

## REVELATION 20 AND PAULINE ESCHATOLOGY

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The twentieth chapter of the book of Revelation is a veritable battleground of conflicting interpretations. The conventional classification of eschatological systems as premillennial, amillennial and postmillennial gives some indication of the diverse ways in which the chapter has been understood, but there are even wide variations within each of these basic positions. The absence of anything approaching a consensus regarding the meaning of this passage bears eloquent testimony to the difficulties that beset the person who makes it the object of study. In view of the knotty problems presented by the Scriptural text and the divergent interpretations of it that have been proposed, one can readily appreciate the pertinence of Leon Morris' statement: "It is necessary to approach the chapter with humility and charity."<sup>1</sup> Nowhere is the need for sober exegesis and an irenic spirit greater than when dealing with this controversial passage.

It is the purpose of this study to examine Revelation 20 in the light of Paul's eschatological teaching in order to see whether the latter can help to clarify our understanding of the former. Paul was unquestionably the most profound theologian of the early Church, and eschatology was at the heart of his theology. His teaching in this area is more extensive than that of the Apocalypse and is generally expressed with greater clarity. This suggests that it may be fruitful to investigate Revelation 20 from the perspective of Paul's eschatology with the intention of discovering which interpretation of that chapter best accords with his thought.<sup>2</sup>

Revelation 20 contains a succession of four visions.<sup>3</sup> First, John saw Satan

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<sup>1</sup>L. Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 233.

<sup>2</sup>On this methodological procedure see G. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 226. Underlying this approach is the assumption that the Pauline and Johannine eschatologies are consistent with one another.

<sup>3</sup>Agreement about the relationship between Revelation 20 and the preceding context is lacking. The central point at issue is whether there is a chronological sequence in chaps. 19 and 20. The view that there is such a sequence is widely held, especially by scholars of premillennial persuasion such as J. F. Walvoord (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ* [Chicago: Moody, 1966] 289, 290). Proceeding on the assumption that Rev 19:11-16 describes the return of Christ, Walvoord infers that chap. 20 describes events that will take place after the parousia. Not all who regard the events of chap. 20 as subsequent to those of chap. 19 belong to the premillennial camp, however. J. E. Adams (*The Time is at Hand* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970] 80-82) is one who applies Rev 20:1-8 to the period before the second advent, though accepting that there is a chronological sequence in chaps. 19 and 20. He is able to do this because he rejects the view that Rev 19:11-16 refers to Christ's return. More common among those who do not adopt a premillennial interpretation is the position that the visions of Revelation 19 and 20 are not arranged chronologically; so W. Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1939) 221-223. It is beyond the purview of this paper to enter into the discussion of the complex question of the structure of the book of Revelation. Suffice it to say that the formula *kai eidon*, with which chap. 20 opens, does not necessarily indicate that the events described in the following verses chronologically follow those described in the preceding chapter.

bound and thrown into the abyss where he was to be kept for a thousand years (vv 1-3); second, he saw certain individuals who came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (vv 4-6); third, he saw a climactic battle at the end of the thousand-year period, which resulted in Satan's being thrown into the lake of fire (vv 7-10); and fourth, he saw the final judgment of the dead (vv 11-15). Of these four pericopae the first two have given rise to more dispute than the others and will be treated somewhat more fully here.

### I. THE FIRST VISION

William Milligan has correctly observed that "the overthrow of Satan, and not the reign of a thousand years, is the main theme of the first ten verses of the chapter."<sup>4</sup> Certainly Satan occupies center stage in the first and third visions, the one being concerned with his temporary imprisonment and the other with his ultimate destiny. According to these visions the overthrow of the devil takes place in stages. First he is bound and sealed in the abyss for a period designated as a thousand years. Then he is released for a short time, in which he deceives the nations and marshals them for battle against the saints. This leads to the final stage in his defeat: his being cast into the lake of fire, there to suffer eternal punishment.

Although the initial stage in the downfall of Satan is described as a thousand-year incarceration, it would be unwarranted to conclude that the author must have had a literal period of a thousand years in mind. Since symbolism is used extensively throughout the Apocalypse and numbers are used in a nonliteral sense frequently,<sup>5</sup> it would be facile to insist that the number "one thousand" be taken literally in this context. Morris observes that "one thousand is the cube of ten, the number of completeness," and draws the conclusion that it indicates that "Satan is bound for the perfect period."<sup>6</sup> That the binding of Satan is for a limited period seems clear, but it appears that John did not intend to indicate the precise length of time involved.

