apocalypse which describe the ongoing struggle of the saints at the hands of Satan and the beast. In 2:10 the church of Smyrna is told that it will suffer persecution for “ten days,” a temporal designation that probably alludes to the ten days of testing of Daniel’s three friends in Dan 1:12–15.<sup>48</sup> The focus is not on a literal period of time but the *meaning* of the trouble that the church is about to experience. Furthermore, following Satan’s expulsion from heaven in 12:7–10, he is permitted to wreak havoc on the earth for a “short time” (v. 12: ὀλίγον καιρόν). Significant also is the reference to three and one-half years, 42 months or 1290 days in 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5 as describing the time of the church’s testing. This temporal reference is clearly inspired by the three and one-half years of Daniel (7:25; 9:27; 12:7, 11–12). Once again, the importance of this temporal designation is not in reference to a literal period of time, but in symbolically depicting the character and meaning of the church’s struggle: their existence is a time of tribulation and testing.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the three and one-half years should probably also be understood in its contrast to the ubiquitous number seven. While the latter number symbolizes perfection, the former number, half of seven, symbolizes incompleteness and imperfection. The significance and function of the number one thousand in Rev 20:1–6 can be seen in contrast to these numerical designations which depict the time of the church’s struggle. In contrast to the imperfect and incomplete suffering of the church signified by three and one-half years, the saints’ reign and vindication will be complete. While the church’s suffering is portrayed with a number of short, limited duration, the reign and vindication of the saints is portrayed with a number of far greater magnitude: they will live and reign for one thousand years.

<sup>45</sup> See Beale, *John’s Use* 388; Ladd, *Revelation* 261; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation* 289. To take the number one thousand as symbolic of completeness is consistent with the use of numbers elsewhere in Revelation. The number 10 can symbolize completeness (Rev 12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7, 12; cf. Dan 7:7, 20, 24). John also uses the square of numbers (12 × 12: 7:4–9; 21:16–17). Moreover, John often uses numbers based on one thousand, a number suggesting fullness and completion (5:11; 7:4–9; 11:13; 14:20; 21:16). The number twelve and its multiples in Revelation is not meant to communicate numerical information, but thematic information. Twelve is the number of the people of God. Squared (12 × 12) and multiplied by one thousand (144,000), it connotes the completeness of the people of God (7:4–9; 21:12–16; 18–20). See Beale, *Revelation* 1018.

<sup>46</sup> Beale, *John’s Use* 388, italics mine.

<sup>47</sup> Hoekema, *Bible and Future* 231. See also P. E. Hughes, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), who calls it “a relatively long or complete age or time” (209).

<sup>48</sup> See Beale, *Revelation* 242–43.

<sup>49</sup> E. S. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 54–55; Beale, *Revelation* 565–68.

As seen above, the millennium in 20:1–6 functions as a climax to the promises in 2:26–27; 3:20 and as a response to the plea of the martyred saints in 6:9–10. As several scholars have indicated, within the discourse of Revelation the millennium functions primarily as a reward for and the vindication of the saints who have suffered for their faithful witness on earth.<sup>50</sup> That vindication is the primary issue is confirmed by the most likely translation of κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς in 20:4a: “judgment was passed on their behalf (in their favor).”<sup>51</sup> The vindication of the saints in vv. 4–6 is clearly to be understood in connection to the mention of Satan’s binding and ultimate demise in vv. 1–3 and 7–11. Thus, the millennium functions in contrast to what we read of Satan and his cohort, the beast, in earlier chapters of Revelation and of Satan’s ultimate demise in 20:1–10. The period of the church age is one in which the kingdom of God and the saints is contested by Satan and his kingdom (chaps. 12–13). The authority of the beast is acknowledged worldwide (13:3–4) and God’s people appear defeated (chaps. 11, 13). Moreover, the beast has apparently survived a fatal blow (13:3–4). However, the millennium reverses this situation by providing a counterpart to the beast’s earthly sovereignty and ostensible invincibility. The dragon, Satan, is bound and the dragon and beast are thrown into the lake of fire (19:20; 20:1–3, 7–11). Now the saints triumph and they reign and rule, and for a comparably much longer period of time, one thousand years.

In view of the foregoing discussion, I would suggest that the reference to the one thousand years is important, not for the temporal information it conveys, but for its *meaning* and *thematic* value: it metaphorically portrays the complete victory and vindication of the saints at the Parousia of Christ.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, I do not think that the one thousand years functions to refer to an actual period of time, but symbolically portrays completeness and is to be seen in contrast to the shorter and imperfect temporal designations (ten days, three and one-half years, short time) which depict the church’s pre-consummate struggles against Satan and the beast. In this way, the millennial kingdom is another graphic portrayal of the victory and vindication of God’s people at the end of history depicted in 11:11–12, 18.

