

ON THE HERMENEUTICS AND INTERPRETATION OF REV 20:1–3: A PRECONSUMMATIONIST¹ PERSPECTIVE

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As the symposium *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*² demonstrates, the interpretation of Rev 20:1–6 continues to influence significantly the premillennial exposition of biblical eschatology. Objections have been lodged against attributing such importance to the pervasively symbolic, hence less interpretively accessible, apocalyptic literature of Revelation.³ Premillennialists, however, have clung arduously to their views, arguing for the chronological progression of Revelation 19–20, the futurity of Satan's imprisonment, the physicality of "the first resurrection," and the literalness of the "one thousand year" duration of Christ's post-second-advent interregnum. At the root of these claims is a more basic concern for hermeneutical consistency in the interpretation of the Bible's apocalyptic and non-apocalyptic literature and of Rev 20:1–6 particularly.⁴

In my view, preconsumptionists ought to receive the premillennialist's concern as an appropriately insistent call for integrity in handling Revelation 20 and the apocalyptic genre. The purpose of this essay is, therefore, to provide a partial answer to the premillennialist's exhortation. Limiting myself to the interpretation of Rev 20:1–3, my specific aim is to identify and apply a canonical paradigm that answers the premillennialists' call for a hermeneutically consistent preconsumptionist exegesis of Rev 20:1–3. This is hardly to say that previous preconsumptionist efforts are without merit; in

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¹ The term *preconsumptionist* and its cognates have been proposed as substitutes for the traditional but misleading term *amillennialist* and its cognates. See V. S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 36.

² D. K. Campbell and J. L. Townsend, eds., *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus* (Chicago: Moody, 1992).

³ See, e.g., G. L. Murray, *Millennial Studies: A Search for Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1948) 153–154; G. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 226–228; and H. N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. J. R. de Witt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 556–559. Cf. G. E. Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 181–182.

⁴ A recent expression of this reality comes from Kenneth Kantzer, who writes: "The importance of premillennialism to most of its adherents stems from their desire to protect a valid hermeneutic" ("Foreword," *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus* [eds. D. K. Campbell and J. L. Townsend; Chicago: Moody, 1992] 9).

fact, the studies of Hoekema and Poythress⁵ are fitting preludes to this one, which will attempt to advance the discussion still further.

The thesis of this study is that the biblical and cognate epic ideology of victory over the dragon followed by house building constitutes a fundamental hermeneutical paradigm for the historical-grammatical, yet non-literal interpretation of Rev 20:1–3. The use of the epic ideology as a hermeneutical control in the interpretation of Rev 20:1–3 may initially appear to be a problematic proposal. What, after all, could these ancient cosmogonic themes possibly have to do with visions received on Patmos? Indeed, what warrant do I have to suggest that an author and his audience in late first-century AD Asia Minor could be aware of, for example, mythological traditions from 15th-century BC Canaan? The problems of comparative methodology seem formidable enough to make my thesis impossible. But several factors provide reasons sufficient to stay the course. They include (1) the interaction with ancient mythic lore in John's OT and Jewish apocalyptic literary heritage,⁶ (2) the accessibility of Ugaritic combat mythology to John and his audience through the work of Philo of Byblos;⁷ and (3) the legacy of analogs to Canaanite epic in and around the Anatolian region where John's audience was located.⁸ Admittedly, uncertainties still exist as to how and in what form authors and their audiences in the late first century AD could have come by a knowledge of cognate myth. There is no reason, however, to doubt that such material was available.⁹ It is precisely the availability of this material (from OT sources and beyond) to John and his audience that in my judgment justifies this study of John's vision in Rev 20:1–3 in terms of the epic themes of victory and house building.

⁵ A. A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) chap. 16; V. S. Poythress, "Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev 20:1–6," *JETS* 36 (1993) 41–54. Hoekema's comments on Rev 20:1–3 represent a traditional preconsummationist treatment, which looks to establish its hermeneutic in considerations other than the Bible's use of epic themes. Poythress focused his study in such a way that the payoff comes primarily in his reflections on 20:4–6. Thus, there is room for further reflection on the hermeneutics of Rev 20:1–3 in light of ideology of divine victory over the dragon.