One of the most contentious issues in the debate over the interpretation of Revelation 20 is the significance of the binding and imprisonment of Satan that is described in the opening verses of the chapter. According to John Walvoord, "the obvious teaching of the passage is that the action is so designed as to render Satan inactive."<sup>7</sup> He goes on to argue that this cannot be a description of Satan's present state since the NT repeatedly affirms that he is very active in this age, most notably in 1 Pet 5:8: "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Robert Mounce agrees that Rev 20:1-3 refers to the complete cessation of Satanic activity, but he finds support for this within the text of Revelation itself in that it indicates that elaborate measures are taken

<sup>4</sup>W. Milligan, *The Book of Revelation* (New York: Armstrong & Son, 1893) 336.

<sup>5</sup>On the symbolism of Revelation see R. Summers, *Worthy is the Lamb* (Nashville: Broadman, 1951) 19-26.

<sup>6</sup>Morris, *Revelation*, 235. Cf. T. F. Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) 133; G. E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 262.

<sup>7</sup>Walvoord, *Revelation*, 291.

to keep Satan confined.<sup>8</sup>

A number of scholars do not agree that the binding of Satan implies that he is rendered totally inactive but suggest rather that it speaks of a radical curbing of his power. William Hendriksen is one of the leading exponents of this view.<sup>9</sup> He points out that elsewhere in the NT the way Satan's power was curtailed by the coming of Christ is described in terms that are strikingly similar to the description in Rev 20:1-3. Of particular importance is Jesus' saying about the binding of the strong man (Matt 12:29), where the same word is used for "binding" as in Rev 20:2.<sup>10</sup> Support for this interpretation is found in the fact that Rev 20:3 appears to specify the respect in which Satan's power is limited—namely, "that he should deceive the nations no more." Hendriksen takes this to mean that the devil's influence is not eliminated altogether but that it is limited so that he is not able to prevent the extension of the gospel throughout the world.

Clearly the major exegetical difficulty in connection with the first vision is whether it speaks of a restriction in Satan's power or its complete elimination. Our interest is in seeing whether a comparison with Paul's eschatological teaching sheds any light on the problem.

Like John, Paul refers to two stages in the defeat of the Satanic powers. In Col 2:15 he indicates that one of the consequences of the death and resurrection of Christ was a decisive victory over the forces of evil. There he says that God "disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him (Christ)."<sup>11</sup> He also refers to a future subjection of these spiritual powers. In 1 Cor 15:24 he speaks of the consummation when Christ "delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power." Paul appears to see himself as being in the period between the initial defeat of the Satanic powers and their final doom. In this period the forces of evil continue to be active in spite of their having been conquered and, in Eph 6:11-17, believers are admonished to be prepared to do battle with them.<sup>12</sup>

The similarity between Paul's view that the subjugation of the evil powers occurs in two stages (separated by the present age) and the teaching of Revelation 20 seems to offer some support for Hendriksen's position that the millennium mentioned in the latter is to be identified with the time between the first and second advents of Christ. Certainly the parallel deserves closer examination.

As has been observed, Hendriksen suggests that the binding of Satan indi-

<sup>8</sup>R. H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 352.

<sup>9</sup>Hendriksen, *Conquerors*, 223-229. So also H. H. Wernecke, *The Book of Revelation Speaks to Us* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954) 148, 149; Ladd, *Revelation*, 262.

<sup>10</sup>I. e., *deō*. The other sayings of Jesus to which Hendriksen calls attention are "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18) and "now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (John 12:31).

<sup>11</sup>Paul does not specifically mention Satan in connection with the subjugation of the evil powers as the result of Christ's first advent, but elsewhere in the NT he is explicitly referred to in similar contexts (cf. Heb 2:14, 15; 1 John 3:8). That Christ's coming meant defeat for the devil is also implied in Rom 16:20: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."

<sup>12</sup>Cf. G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956) 81, 82.

cates that his power is restrained specifically in relation to the deception of the nations. This calls to mind the Pauline conception of the Gentile mission as one of the features of the new age inaugurated by Christ's coming. According to Paul the pre-Christian period constituted "the times of ignorance God overlooked" (Acts 17:30), and during that age God "allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:16). A radically different situation obtains since the coming of Christ. No longer is the message of redemption hidden from the Gentiles, for Paul himself is sent "to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18).<sup>13</sup> Although Paul definitely believes that the devil continues to exercise a significant influence in the affairs of men<sup>14</sup> he also teaches that the gospel age is characterized by a new universalism, which implies a limitation in Satanic activity. The correspondence between this aspect of Pauline theology and the restriction in Satan's power to deceive the nations mentioned in Rev 20:3 is obvious and lends corroboration to the view that Rev 20:1-3 portrays in symbolism what has happened to Satan as the result of Christ's coming.

