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The Pattern of New Testament Truth

A COMMENTARY ON THE REVELATION OF JOHN

by

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Hades = intermed. state

burns with brimstone. The lake of fire is Gehenna, although the word itself is not used in the Revelation. In the New Testament, Hades and Gehenna are clearly distinguished from each other, although the Authorized Version does not make this distinction clear. Hades is the intermediate state between death and the resurrection (Matt. 16:18; Luke 16:23; Acts 2:27) and is sometimes used synonymously with the grave (Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13). It is the equivalent of the Old Testament Sheol. For the Old Testament background for the idea of Gehenna, see the notes on 14:9-10. Because Ge Hinnom or the Valley of Hinnom was a place of human sacrifices, it came to be the hell of final punishment in apocalyptic literature (*Enoch* 27:1ff.; 54:1ff.; 56:3ff.; 90:26; *IV Ezra* 7:36; *Apoc. of Baruch* 59:10; 85:13). The fact that in the gospels hell is pictured not only as a place of fire but also as a place of darkness (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) suggests that both descriptions use metaphorical language drawn from contemporary Judaism to describe final and irremedial judgment. It is also significant that in Paul's important passage about the man of lawlessness, he — the Antichrist — is not to be cast into the lake of fire but is to be slain by the breath of Messiah's mouth (II Thess. 2:8). Obviously this is metaphorical language describing complete destruction. The lake of fire appears again in 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8.

Verse 21. John now speaks in very concise form of the destruction of the armies of Antichrist, consisting of the kings of the earth and those who had been seduced by the false prophet to receive the mark of the beast and to worship its image (vs. 20). All he says is that they were slain by the sword of him who sits upon his horse, the sword that issues from his mouth. Just how John conceived of this slaughter being actually carried out, we cannot say. It is, however, certain that he means to indicate the actual destruction of the hosts of evil. He concludes by resuming the theme of the great supper: all the birds were gorged with their flesh. Some scholars find elements of universalism in the New Testament; this, however, can be done only when certain verses are taken out of their biblical context. The New Testament expects masses of men to remain unrepentant and obdurate in heart, who can anticipate nothing but the judgment and wrath of the Lamb.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE MESSIANIC TRIUMPH

Having related the destruction of Antichrist, John now relates the conquest and destruction of the beast's master — Satan himself. This takes place in two different stages. First, Satan is bound and shut up in the abyss; the first resurrection occurs and the resurrected saints join Christ in his messianic reign of a thousand years. At the end of this interim kingdom, Satan is loosed from his prison and finds the hearts of men over whom Christ has reigned to be still responsive to his enticements. He again deceives them and gathers them together for a second battle against Christ. After his defeat, Satan is cast into Gehenna where the beast and false prophet are; there follows (presumably) the second resurrection, for the dead stand before the throne of God in the final judgment. The wicked join Antichrist and Satan in Gehenna, and the righteous enter into the final state of blessedness in the new heaven and new earth.

The interpretation of this chapter has been a source of great debate and even conflict in the church. Systems of eschatology have often been identified in terms of the way they treat the question of the millennium — the thousand-year reign of Christ. A postmillennial view was popular among interpreters of the historical school, who saw in the Revelation a prophecy of the course of history down to the end. *Postmillennialism* means that the return of Christ would not occur until the Kingdom of God had been established by the church in human history. In this view, chapter 19 does not describe the coming

of Christ but is a very symbolic way of describing the triumph of Christian principles in human affairs and the triumph of Christ through his church. After this "golden age," Christ will return to raise the dead, judge the world, and inaugurate the new eternal order.

Amillennialism is the term used to describe the view of those who do not look for a millennial reign of Christ either before or after his second coming. This way of interpreting Rev. 20 involves the principle of recapitulation, viz., that the structure of Revelation does not relate consecutive events but frequently covers the same ground from different perspectives.