⁶ As F. M. Cross has stated, "It has become vividly clear that the primary source of mythical material in forming Jewish apocalyptic was *old* Canaanite mythical lore" (*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* [Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973] 346 n. 13). Cf. J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977) 101–104. Principally for reasons of chronological distancing the posited influence of Canaanite myth on Jewish apocalyptic remains a difficult hypothesis for some scholars to accept. See, e.g., C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 97, 257–258.

⁷ Around the end of the first century AD, Philo translated the ancient "Phoenician theology" (or "history"; so J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985] 166) of Sakkunyaton (Sanchuniathon, ca. 500 BC). While there have been doubts about the authenticity of Philo's translation, "recent studies have shown that his work has much in common with the Ugaritic myths" (Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision* 102). Philo of Byblos is important because "his work shows that ancient Canaanite lore was accessible in the Roman period"—that is, more or less at the time when John most probably penned his apocalypse for the churches of Roman Asia (*ibid.*).

at this point that it presupposes what it should demonstrate, namely, that

historical-grammatical hermeneutics *necessarily* involves a direct correspondence between John's vision and its historical referents. As we shall see, this question-begging presupposition is simply false, especially in light of what scholars have observed regarding the Bible's preemption of the ancient mythic combat paradigm.¹² The following survey of the biblical data is provided lest the reader mistakenly think that the ideology with which we are concerned here is unique to Revelation 20 or, for that matter, any one part of the Bible.

1. *The Preemption of Epic Ideology in the OT.* According to an emerging scholarly consensus, the victory and house building themes find expression in both the OT and the NT. The consensus of which I speak has already occurred among OT researchers,¹³ where interest in the Bible's use of epic conventions derives from study of the theme of God's conflict with the dragon and the sea. The themes of divine victory and/or house building have been discerned in descriptions of the world's creation (e.g., Job 26:10–13; Ps 89:9–13), the world's redemptions in Noah's day (e.g., Ps 29:9–10; 74:12–17; 104:5–9) and on the Day of the LORD (Isa 27:1), and Israel's redemptions from Egypt (the book of Exodus, especially chap. 15), from David's enemies (2 Samuel 7), from Babylon (Isa 51:9–11), and from Gog-Magog (Ezekiel 36–48). Take Job 26:10–13 and Isa 51:9–11, for example.

Job 26:10–13:

¹² For an extended discussion of the epic themes in biblical descriptions of creation and redemption, see my *Victory and House Building in Revelation 20:1–21:8: A Thematic Study* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1987) chap. 2 and the literature cited there.

¹³ The study of this subject had its effective beginning in 1895 with the publication of H. Gunkel's pioneering classic, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit. Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895). Gunkel was the first scholar to examine thoroughly the relevant material in the OT, thereby recognizing its mythical character and seeing in it "an Israelite appropriation of the Babylonian myth of Marduk's victory over Tiamat" (Day, *God's Conflict* 1). In the view of most recent scholars, Gunkel's proposal of a Babylonian origin for the OT allusions to ancient cosmogonic myth has not withstood the test of time; results from the study of Ugaritic texts have seen Babylon yield its place to Canaan. Nevertheless, the subject of Gunkel's seminal investigation continues to be the object of critical inquiry. Almost a century later, Day opened his 1985 monograph on the OT theme by noting that, despite a fair amount of writing on the topic since Gunkel, "there are still many disputed points of interpretation, so that a reconsideration of the material is clearly desirable" (*ibid.*). For a summary of the basic character of the cosmogonies of the ancient cultures, see n. 8 above.

- v. 10 He marked out the horizon on the surface of
the waters at the boundary between light and darkness.
- v. 11 The pillars of the heavens trembled,
they were astounded at his rebuke.
- v. 12 By his power he stilled the sea;
by his understanding he smote Rahab.
- v. 13 By his Spirit¹⁴ the heavens were made fair;
his hand ran the fleeing serpent through.

In this passage we find one of the several allusions to the cosmogonic combat mythology in the book of Job.¹⁵ If we take 26:5-14 in its entirety, we may see in it a contemplation on God's omnipotence over chaos forces in *both* creation *and* providence. It is evident enough, however, that vv. 10-13 concern the Lord's creative triumph in the beginning (cf. Prov 8:27). The account of God imposing order on chaotic seas and in clouded heavens is conceptually parallel to the account of his creative work in Gen 1:2-8. Here in Job, though, the deep and darkness of Genesis are obviously personified (respectively?) as Rahab (v. 12b) and the serpent (v. 13b).¹⁶ By now it is widely recognized that such personifications are traceable to the author's monotheistic reformulation of polytheistic cosmogony. The poet thus employs the epic theme of victory over the anti-creative serpent¹⁷ as he contemplates the power of the true Creator, Elohim.