A particularly intriguing possible connection between Revelation 20 and Pauline eschatology is found in the discussion of the restrainer in 2 Thess 2:6-7. There Paul refers to a restraining power that prevents the outbreak of lawlessness until shortly before the return of Christ. The identification of this restraining power is a well-known *crux interpretum* for which numerous explanations have been offered.<sup>15</sup> William Neil suggests that the clue to the solution of this problem may lie in Revelation 20. In connection with Paul's discussion of the restrainer he writes:

There . . . is a conception in Christian apocalyptic of the power of evil being restrained or held in check by some angelic power until the final outburst of lawlessness before Christ's ultimate victory. Some such idea probably lies behind the apostle's statement here.<sup>16</sup>

The correspondence between 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 20 is sufficiently close to raise the possibility that what John speaks of as a binding of Satan is nothing other than the present restraint upon evil described by Paul.<sup>17</sup> Before

<sup>13</sup>On the reliability of the speeches of Acts as a guide to Paul's theology see F. F. Bruce, *The Speeches in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: Tyndale, n. d.); "The Speeches in Acts—Thirty Years After," *Reconciliation and Hope* (ed. R. Banks; Exeter: Paternoster, 1974) 53-68.

<sup>14</sup>Cf., e.g., 2 Cor 4:4: "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God."

<sup>15</sup>For a good survey of the major interpretations that have been proposed see E. Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: Black, 1977) 295-301.

<sup>16</sup>W. Neil, *The Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1950) 170. See also Vos, *Eschatology*, 129-132; H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of his Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 524, 525.

<sup>17</sup>It is tempting to speculate that the restrainer mentioned by Paul might be the angel Michael, since he appears as the one who defends God's people from those who oppose him in Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1, and Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2 is rooted in the Danielic prophecies. If this identification is accepted it would constitute another link with Revelation 20, for the binding of Satan is pictured as the work of an angel there. Moreover, although the angel who binds Satan is unnamed, there is reason to think that the seer had Michael in view. Revelation 12 describes a heavenly battle between the armies of Michael

passing final judgment on that possibility, however, we will have to examine the similarities between Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians and the third vision in Revelation 20.<sup>18</sup>

We have seen that a comparison of the first vision of Revelation 20 with the teaching of Paul discloses some noteworthy parallels that favor the view that John's account of the incarceration of the devil refers to a curbing of his power that began with the first coming of Christ and will continue until shortly before his return. Interestingly, this interpretation is found in the section of the *Acts of Pilate* that deals with Christ's descent into hell. There we read:

Then the King of glory seized the chief ruler Satan by the head and handed him over to the angels, saying: Bind with iron fetters his hands and his feet and his neck and his mouth. Then he gave him to Hades and said: Take him and hold him fast until my second coming.<sup>19</sup>

Although it is difficult to estimate how old the story of Christ's descent is, it at least provides us with evidence from the patristic period of the belief that Satan was bound as the result of Christ's coming.

## II. THE SECOND VISION

The vision of the binding of Satan for a thousand years in Rev 20:1-3 is followed by a vision of reigning with Christ for a thousand years in vv 4-6. There is a general consensus that the thousand years of the second vision coincides with the thousand years of the first vision, but there is little else in these verses that commands agreement among commentators. Clearly it is impossible to deal with all of the disputed points here. One, however, stands out as more critical than the others, and that is the significance of the coming to life and reigning with Christ mentioned in v 4.

It is not at all clear whose coming to life is envisaged in this verse. One very common view is that the coming to life is experienced only by those who have been beheaded for their faith. This interpretation assumes that the clause "who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands" (v 4c) is a further description of the martyrs mentioned in the preceding clause (v 4b), who may or may not be the occupants of the thrones mentioned at the beginning of the verse (4a).<sup>20</sup> It is also possible that Rev

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and Satan that results in Satan and his forces being cast out of heaven. What happens to the devil according to Revelation 12 exhibits enough similarity to what is pictured in Rev 20:1-3 to prompt the suggestion that a single experience is in view in both. So Hendriksen, *Conquerors*, 171-173; W. J. Harrington, *Understanding the Apocalypse* (Washington/Cleveland: Corpus, 1969) 234. Contra R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 2. 140; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Highlights of the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Broadman, 1972) 66, 67.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. the discussion of the third vision below.