If this is the case, then it is clearly possible to hold to a recapitulation of the battle scenes in 19:11–21 and 20:7–12 while still maintaining the view that the millennium of 20:1–6 occurs at the second coming of Christ. As I have suggested, the one thousand years does not refer to a period of time, but is symbolic of the ultimate triumph and vindication of the saints. Once we relinquish treating the millennium as a specific period of time, there is no need to see it as extending over a long period of time before the final battle ensues in 19:11–21 and 20:7–11 (amillennialism), or as intervening between the accounts of two separate end-time battles (premillennialism). Along with the final battle and judgment narrated in 19:11–21 and recapit-

<sup>50</sup> E. Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960) 96; Mounce, *Revelation* 369; Beale, *John’s Use* 388; R. J. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993) 107; Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting* 146.

<sup>51</sup> For arguments supporting this translation see Beale, *Revelation* 997.

<sup>52</sup> My view has similarities with the view proposed by Mounce, *Revelation* 369–70. Cf. also Bauckham, *Theology* 107–8.

ulated in 20:7–11, the millennium portrays a further, *positive* effect of the Parousia of Christ at the end of history. Therefore, after depicting the final battle in graphic detail in 19:11–21, the author backs up once again and considers not only the final battle in 20:7–11 but now also the ultimate triumph of the saints in 20:1–6. In this way the writer offers the reader a slightly different angle on the end-time judgment occurring at the Parousia of Christ by highlighting the correlative positive theme of the triumph and vindication of the saints symbolized by one thousand years. Thus, I find recapitulation taking place within the various visionary units in 19:11–20:15, but within the context of the end-time Parousia of Christ. As Wall comments on 19:11–21:8,

John's vision concerns the complexity of a single event, the second coming of Christ, and does not chart a series of events over an extended period of time. Each vision of the whole portrays a distinct and critical aspect of God's coming victory in Christ.<sup>53</sup>

This is also true of the depiction of the binding of Satan in 20:1–3 and his subsequent release and destruction in 20:7–10. The vindication of the saints is accompanied by the complete curtailing of the most characteristic activity of the dragon on earth: deceiving the nations. Yet Satan's binding is for "a short time", anticipating his release, and final rebellion and destruction after the millennium in 20:7–10. The binding, release, and final judgment of Satan may simply reflect a traditional apocalyptic motif as found in Isa 24:21–22; *1 Enoch* 10:4–6, 11–13; and Jude 6, which reflect the common themes of binding and imprisonment of demonic beings (Azazel in *1 Enoch* 10:4) until a future time of judgment.<sup>54</sup> The parallels between Rev 20:1–10 and *1 Enoch* 10:4–6 are particularly close: (1) an angel binds Azazel (10:4; Rev 20:1–2); (2) Azazel is imprisoned in darkness and sealed over for a period of time (10:4–5; Rev 20:3); (3) the binding lasts until the day of judgment when Azazel is thrown into the fire (10:6; Rev 20:3, 7–10); (4) the binding renders Azazel incapable of corrupting the people with false teaching (10:7–8; Rev 20:3). John has taken over and adapted a traditional apocalyptic theme of the binding of the demonic/Satan and has integrated it into his own eschatological scenario of the final battle (20:7–10) and the final vindication of the saints (20:4–6). Thus, the binding and subsequent judgment of Satan are also not meant to communicate chronological information, but the thematic idea of the judgment of Satan using a traditional apocalyptic motif. The binding and judgment of Satan in vv. 1–3, like the millennium of vv. 4–6, function as part of the complex of events that will transpire at the Parousia.

The inclusion of the one thousand year reign of the saints between the two parallel scenes of the final battle can be explained in three ways. First, at this point John seems to be following Dan 7:9–14.<sup>55</sup> Daniel 7 envisions the destruction of the beast at the end of history and the transference of his

<sup>53</sup> Wall, *Revelation* 227.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *1 Enoch* 18:16; 21:3–6; *2 Enoch* (J and A) 7:2; 2 Pet 2:4.

<sup>55</sup> For John's dependence on Dan 7:9–14, see Beale, *John's Use* 372–74; Bauckham, *Theology* 106–7.

authority to the Son of Man and the saints with him. The judgment of the beast and the saints' enemies is a necessary prelude for the reign of the saints. Therefore, the destruction of the beast and all evil in Revelation "requires as its positive counterpart that judgment be given in favour of the martyrs, who must be vindicated and rewarded."<sup>56</sup> Second, and related to this, the mention of the saints seated on thrones in 20:4–6 suggests not only reigning but judging (cf. Dan 7:22; Luke 22:30; 1 Cor 6:2).<sup>57</sup> The saints carry out their judicial function by ruling over and defeating the enemies in 19:11–21; 20:7–11. Finally, by placing the vision of the final vindication of the saints in 20:4–6 immediately prior to the account of the final eschatological battle in vv. 7–11, John emphasizes that the vindication and victory of the saints is irreversible and secure. Satan's last-ditch effort to thwart the saints is no contest at all and ends up in inevitable failure (vv. 9–10). God's word on the matter is final.<sup>58</sup>