¹⁴ The translation of *rūah* by "Spirit" reflects my basic agreement with those who see here a description of the work of creation through the power of God's Spirit. Cf. S. Terrien, *Job* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestle, 1963) 217 n. 4; L. Neve, *The Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Tokyo: Seibunsha, 1972) 71-72; and M. G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 13-20. Cf. M. M. Kline, "The Holy Spirit as Covenant Witness" (Th.M. thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1972) 132-138. M. M. Kline's discussion is especially noteworthy here because of its focus on the parallelism of the hand of God and the Spirit of God in OT contexts other than Job 26:13. See, e.g., Ezek 8:1, 11:5, 37:1; 1 Kgs 18:12, 18:46; Isa 34:16-17.

¹⁵ On the mythic allusions in the book of Job, see Day, *God's Conflict* 38-49 and M. J. Pope, *Job* (AB 15; 3d ed.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1973) 30, 60-61, 268-270, 276-280.

¹⁶ Day notes a similar linking of the chaos monster with primordial darkness in Job 3:8 (*God's Conflict* 39, 44-46). In that text, "cursing the day with darkness" (vv. 3-7, 9; cf. Gen 1:2-5) is compared to "rousing Leviathan," implying an association between darkness and Leviathan. This connection between Leviathan and darkness apparently goes back to Canaanite mythology. The same observation has been made by M. Fishbane, "Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13: a recovered use of the creation pattern," *VT* 21 (1971) 151-167 and T. H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) 788.

¹⁷ Here in Job 26, victory over the serpent is achieved by *slaying* it, presumably, with a sword. But the book of Job also preserves references to victory over the beast by *capturing* it. In Job 7:12, Job likens himself to the primordial chaos beast *in captivity*.

Isa 51:9–10. The deliverance of captive Israel from the bondage of Babylon is described in the prophets as a second exodus.¹⁸ Isaiah is most notable in this connection¹⁹ and his words in 51:9–11 are especially evocative:

- v. 9 Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength,
 O arm of the LORD!
- Awake as in days of old,
 as in generations of long ago!
Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces,
 who ran the dragon through?
- v. 10 Was it not you who dried up the sea,
 the waters of the great deep,
 who made the depths of the sea a road
 for the redeemed to cross over?
- v. 11 So shall the ransomed of the LORD return
 and come to Zion with singing;
 Everlasting joy shall be on their heads;
 they shall obtain joy and gladness,
 and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

In this message of comfort to the captives of Judah, Isaiah summons the arm of the LORD, which had displayed its power so extraordinarily in the past, to intervene once again to secure the exiles' release from Babylon. The imagery describing the work of the LORD's arm is that of the cosmogonic conflicts, the implication being that the return from Shinar will involve yet another battle with the draconic chaos powers. Now, as mentioned, in context the prophet compares the coming battle to similar episodes in the past, battles identified, by general scholarly agreement, as those at the creation and at the first exodus.²⁰ The effect of this linkage between the return from exile, the original creation, and the Egyptian exodus is to invest the prophesied return with the significance of both a new creation and a new exodus. In fact, the significance of the return involves even more than a new exodus, for the expected deliverance is to culminate in a new eisodus as the LORD's ransomed make their way again to Zion (v. 11).

Clearly, then, the cosmogonic conflict that was used to interpret the significance of the world's creation from chaos and Israel's emancipation from Egypt is being used in Isa 51:9–11 to interpret the significance of the pre-

¹⁸ See especially M. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979) 122–140.

¹⁹ On the exodus motif in Isaiah, see B. W. Anderson, "Exodus Typology in Second Isaiah," *Israel's Prophetic Heritage* (ed. B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson; New York: Harper, 1962) 177–195.