<sup>19</sup>*Acts of Pilate* 22.2; cited from E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* (London: Lutterworth, 1963), 1. 474. This reference is mentioned by Neil (*Thessalonians*, 170), who points out that the word *katechein* is used here and in 2 Thessalonians 2.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (London: Black, 1966) 252-255; Mounce, *Revelation*, 354-356.

20:4c describes a group distinct from the martyrs, who also may or may not be the occupants of the thrones in v 4a.<sup>21</sup> The grammar in the verse is awkward, and it is very difficult to be sure whose coming to life John meant to describe.

Not only is there a problem with the identification of the persons who came to life but there is the related problem of understanding the nature of that coming to life correctly. Indeed this is the central issue around which the other questions of interpretation revolve.

According to premillennialist interpretation, the coming to life is to be understood literally and refers to the bodily resurrection of believers that will take place at the return of Christ and before his millennial reign. This, it is thought, will be followed by a similar resurrection of unbelievers ("the rest of the dead" of v 5) after the millennial reign. The chief consideration favoring this interpretation is the fact that two resurrections are mentioned in v 5 and, since the second is generally believed to be a physical resurrection, it is argued that the first must be as well.<sup>22</sup> At first sight this might appear to be the most natural understanding of the passage, but there are three factors to be taken into account that warn against a hasty acceptance of it. In the first place there is no explicit mention of the return of Christ in vv 4-6, and that would be a surprising omission if the coming to life refers to the resurrection that is to occur at that time. Secondly, the NT does not speak elsewhere of multiple future resurrections or, more specifically, of an interval between the resurrection of the righteous and that of the unrighteous.<sup>23</sup> Finally, it may be questioned whether a literal interpretation is demanded in the context. "To infer . . . that the *ezēsan* of v 4 must be understood of bodily resuscitation," says Swete, "is to interpret apocalyptic prophecy by methods of exegesis which are proper to ordinary narrative."<sup>24</sup> The genre of the literature with which we are dealing is such that it is not at all certain that the most literal interpretation is to be preferred.

The most popular alternative to the premillennial interpretation is the view that the coming to life in v 4 is a figurative description of the souls of believers going to be with the Lord at death.<sup>25</sup> This is understood to be "the first resurrection" (v 5), which is distinguished from the general resurrection that takes place after the millennium. Recently Meredith Kline has made a particularly impres-

<sup>21</sup>Cf. H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (3rd ed.; London: Macmillan, 1909) 262, 263; G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 628, 629, where Ladd contends that three groups are in view in Rev 20:4. In *Revelation* (263-265) Ladd argued that there were two groups: those who occupied the thrones, and the martyrs.

<sup>22</sup>So H. Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Guardian, 1976 [orig. pub. 1875]), 4. 2.732, 733; Walvoord, *Revelation*, 298-300; Ladd, *Revelation*, 265-268.

<sup>23</sup>On the contrary, the idea that the resurrection of the just and unjust occur simultaneously seems to be present in John 5:28, 29 and Acts 24:15.

<sup>24</sup>Swete, *Apocalypse*, 263. Swete goes on to suggest that the author added the comment about the resurrection of the rest of the dead in v 5 to prevent the misunderstanding that he had the general resurrection in mind in v 4.

<sup>25</sup>So Wernecke, *Revelation*, 150; Hendriksen, *Conquerors*, 230-232; J. A. Hughes, "Revelation 20:4-6 and the Question of the Millennium," *WTJ* 35 (1973) 281-302. In connection with the latter cf. R. A. Ostella's response, "The Significance of Deception in Revelation 20:3," *WTJ* 37 (1975) 236-238.

sive case for this interpretation.<sup>26</sup> He perceptively suggests that the relationship between the first and second resurrections is not simply one of temporal sequence but rather of continuity in redemptive history. He takes the position that the adjective "first" in the expression "first resurrection" is used as an antonym of "new," as in the contrast between the first and new heaven and earth in Revelation 21, the first and new covenant administrations in Hebrews, and the first and last Adams in 1 Corinthians 15. If this is correct, the first resurrection is the counterpart in the present age of the resurrection that will take place at Christ's return.<sup>27</sup> Kline further argues that there is a complex paradoxical relationship between death and resurrection in Revelation 20 and 21. He writes: "Just as the resurrection of the unjust is paradoxically identified as 'the second death' so the death of the Christian is paradoxically identified as 'the first resurrection.'" <sup>28</sup> Although Kline develops this thesis with characteristic vigor, one cannot avoid having misgivings about it. Like all attempts to relate the first resurrection to the intermediate state, it faces the objection that the translation of the soul of the believer to heaven at death is not spoken of as a resurrection anywhere else in the NT.