Interpreters of this viewpoint often identify the binding of Satan and his incarceration in the abyss with the victory over Satan accomplished by our Lord in his earthly ministry. It is clear that the gospels do represent Jesus as having bound Satan (Matt. 12:29) and toppled him from his place of power (Luke 10:18); and this victory over Satan is reflected in the Revelation (see note on 12:9); it is an open question as to whether the binding of Satan in Rev. 20 is the same as that in Matt. 12 or is an eschatological event.

Amillennialists usually understand the "first resurrection" in one of two different ways. Some see here the resurrection unto eternal life, which is an altogether spiritual reality that occurs for each believer when he becomes a Christian (John 5:25; Eph. 2:5-6). The reign of Christ with his saints is either the reign of Christ manifested in history through his church, or the spiritual reign of believers with Christ "in the heavenly places" (Eph. 2:6). The thousand-year period is no literal piece of history; it is a symbolic number coextensive with the history of the church on earth between the resurrection of Christ and his return.

A different amillennial interpretation understands the resurrection and reign of the saints with Christ to represent the destiny of the martyrs. Though they were slain, the martyrs did not really die. In fact, they lived and reigned with Christ in heaven. The "millennium" is the church age when martyred saints reign with Christ in heaven, awaiting the resurrection.

Premillennialism is the view that Rev. 20 is altogether eschatological. The coming of Christ will be followed by a binding of Satan and the resurrection of the saints who will join him in a temporal kingdom when he reigns over the earth.

This millennial kingdom will end with a final rebellion and the last judgment.

A variant form of premillennialism is Dispensationalism, which sees the millennial kingdom primarily in terms of God's theocratic promises to Israel. The entire book of Revelation is interpreted in terms of these dispensational presuppositions and is concerned with the fate of restored Israel in the last days and not with the church. In many circles the only form of premillennialism known is Dispensationalism. The form of premillennialism which sees the Revelation as a prophecy of the destiny of the church is not widely held today but it is the theology expounded in the present commentary.¹

A key issue in our understanding of the millennium is whether chapter 20 involves recapitulation, looking back from the end to the whole history of the church. In chapter 12, it is unmistakably clear that the passage looks back to the birth of Messiah. However, in the present passage, no such indication is to be found. On the contrary, chapters 18-20 appear to present a connected series of visions. Chapter 18 tells of the destruction of Babylon; chapter 19 tells of the destruction of the beast and the false prophet; and chapter 20 moves on to tell of the destruction of Satan himself—a destruction accomplished in two stages. Antichrist, the false prophet, and Satan form an evil triumvirate, and are closely linked in chapter 13 (see also 16:13 where they are mentioned together in a single verse).

(4) The Binding of Satan, the Resurrection, and the Millennial Kingdom (20:1-6).

Verse 1. **Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain.** The bottomless pit is the abyss from which demonic locusts swarmed forth to torture men (9:1-6). In that vision an angel had the key to the abyss which he used to open the shaft releasing the demonic locusts. The abyss is also the home

¹For a more detailed discussion of these issues, see G. E. Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), pp. 135-183; and for a more complete presentation of the different schools of eschatology, see John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), pp. 282-290. Walvoord's commentary is of the dispensational type.

of the beast; he "ascends from the bottomless pit" (11:7; see our note on 9:1ff.). In the present instance, Satan is bound and incarcerated in the abyss. This is obviously symbolic language describing a radical curbing of Satan's power and activities.

Verse 2. **And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan.** Satan is here identified by the same complex of names as in 12:9, which depicts a prior overthrow of Satan. It is difficult to understand the **thousand years** for which he was bound with strict literalness in view of the obvious symbolic use of numbers in the Revelation. A thousand equals the third power of ten — an ideal time. While we need not take it literally, the thousand years does appear to represent a real period of time, however long or short it may be.

Verse 3. The meaning of this binding and incarceration is that **he should deceive the nations no more** during the millennial period. This idea of the deception of the nations reappears after Satan is loosed (20:8); he gathers the nations again in a further revolt against the Messiah, like the revolt which has already occurred under Antichrist (13:14; 16:14). This suggests that this binding is different from the binding of Satan accomplished by our Lord in his earthly ministry; the latter had special reference to demon exorcism by which individuals were delivered from satanic bondage (Matt. 12:28-29). We must remember that the very idea of binding Satan is a symbolic way of describing a curbing of his power and activity; it does not mean his complete immobility. His incarceration in the abyss does not mean that all of his activities and powers are nullified, only that he may no longer deceive the nations as he has done through human history and lead them into active aggression against the saints during the thousand years.