²⁰ Day, *God's Conflict*, 91–93.

dicted return from Babylon as well. And, lest we overlook the extent to which the epic paradigm finds expression in the return from Babylon, we should note that according to both prophecy and history the LORD's defeat of draconic Shinar was to be followed by the erection of a second temple. Through Isaiah the LORD prophesied concerning Cyrus, "He is my shepherd and he will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of the temple, 'Let its foundations be laid'" (44:28). Accordingly, in the historical narrative of Ezra 1:2-3, we find the decree of Cyrus in which the Persian king speaks of the house building to be undertaken for the LORD by the returned exiles. Thus, as it was with the world's creation and Israel's redemption from Egypt, so it was with the coming redemption from Babylon: the themes of divine victory and house building explain the significance of that future great event, distinguishing it as a reenactment of creation on a microcosmic scale.

2. *The Preemption of Epic Ideology in the NT.* While the theme of God's combat with the dragon and the sea has been extensively researched in the OT, the use of that theme in the NT has just begun to receive equal treatment.²¹ Six examples of this new research come to mind. Most notably, A. Y. Collins has published a variety of studies involving an interpretation of the Book of Revelation in the light of ancient Near Eastern combat mythology.²² In a similar vein, T. Longman III and D. G. Reid have sought to demonstrate the use and development of the OT's Divine Warrior theme in the NT's Synoptic Gospels, epistles, and Apocalypse.²³ In the context of a study of biblical canonicity, M. G. Kline argued for the house building function of the OT and NT documents according to the cognate pattern of victory and house building. In connection with the NT in particular, he cited the presence of the epic themes in Heb 3:2-6; Revelation 12 and 20:7-22:5.²⁴ In a recent study modeled after Gunkel's classic, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, W. A. Gage argued that "the redemptive pattern throughout *the scripture* [i.e., not just in *the OT*] conforms to the . . . epic ideology of divine victory over the anti-creative beast followed by the establishment of a royal residence or temple."²⁵ Finally, in two other recent works, F. R. McCurley and B. F. Batto²⁶ have each devoted chapters to the way the Synoptic Gospels and the Book of Revelation "con-

²¹ This despite the fact that Gunkel's own investigation of Revelation 12 in *Schöpfung und Chaos* could have served as an impetus for such study.

²² A. Y. Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR 9; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1976); idem, *The Apocalypse* (New Testament Message 22; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1979); and idem, *Crisis & Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

²³ T. Longman III and D. G. Reid, *God is a Warrior* (Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

²⁴ M. G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 84-86.

²⁵ Gage, *Genesis 19* (emphasis mine). Gage offered his work as a response to Gunkel's admitted inability to discover the nature of the relationship between the biblical beginning and ending (see Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos* 369).

tinue the imagery of the cosmic conflict as the means by which the eschatological victory of God is achieved and his kingdom established."²⁷ All of these scholars' efforts have yielded helpful insights for our understanding of the way the NT adapted the OT's use of its neighbors' *Chaoskampfmythos*.²⁸

Before turning finally to Rev 20:1–3, let us focus on Rev 1:5–6; 5:5, 9–10; 12:11; and 20:7–21:8 where John describes the church's redemption through

Christ's work. In 1:5–6 and 5:9–10, John implicitly compares the Lamb's redemptive work for the church to God's victory over draconic Egypt and his subsequent constitution of Israel (with her tabernacle) as his kingdom-dwelling place. Then, in the Divine Warrior victory song of 12:10–12,²⁹ saints are described as those who have obtained victory over their draconic accuser on account of the blood of the true Lamb (12:11), because the blood of this Lamb, unlike the first Passover lamb, secures the release of God's people from their sins. Finally, in 5:5, the redemptive victory of the Lamb becomes the victory of a new David, that Lion-Warrior of Judah who was given rest from his enemies and then turned his attention to building the Lord's temple-house. Thus, when in chaps. 1, 5 and 12 John invokes the redemptions of Israel under Moses and David to describe the church's experience, the point not to be missed is John's willingness to employ the epic paradigm to explain the significance of the church's redemption through Christ's work.

With regard to Rev 20:7–21:8, the recognition of the victory and house building themes illumines our understanding of Christ's age-ending defeat of Satan and the nations (20:7–10) and the resurrection and judgment of the dead (20:11–21:8). The hermeneutical use of the epic themes in 20:7–10 enables us to see the events depicted there as the Divine Warrior's final redemptive judgment against the deceptive dragon who had made a final, failed attempt to destroy the kingdom-city built by the Lamb and in so doing had turned the world temple into an abomination of desolation.³⁰ Similarly, the application of the epic motifs to 20:11–21:8 helps us see the resurrection as the Divine Warrior's victory over his last enemy, death. The saints' resurrection and the creation's renovation constitute the redemptive rebuilding

²⁶ F. R. McCurley, *Ancient Myths and Biblical Faith: Scriptural Transformations* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); B. F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992).