This brings us to the third major interpretation of the first resurrection—i. e., that it relates to initiation into the Christian life in the present age.<sup>29</sup> Kline's insight that the relationship between the two resurrections has to do with the pre-consummation and consummation phases of the kingdom of God is perfectly compatible with this. The regeneration of the believer might well be seen as the counterpart in this age to the physical resurrection in the age to come. Furthermore there is excellent NT precedent for describing Christian initiation as a resurrection. Frequently cited in this connection is John 5:25-29, where an experience of resurrection in the present and one in the future are correlated.<sup>30</sup> Clearly John was acquainted with the practice of using the imagery of resurrection to describe the imparting of spiritual life. Ladd acknowledges that the word *ezēsan* ("they came to life") could refer to a spiritual resurrection at conversion and that it is possible to speak of such a spiritual resurrection and the future, physical resurrection in the same context. He rejects the view that this is the case in Revelation 20, however, on the grounds that there is no indication in the context that *ezēsan* refers to a spiritual reality in v 4 and a literal reality in v 5.<sup>31</sup> Ladd's point that the verb should be interpreted in the same way in both verses unless there is

<sup>26</sup>M. G. Kline, "The First Resurrection," *WTJ* 37 (1975) 366-375. Cf. the response by J. R. Michaels and Kline's rejoinder in *WTJ* 39 (1976) 100-119.

<sup>27</sup>Kline's observations were anticipated to some extent by Swete (*Apocalypse*, 263).

<sup>28</sup>Kline, "Resurrection," 371.

<sup>29</sup>So L. Poellet, *Revelation* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1962) 263, 264; J. M. Kik, *The Eschatology of Victory* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971) 179-190; and N. Shepherd, "The Resurrections of Revelation 20," *WTJ* 37 (1974) 36-38.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. John 11:25, 26; 1 John 3:14.

<sup>31</sup>G. E. Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) 143-147; *Revelation*, 265-267.

a contextual clue indicating otherwise is well taken, but the reference to the millennium may be the very clue he seeks. If the thousand-year reign in vv 4-6 is coterminous with the thousand-year imprisonment of Satan in vv 1-3, and if the original readers of Revelation believed that the binding of Satan referred to the age in which they lived, they would have understood the coming to life and reigning with Christ as a present reality as well. In spite of Ladd's objection it appears that it is possible to interpret the coming to life in v 4 in terms of conversion.<sup>32</sup>

Having indicated the major interpretations of the second vision of Revelation 20 with some of their attendant strengths and weaknesses, we may now turn to a consideration of Paul's teaching on resurrection and reigning with Christ.

The use of the imagery of resurrection to describe Christian initiation appears at several points in the Pauline corpus. In Eph 2:5, for instance, Paul says that God, "even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ."<sup>33</sup> Especially significant is the Pauline teaching that the believer's death and resurrection with Christ are portrayed in baptism. This comes to pointed expression in Col 2:12, 13 where he says, "You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him."<sup>34</sup> The connection with baptism is important because it attests to the pervasiveness of the use of resurrection language to describe Christian initiation. Obviously such terminology was used extensively in early Christianity and would have been understood without difficulty. Also noteworthy is the way in which Paul places present and future resurrection in juxtaposition. In Rom 8:10, 11 he writes: "But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you."<sup>35</sup> Apparently Paul held that there was a continuity between the believer's experience of new life now and his bodily resurrection in the future. It might even be said that in Paul's view the present experience of resurrection is an anticipation of the future resurrection, and the future resurrection is the consummation of the present resurrection.<sup>36</sup> The similarity between Paul's teaching on resurrection and the third interpretation of Reve-

<sup>32</sup>Philip Hughes has propounded the view that the phrase "the first resurrection" in Rev. 20:5 refers to the resurrection of Christ and that the second resurrection is the general resurrection. This explanation is attractive in the light of the connection Paul draws between the resurrection of Christ and that of believers in 1 Corinthians 15 (esp. v 23). Nevertheless it is more natural in Revelation 20 to equate the first resurrection mentioned in v 5 with the coming to life in v 4. Cf. P. E. Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 119-122; "The First Resurrection: Another Interpretation," *WTJ* 39 (1977) 315-318.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Gal 2:19, 20; Col 3:1.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Rom 6:4 and the quotation in Eph 5:14, which may well be an excerpt from a baptismal hymn.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. 2 Tim 2:11-13.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. Vos, *Eschatology*, 156-159; R. B. Gaffin, Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) 33-74.