Keeping in mind the distinction made earlier between the visionary, referential, and symbolic levels of John's communication, the primary function of the millennium in 20:1–6 is not to communicate temporal information, but to portray the consummate triumph and vindication of the saints who suffered at the hands of Satan and the beast during their lives on earth. This crucial theological truth is graphically communicated by the brief metaphorical narrative of the binding of Satan in the abyss, the reigning of the saints for one thousand years, and the release of Satan and his last-ditch effort to destroy God's people which ends in failure. By seeing the millennium as symbolic of the complete victory and vindication of the saints and not as a reference to an actual period of time, it is possible to see it as part of the constellation of events in 19:11–21:8 which will transpire *at the Parousia*, including the final battle narrated in both 19:11–21 and 20:7–11.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

I have suggested that when understood in its literary context, and when seen in light of the communicative nature of Revelation, the millennium in 20:1–10 supports important aspects of both premillennialism and amillennialism. On the one hand, the latter is correct in finding recapitulation in the final battle scenes in 19:11–21 and 20:7–10. On the other hand, the former view correctly sees the millennium as being inaugurated at the second coming of Christ at the end of history. But in the end, the view expressed here does not fit comfortably into either traditional category. Thus, it does not regard the millennium as extending over the whole interadvent period as amillennialists maintain. Further, its emphasis on the millennium as symbolically portraying the vindication and triumph of the saints as the positive correlation to the judgment at the second coming rather than an actual period of time renders the label "premillennial" (with its *temporal*

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 106.

<sup>57</sup> Beale, *Revelation* 997.

<sup>58</sup> Bauckham, *Theology* 107.

prefix) unsuitable.<sup>59</sup> In light of the above analysis, maintaining recapitulation in 19:11–21; 20:7–10 and placing the one thousand years of 20:1–6 at the time of the Parousia are both entirely plausible. All are part of the visionary mosaic of events that will transpire at the second coming of Christ. If this is the case, then other questions that we bring to Rev 20:1–10 concerning the length of the millennium, or what life will be like in the millennium, or the relationship of the millennium to Israel's promises of a theocratic kingdom take us beyond the boundaries of John's vision. In fact, while it is usually assumed that the reign of the saints in 20:4–6 should be located on earth, the text itself is unclear as to where this reign takes place; it could be located in heaven.<sup>60</sup>

However, in the end the symbolic nature of Revelation warns us against being overly dogmatic about any position.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps John intended an even more general picture than the one delineated above. Perhaps whether John intended to narrate one or two end-time battles, or how the nations emerge 20:1–10 after they are destroyed in 19:11–21, or in what order these events occur are not crucial to decide. Perhaps John is more concerned with the broader themes of the final destruction of evil, the vindication of God's people, and the irreversibility of the ultimate victory against Satan. To go beyond this and be more specific may be saying too much.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, the above discussion is an attempt to account for the primary function of the millennium in 20:1–10 and its relationship to the other end-time events in John's glorious eschatological scenario.

<sup>59</sup> It would be interesting at this point to consider how the earliest interpreters of Revelation understood the reference to the one thousand years in Rev 20:1–6, a task beyond the scope of this study. Cf. L. V. Crutchfield, "The Apostle John and Asia Minor as a Source of Premillennialism in the Early Church Fathers," *JETS* 31 (1988) 413–26; B. W. Snyder, "How Millennial is the Millennium? A Study in the Background of the 1000 Years in Revelation 20," *Evangelical Journal* 9 (1991) 51. Thomas (*Revelation* 8–22 563) argues that the way the early church Fathers understood the millennium argues against any other understanding than a literal, temporal fulfillment in the future. However, the deciding factor in interpretation of Rev 20:1–6 cannot be whether the view in question was discovered by earliest interpreters but a contextual and exegetical study of the text itself.

<sup>60</sup> See Morris, *Revelation* 228. Cf. Rev 11:11.

<sup>61</sup> Poythress, "Genre" 53. "The intrinsic flexibility and relative indirectness of the correspondence between vision and referent in Revelation as a whole should make all interpreters hold their views on Rev 20:1–10 with less dogmatism" (54).

<sup>62</sup> See Morris, *Revelation* 228; Fiorenza, *Revelation* 104: "The series provides a spectrum of related images that express final salvation following upon this last judgment. The sequence of these visions does not seek to convey chronological information. Rather, its approach is topical, describing in various ways ultimate salvation in its different aspects."