²⁷ McCurley, *Ancient Myths* 58.

²⁸ Indeed, the NT has been found to use the victory and house building themes in descriptions of the church's redemptions at Christ's first advent (Eph 2:14–22 [cf. 4:8]; Col 2:15; 1 Pet 2:4–10) and at his second advent (1 Cor 15:53–57; 2 Cor 5:1–4).

²⁹ Collins, *The Combat Myth* 138. Collins identifies the song by reference to Gunkel's psalm category *Siegelseslieder*. I have derived my identification from T. Longman III, "Psalm 98: A Divine Warrior Victory Song," *JETS* 27 (1984) 267–274.

³⁰ By the time of creation's destruction in 16:18, 20, the dragon, the sea beast, and the land beast-false prophet will have defiled the entire earth through "unclean spirits" (16:13), thus turning the world into an abomination of desolation. Also, by the time of her destruction in 16:19, Babylon will have been filled with "uncleaness" (cf. 17:4; 18:2), having become "the mother of the abominations of the earth" (17:5). See also n. 36.

(re-creation) that follows the final victory: the saints appear as the holy city (cf. 3:12), while the new heavens and earth emerge as the eternal dwelling place of God and man. Again, in his rehearsal of these epic images and plot, we witness John's willingness to employ the epic paradigm to explain the significance of the church's redemption through Christ's work.

Despite appearances to the contrary, these OT and NT instances of cosmogonic appropriation do comport with the Bible's strong polemic against pagan religion. For apologetic as well as evocative purposes, the canonical authors—especially seers, prophets, and psalmists—borrowed imagery and plot from pagan cosmogonic myth and boldly “mythologized” the creation of the world, so that Elohim the true Creator was depicted in combat with the anti-creative dragon, serpent, or sea.³¹ In fact, we should state the matter differently: precisely by calling attention to the mythic traditions in their reformulations of creation and redemption, the monotheistic writers of Scripture were “demythologizing” those traditions. And perhaps the most striking aspect of this demythologization is that these authors not only recast the *creative* process in conformity with epic idiom—they also recast the *redemptive* process in conformity with that pattern, thereby disclosing its *re-creative* character.³²

It is this willingness on the part of John and other biblical authors to adopt the victory-house building paradigm as a fundamental metaphor, even an organon, by which to interpret history—indeed their willingness to allow the epic motifs to be hermeneutical of historical events—that should occupy our attention as we turn to Rev 20:1–3. This should be all the more the case when we see that vision preceded in 19:11–21 by visions of redemptive judgment against anti-redemptive beasts, and followed in 20:4–6 by references to the establishment of a kingdom-city and in 20:7–21:8 by another sequence of visions involving victories over anti-redemptive enemies (20:7–15) and the subsequent establishment of an eternal dwelling place for God and man (21:1–22:5).

II. APPLYING THE CANONICAL HERMENEUTICAL PARADIGM TO THE INTERPRETATION OF REV 20:1–3: THE MYTHOPOETIC AND HISTORICAL FATES OF GOD'S ENEMIES

The discussion of Rev 20:1–3 in evangelical eschatological literature is largely at an impasse over the extent to which the vision can be translated into history. Remember the premillennialist's question: If, as preconsummationists say, Satan is cut off from the earth during his confinement, how can we harmonize his imprisonment during the interadvent age with the clear

When the biblical revelation identifies Yahweh, the living and true God, as the Creator who slays the dragon, it is not a mere matter of substituting one deity for another while maintaining the essence of the myth. In its adaptation of the myth the Bible demythologizes the myth as such. It demythologizes the hero-god, it demythologizes the dragon (whether

³¹ See *The Living Christ: As He Is, and as He Will Be*, by C. F. Johnson, Creative Arts, 1978, pp. 107–110. For a more detailed discussion of the myth of the dragon and the sea, see *The Bible and the Myth of the Dragon*, by M. R. Kline (Southampton, MA: the author, 1989) 19).