lation 20 discussed above is obvious and is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that Paul does not speak of more than one future resurrection and never refers to what happens at death as a resurrection. If the original readers of Revelation 20 were familiar with the sort of resurrection theology that we find in Paul, they might well have interpreted "they came to life" in v 4, and "the first resurrection" in v 5, as referring to regeneration. The "second" or "new" resurrection, in which "the rest of the dead" (v 5) would also participate, would then have been seen as the general resurrection at the parousia.

In Rev 20:4 the coming to life is coordinated with a reigning with Christ for a thousand years. We must now investigate Paul's teaching about reigning with Christ to see how it relates to the teaching of the Apocalypse.

In 2 Tim 2:11, 12 Paul cites traditional material that speaks of living and reigning with Christ in the future. There we read: "The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him."<sup>37</sup> Paul's conception of reigning with Christ is not confined to the future, however. In Eph 2:5, 6 he brings together the idea of the believer's present experience of resurrection and his present exaltation when he says that God "made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Commenting on this verse Andrew Lincoln writes: "Christians have been made sharers with Christ in his dominion so that even now in anticipation of the age to come their life is placed in the heavenlies where he reigns."<sup>38</sup> In Pauline thought the NT believer occupies a position between the inception of the eschatological era with the initial coming of Christ and its consummation with his return. In this "semi-eschatological" age he enjoys anticipations of the final state by virtue of his union with Christ, and that includes "actually sharing his life and reign in heaven where he is."<sup>39</sup> The Pauline conception of a present anticipatory reign with Christ and its future counterpart, like his view of the present and future resurrections of the believer, finds a close parallel in the third interpretation of Rev 20:4-6. Since the references to a thousand years in this pericope suggest a reign of limited duration, it could well be that this corresponds to the believer's present experience of reigning with Christ spoken of by Paul.

It is sometimes alleged that Paul teaches, or at least allows for, an intermediate reign with Christ between the present reign and the eternal reign. Oscar Cullmann, for example, understands Paul to teach that Christ's reign began with his ascension but will enter another phase at the parousia, and after that the kingdom will be delivered to the Father.<sup>40</sup> This is based on an exegesis of 1 Cor 15:23, 24 that sees a substantial interval between the resurrection of those who belong to Christ described in v 23 and "the end" when the kingdom is delivered

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Rom 5:17; 1 Cor 6:2, 3. It is debatable whether Rom 5:17 refers exclusively to a future reign. See. J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 1. 198.

<sup>38</sup>A. T. Lincoln, "A Re-examination of 'the Heavenlies' in Ephesians," *NTS* 19 (1972-1973) 472.

<sup>39</sup>Lincoln, "Heavenlies," 474.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. O. Cullmann, "The Kingship of Christ and the Church in the New Testament," *The Early Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956) 112, 113; Ladd, *Questions*, 177-181.

to the Father. With regard to this passage C. K. Barrett writes:

We cannot from verse 24 deduce an interval (accommodating what has been called a *Zwischenreich*, or "Intervening Kingdom"), between the *parousia* and the End (*telos*); it seems rather that the End is thought of as following directly upon the *parousia*, the signal by which it is introduced. Christ's reign is thus placed not between his *parousia* and some "end" distinct from this, but between his resurrection and the *parousia*; that is, during the period of the Church's activity on earth.<sup>41</sup>

Barrett appears to be on solid ground here. The attempt to make room for a provisional messianic kingdom between the return of Christ and the final consummation on the basis of 1 Cor 15:23, 24 is unconvincing.<sup>42</sup> In Paul's eschatology the return of Christ, the physical resurrection of believers, and final judgment appear as a single complex of events, and it is hard to imagine that he would have found congenial the notion of a provisional kingdom following the *parousia*. One certainly does not find explicit reference to such a kingdom in his writings, and it is doubtful whether the structure of his eschatology allows room for it. If this understanding of Paul is correct, preference should be given to an interpretation of the millennial rule that sees it as a present reality. This, as we have seen, is satisfied by the view that the coming to life mentioned in v 4 refers to Christian initiation.