³² Gage, *Genesis* 18–19.

this question by appealing to Jesus' saying on the binding of the strong man in Matt 12:29, his vision of Satan's fall in Luke 10:17–18, and his teaching on the meaning of his death/exaltation in John 12:31–32. In my opinion, all of these appeals have merit, but they have had little effect on the debate. I am suggesting that significant light is thrown on the question before us if we recognize John's tactical preemption of the epic idiom of divine victory over the dragon.

1. *The Mythopoetic and Historical Fates of God's Enemies Outside Rev 20:1–3.* The hermeneutical break in the impasse over the dragon's imprisonment consists in this: when we examine the relationship between historical events and their epic-symbolic depiction in the Bible, we find that the fate of dragons is analogous, not identical to the fate of those historical entities to whom the image is applied. To put it differently, while the dragon (serpent, sea) may be captured or slain in the epic imagery and plot, the enemy so depicted is neither captured nor slain in history. To see this fact, we only have to recall our two examples above.

In Job 26:10–13, the creation process finds God smiting Rahab and running the fleeing serpent through (vv. 12, 13). Yet in Genesis 1, the deep and darkness, to which Rahab and the serpent correspond, are neither smitten or run through; rather, they are restrained or compartmentalized. Similarly, in Isa 51:9–11, the exiles' release from Babylon is likened to God dismembering Rahab and (again) running the dragon through. Yet in history Babylon, to whom Rahab and the dragon correspond, was neither dismembered nor run through; instead Babylon, in the person of King Cyrus, was moved to act on the exiles' behalf according to the Lord's good pleasure (Isa 44:28; 2 Chr 36:22; Ezra 1:1).

For any who may think this distinction between the mythopoetic and historical fates of God's enemies is isolated to the texts just cited, I can only invite them to consider the other texts where the anti-creative/anti-redemptive animal imagery is applied to an entity in history. In each and every case, they will find that the monster's fate in the epic idiom is only analogous, not identical to its fate in history. This will be so whether they find the evil animal to have been captured or slain. In all such cases, the fate of the dragon represents the truth that the effort of God's enemies to resist his creative and redemptive work in heaven and earth is itself effectually resisted by God whether through temporal or final means.

2. *The Mythopoetic and Historical Fates of God's Enemy in Rev 20:1–3.* Against this backdrop, we come to the dragon's imprisonment in Rev 20:1–

3. Our immediate concern is, of course, the dragon's fate: he is captured and confined in the abyss. How shall we interpret this captivity? What does sound historical-grammatical hermeneutics require of us here? As I see it, it requires our recognition of the canonical paradigm of cosmogonic preemption. It requires us to recall that, in his book as a whole and in the immediately preceding and following contexts of Rev 20:1–3, John, like his biblical forebears, adopts the victory-house building paradigm as a fundamental metaphor and organon for his interpretation of history—it requires us to recall that John allows the epic motifs to be hermeneutical of the historical events linked with Christ's death/exaltation.

Applying our observations about the relationship between historical events and their symbolic depiction, I believe we are bound to conclude that the fate of the dragon in Rev 20:1–3 is analogous but not identical to the fate of Satan in history. Stated differently, while the dragon is captured and confined in the epic imagery and plot of John's vision, Satan is not captured and imprisoned in history. Rather, like the serpentine dragons of Babylon and of the darkness and deep, Satan is deposed from his role as deceiver of the world nations.

That the deposing of Satan is linked to Christ's death/exaltation becomes clearer when we see the vision of Rev 20:1–3 as depicting one of a complex of inaugural victories through which Christ, as the newly ascended Son, casts the dragon out of heaven and earth, thereby thwarting the dragon's efforts to keep him from fulfilling his redemptive work of subduing his enemies and building his kingdom-city. The victories I have in mind³³ are those narrated in 12:7–9 and, of course, 20:1–3. Both of these texts and their contexts are manifestly rich with allusions to the oracle of destiny in Gen 3:15 and to the age-old struggle for cosmic kingship between the dragon and the woman's seed. Most clearly indicative of this redemptive-historical connection are John's identification of the dragon as "the old serpent" and as "the deceiver (of the whole world)" (12:9; 20:3; cf. 20:8; 16:13–16). Of course, properly speaking, the focus of the narrative in 12:7–9 and 20:1–3 is on the elect angels' role in the Son's victories over the dragon. But, as we explore the broader theological linkage between these visions in what follows, notice how even this activity is connected with the events of Genesis 3.³⁴ We turn now from the last book of the Bible to the first.