### III. THE THIRD VISION

Vv 7-10 contain the third vision of Revelation 20, and they describe what happens after the thousand-year period discussed in the first six verses. After his release from imprisonment, Satan goes out to deceive the nations and to marshal them for battle against God's people. When apparently on the verge of victory his armies are destroyed by fire from heaven, and the devil himself is thrown into the lake of fire. How does this scenario relate to Pauline eschatology?

Mention has already been made of the similarity between the binding of Satan in Rev 20:1-3 and the restraining power in 2 Thess 2:6, 7. The description of the loosing of Satan, his subsequent activity and his ultimate doom in Rev 20:7-10 is also reminiscent of Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians.<sup>43</sup>

Both passages speak of a restriction that prevents a major outbreak of evil for a limited period of time but that will eventually be removed, with the result that there will be a period of heightened opposition to God that will be brought to an end by divine intervention. Besides having this basic sequence of events in common, Revelation 20 and 2 Thessalonians 2 exhibit a number of similarities of detail. The overarching sovereignty of God is emphasized in both accounts. According to Revelation, Satan is not able to deceive the nations until he is released from prison. Thus he is under divine control in this matter. Similarly, in 2 Thessalonians the outbreak of wickedness is inhibited by the restraining power and,

<sup>41</sup>C. K. Barrett, *From First Adam to Last* (London: Black, 1962) 101.

<sup>42</sup>For a more detailed discussion of 1 Cor 15:23, 24 and other Pauline passages that have been appealed to in support of the "intervening kingdom" idea see E. B. Allo, "Saint Paul et La 'Double Résurrection' Corporelle," *RB* 41 (1932) 187-209; Vos, *Eschatology*, 238-258; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 556-559; and especially W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (New York/Evanston: Harper, 1967) 291-298.

<sup>43</sup>Some of the parallels are discussed briefly in R. H. Mounce, "Pauline Eschatology and the Apocalypse," *EvQ* 46 (1974) 164-166.

referring to the deception of the wicked, Paul even says: "Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false" (2 Thess 2:11). Both accounts also highlight the role of deception in connection with this eschatological rebellion. This comes to pointed expression in Rev 20:3, 8, 10 and in 2 Thess 2:9-12.<sup>44</sup> Not only do the two passages have the theme of deception in common, but in both Satan occupies a prominent position in relation to it. In Revelation he is presented as the one who deceives, and in 2 Thess 2:9 he is seen as the real force behind the lawless one's program of deception. Finally, there is a significant similarity between the Johannine and Pauline conceptions of how the rebellion is terminated. Rev 20:9 refers to fire coming down from heaven to consume God's enemies, and this is followed by a description of the eternal punishment of the devil. 2 Thess 2:8 speaks of the slaying of the lawless one by Christ at his return. In both cases the rebellion is brought to an abrupt end by a sudden divine intervention. But the resemblance is even closer than this, for in the first chapter of 2 Thessalonians Paul, like John, associates the return of Christ with fire and the execution of final judgment on the enemies of God. According to vv 7 and 8, Christ will be "revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." Concerning the unbeliever Paul adds, "They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might."

The parallels between the third vision in Revelation and what Paul says about the eschatological rebellion associated with the man of lawlessness are so numerous and so detailed that it is unlikely that they are coincidental. Certainly there are many differences between the two accounts. For instance, the man of lawlessness has no counterpart in Revelation 20, and the idea of a climactic battle is missing from 2 Thessalonians 2. Though differences exist, they do not amount to contradictions and may largely be explained by the fact that Rev 20:7-10 is built on the prophecies concerning Gog and Magog in Ezekiel while the background for Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2 is to be found in the book of Daniel.<sup>45</sup> Such is the nature of the points of contact between Rev 20:7-10 and 2 Thessalonians 2 that it seems probable that they predict the same events. This provides additional corroboration of the view that the millennium is not a future reality to be initiated by Christ's return but a present reality to be followed by Christ's return.

#### IV. THE FOURTH VISION

The last vision recorded in Revelation 20 is one of final judgment, in which John sees the dead standing before a great white throne while the book of life and a set of books recording the deeds of men are opened. Judgment is executed on the basis of these books, and those whose names are not found in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire. Once again there are some impressive similarities between this section of Revelation 20 and Pauline eschatology.

The judgment depicted in Revelation takes place before a great white throne.

<sup>44</sup>Notice that the verb *planaō* ("to deceive") appears in Rev 20:3, 8, 10 and the cognate noun *planē* ("delusion") is used in 2 Thess 2:11.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. Vos, *Eschatology*, 110-112.

John does not specify who sits on the throne but, since elsewhere in Revelation the throne is occupied by God the Father, the presumption is that this is also true here.<sup>46</sup> Paul refers to a future judgment in Acts 17:31, 2 Cor 5:10 and 2 Tim 4:1, but in each of these verses Christ is portrayed as the final judge. Despite the apparent disagreement about who sits on the throne, we should not conclude that John and Paul contradict one another or that they refer to different acts of judgment. Although Paul more frequently describes Christ as judge, in Rom 14:10 he speaks of "the judgment seat of God," and the similarities between this text and 2 Cor 5:10 compel the conclusion that a single judgment is in view in both. Similarly, although God the Father is normally represented as occupying the throne in Revelation, Christ shares that position with him according to Rev 3:21; 22:1, 3. The slight variations in the way final judgment is pictured in the NT do not force us to postulate a number of distinct judgments.<sup>47</sup>

In John's vision he sees the dead standing before the throne. An account of their resurrection appears to be given in v 13, which says that "the sea gave up the dead in it" and "Death and Hades gave up the dead in them." Books are opened and the dead are judged in the light of their contents. According to v 12 this judgment is based on a set of books that record what they have done, but v 15 says that those whose names are not in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire. The first set of books suggests that judgment is given on the basis of works, whereas the book of life suggests a judgment based on divine grace. John does not spell out the relationship between these two types of judgment, but for our purposes it is sufficient to notice that a similar duality is found in Paul. In Rom 2:6-10 and 2 Cor 5:10 he expressly refers to a future judgment based on what has been done in this life but, on the other hand, no one is more emphatic than Paul in his insistence that salvation is by grace and not works, and he even uses the actual expression "the book of life" in Phil 4:3.<sup>48</sup> Whatever difficulties there may be in integrating the concepts of judgment on the basis of works and judgment on the basis of grace, it is clear that John and Paul agree that both are taken into account in the final judgment.<sup>49</sup>

As far as the issue of the eschatological judgment is concerned, John says that Death and Hades, along with those whose names are not found in the book of life, are thrown into the lake of fire. The symbolic description of the destruction of Death and Hades corresponds to Paul's statement in 1 Cor 15:26: "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (cf. vv 54, 55). For both John and Paul the last scene in the drama of redemption before the inauguration of the eternal state is the elimination of death.<sup>50</sup> With regard to the ultimate destiny of the lost, John and

<sup>46</sup>Cf. Rev 4:2, 3, 9; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 21:5. H. B. Swete comments that "it belongs, perhaps, to the Jewish-Christian character of the Book that in this supreme act prominence is given to the Person of the Father" (*Apocalypse*, 271).

<sup>47</sup>So Ladd, *Revelation*, 271; contra Walvoord, *Revelation*, 306, 307.

<sup>48</sup>On "the book of life" cf. Exod 32:32, 33; Ps 69:28; Dan 12:1; Luke 10:20; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27.

<sup>49</sup>Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 1. 151-153 on the ways in which judgment by works and judgment by grace have been related to one another.

<sup>50</sup>Commenting on Rev 20:14 Caird writes: "Here as in the theology of Paul, Death is the last enemy, whose destruction leaves no further obstacle to the establishment of the eternal reign of God" (*Revelation*, 260).

Paul are also in agreement. While exhibiting a certain reticence in speaking of the fate of the unrighteous, they both refer to the terrible prospect of eternal punishment. According to John they are consigned to the lake of fire, which is represented as a place of eternal torment in v 10. And in 2 Thess 1:9 Paul speaks in analogous terms of “the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.”

#### V. CONCLUSION

Our study of Revelation 20 in the light of Pauline eschatology has revealed many common motifs. To be sure the form in which the teaching of Revelation 20 is presented differs markedly from that used by Paul. Naturally John makes considerably greater use of apocalyptic language and symbolism than does Paul. Bearing in mind the unique literary genre of Revelation, however, and allowing for the use of distinctive imagery, it is possible to see a close correspondence between Revelation 20 and some of the major features of Paul’s eschatological teaching. Indeed, an especially close agreement between them emerges if one equates the millennium of Revelation 20 with the period between the first and second advents of Christ and the coming to life of v 4 with the new birth. Insofar as the relevance of this to the debate about the millennium is concerned, it lends not inconsiderable support to the classic Augustinian position.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup>Cf. Augustine, *The City of God*, 20. 7-15. This conclusion is proffered with due recognition that a final decision on the millennial question must take account of many factors not considered in this paper. Our purpose was limited to seeing which view harmonized best with Paul’s teaching.