When in Genesis 3 the serpent entered the garden dwelling of God and man, he set himself forth as the Adversary of God. In the aftermath of Adam's failure, God subjected the serpent, the man, and the woman to curses of defeat and death. Ironically, in the curse on the serpent, the man and the woman could find God's Gen 1:28 promise of victory and life restored. For to One of the woman's seed would belong the blessings of victory over the ser-

³³ Actually, the Lamb's conquest of the dragon in Revelation has three stages, including 12:13–16 as well as 12:7–9 and 20:1–3. The three victories pertain to heaven (12:7–9) and earth (12:13–16; 20:1–3). For a complete discussion of all these visions, see my *Victory and House Building*, chap. III.

³⁴ Much of the discussion that follows derives from my interaction with Kline, *Kingdom Prologue, passim*, supplemented by interaction with Gage, *Genesis, passim*.

pent: through the victory of the One seed, many of the woman's otherwise cursed seed would be blessed with life (Gen 3:15). To reveal without delay his holy wrath against sin, God rose up to cleanse the Edenic sanctuary, which the serpent, the man and the woman had turned into an abomination of desolation. Of course, in due time, God would leave Eden desolate (cf. Genesis 7), but his immediate judgment was to drive Adam, Eve and the serpent from Eden's earthly summit and to station the cherubim at its entrance to guard it against any further defilement by his now cursed creatures (Gen 3:24). Thereafter, amidst the suffering and death of the curses, the conflict between the woman, the serpent and their seed began its course toward the consummation of the divine purpose.

It is into the midst of the ancient conflict that Revelation 12 and 20 thrusts us.³⁵ In Revelation 12, the redemptive purpose of the Son of God to fulfill the promise of Gen 3:15 is inaugurated on a macrocosmic scale.³⁶ The promised Seed, having been victorious over the serpentine dragon on earth (5:5–6; 12:4–5; cf. 12:11),³⁷ ascends the heavenly throne (12:5), thus returning Man to the world summit (Zion, 14:1). At the beginning of the ages, the Lord had driven Man and the serpent from the earthly Edenic temple (Gen 3:23), and the cherubim had resisted their return (Gen 3:24). At the end of the ages, the Son of Man is caught up to the heavenly sanctuary, and Michael and his angelic army assist him to establish Zion's inviolability by driving the old serpent and his demons from that world summit (12:8–9; cf. 11:19; 15:5–8).³⁸

significant of Christ's death/exaltation: Satan has been expelled from Eden, but he now the world temple of heaven and earth. To appreciate the significance of this observation, we need to remember that Eden was a microcosmic version of the world temple. Consequently, the events of microcosmic (Edenic) history constitute *mutatis mutandis* a microcosmic edition of world history. In the treatment of the Christ's victories in Revelation, then, we must keep before us both the ³⁵ The position here is a microcosmic to his macrocosmic setting, and the analogy between the two is a macrocosmic to his macrocosmic setting. That change consists in the fact that, from a cosmological perspective, the

³⁶ The metaphor of heaven and earth as the macrocosmic temple informs John's cosmology in Revelation. This can be seen in his conception of heaven as a throne-residence of God in chap. 4; 11:19; and 15:5 and his conception of the earth as a four-cornered floor in 7:1 and 20:8. See M. G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 20–21, 35–42; idem, *Kingdom Prologue* 17–20. Cf. R. M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical [TYPOS] Structures* (Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. II; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1981) 352–354, 358–363, 367–388. See also my discussion of OT cosmology in *Victory and House Building* 26–33 and the literature cited there.

³⁷ In 12:11, the choir's reference to the brothers' share in the Lamb's redemptive work recalls the lyrics of the new song in 5:9–10. In the verses preceding the new song in chap. 5, the Lamb's victory is the victory of the Lion, God's warrior from Judah, the Davidic king (5:5). This victory is presumed in 12:11 and its context and, in fact, would precede the victory over the dragon in 12:7–9.

³⁸ In cosmological-theological perspective, Zion is the world mountain, the site of divine enthronement, of divine conflict with the dragon over world dominion, and of divine judicial pronouncement. The same description applies to Eden, the cosmography presupposed in Genesis 2–3 depicting Eden as a world mountain. See R. J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (HSM 4; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1972) 3–4, 98–103, 142–153; E. T. Mullen, *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (HSM 24; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1980) 226–240; cf. Day, *God's Conflict* 127; Gage, *Genesis* 50–54.

Christ's cleansing of the world temple does not assume the form of casting the dragon at once into the lake of fire.³⁹ Rather, as 12:7-12 indicates, Christ's immediate judgment on the serpent is to cast him permanently from the heavenly sanctuary and temporarily into the earthly court. Thereupon, the setting of the conflict with the dragon shifts from the heavenly sanctuary to the earthly court of the world temple.⁴⁰

Turning to Rev 20:1-3, the serpentine dragon is identified as the one who, by deceiving the nations into strife with the saints (i.e., the woman's

seed; cf. 12:17 with 13:7, 10; 14:12), would make his final attempt to destroy the kingdom-city being built by the Son and who in so doing would turn the world temple into an abomination of desolation (12:17; 20:3, 8; cf. 12:9; see n. 30). Granting the recapitulatory nature of Rev 20:1-6, the outcome of the angel's judicial mission in 20:1-3 reveals again the significance of Christ's death/exaltation: Satan has been deposed from his role as the deceiver of the nations. By having the dragon cast from the earthly court of the world temple, Christ forestalls the dragon's deception of the nations, his final attempt to destroy the kingdom-city, and his defilement of the world temple. Also, with this expulsion of the dragon from earth, Christ takes another step toward fulfilling his redemptive work in the face of the dragon's challenge. However, as in the case of God's cleansing of the holy garden in Eden, this step in Christ's cleansing of the world temple does not assume the form of casting the dragon at once into the lake of fire. Rather, as indicated by the vision in 20:1-3, Christ's judgment on the dragon is to cast him into the abyss for a thousand years, postponing until that period has been completed, his deception of the nations, his defilement of the world temple and, most importantly, his final attempt to destroy Christ's kingdom-city. Meanwhile, as indicated in the vision of 20:4-6, the exalted Christ fulfills his redemptive work of subduing his enemies and constituting his kingdom-city, drawing its citizens from the remnant of all the nations (5:9-10).

III. CONCLUSION

For some it would be enough to conclude here with an expression of hope that it is now clearer how the vision of Rev 20:1-3 can teach what preconsummationists say it teaches. And, in fact, I do hope it is clearer how it can be said that Satan has been deposed from his role as deceiver of the nations but continues to resist, though ineffectually, the redemptive work of Christ

³⁹ Cf. Collins, *The Combat Myth* 141. See also Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* 85.

⁴⁰ Cf. Collins, *The Combat Myth* 143.

in the other roles he retains in this world.⁴¹ Be that as it may, in keeping with the title of this paper, I wish to return in closing to the question I raised earlier: What does historical-grammatical hermeneutics require of us when

⁴¹ For example, Satan may thwart the plans of the apostle Paul to return to Thessalonica (1 Thess 2:18). He may go about as a lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:8). He may even blind the minds of the unbelieving (2 Cor 4:4). But he does not now go about as the deceiving dragon who would gather the nations for the age-ending battle against the Divine Warrior. Having thus subdued the dragon, the Warrior's purpose to constitute his kingdom-protectorate from every tribe, language, people and nation on earth cannot be frustrated.

we come to the interpretation of Rev 20:1–3? If “the importance of premillennialism to most of its adherents stems from their desire to protect a valid hermeneutic”⁴²—and I believe it does—then there is no better place to press the hermeneutical point than right here. The claim of this essay is that historical-grammatical hermeneutics requires us to recognize that in Rev 20:1–3 John adopted the epic idiom of victory over the dragon to be hermeneutical of Christ’s death/exaltation and thereby illuminated the theological

significance of those first-coming events in relation to draconic Satan.⁴³ To recognize John’s idiom is to appreciate how much of a debt he owed to the heritage of demythologization exemplified by his canonical forbears; to overlook or ignore that idiom is arguably to be inconsistent in our practice of historical-grammatical hermeneutics.

⁴² Kantzer, “Foreword” 9.

⁴³ Once we recognize the epochal significance of the dragon’s defeat, the necessity of identifying the specific point during the first advent when Satan was bound becomes less important. It is enough to associate the vision of Rev 20:1–3 within the complex of events associated with Christ’s death/exaltation.