The mention of the nations raises a difficult question. One would suppose from the preceding chapters of the Revelation that the entirety of mankind had been involved in the struggle between Christ and the Antichrist. In the days of Antichrist, Satan the great deceiver (12:9) seduced the "kings of the earth" by the glamour and glitter of Babylon to give their allegiance to the devil's representative (16:12, 14; 17:2; 18:3, 9). One might suppose that this satanic deception embraced all the nations of the earth, including both their kings and

their subjects. Now, however, it seems clear that the "kings of the earth" represent a select number who have supported Antichrist. There apparently remain nations outside the scope of this struggle who are now delivered from satanic deception.

The binding of Satan is not punitive but precautionary: **after that he must be loosed for a little while.** After the divine purpose in Christ's millennial reign is accomplished, Satan must be loosed and go about again to deceive the nations. These words are difficult to understand if they are applied to our Lord's binding of Satan in his earthly ministry. The victory he won over Satan was won once and for all. Satan will never be loosed from bondage to Christ won by his death and resurrection.

Verse 4. **Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus, and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands.** This is a very difficult verse. The question is: How many groups does John see? Many interpreters recognize only one group and limit this "first resurrection" to the martyrs, maintaining that God has some special blessing for those who have died because of their faithful witness to Jesus. However, the RSV correctly reflects the Greek idiom, which could be literally translated: "And I saw thrones, and [people] sat upon them, and judgment was given to them; and [I saw] the souls of those who had been beheaded" The language suggests two different groups: one group to whom judgment was given, and a smaller group who are the martyrs of the great tribulation. In Greek, the language is quite ungrammatical, which leads Charles to treat the first phrase as a gloss.² However, it may well be that John actually envisaged two groups: a larger group of all the saints and then a smaller group — the martyrs — whom he singles out for special attention.

This would accord with the biblical theology as a whole, which gives to the saints a share in the eschatological rule of Christ. Christ himself had promised through John the prophet

²R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John* (New York: Scribners, 1920), II, 182.

a share in his throne to all who overcame (3:21); and we found no reason to limit this promise to martyrs. It is a promise to all victorious believers. In 2:26 the promise was given, "He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father." Here again is a clear promise that the saints will share Christ's authority and rule. The promise of reigning with Christ as king is repeated in 5:9-10, and it is addressed to all the saints: "Thou . . . didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth." The saints constitute a kingdom not because they are the people over whom Christ reigns, but because they share his reign. Daniel's vision of the Son of man sees not only the throne of God but a plurality of thrones (Dan. 7:9), and this is interpreted to mean that "the kingdom and the dominion . . . shall be given to the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them" (Dan. 7:27). Jesus promised his disciples, "In the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). Paul says, without explanation, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (I Cor. 6:2). The verb "to judge" (*krino*) can have the broader meaning of "to rule,"³ and this is probably the meaning in I Cor. 6:2.⁴ In the Revelation, the meaning of the judgment given to those seated upon thrones is further defined in the last sentence of vs. 4: "they came to life again, and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

Many commentators emphasize the statement "I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded," insisting that the passage has reference to the fate of the martyrs in the intermediate state rather than in the resurrection. The souls of the martyrs have already appeared in the Revelation. Upon the

³See F. Büchsel in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), III, 923.

⁴See A. Robertson and H. Plummer, *First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (New York: Scribners, 1911), p. 111. "It is in the Messianic Kingdom that the saints will share Christ's reign over the created universe."

opening of the fifth seal, John saw the souls of the martyrs under the altar (6:9ff.), asking the plaintive question, "How long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood?" They were told to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants should be complete. Now, John again sees the souls of the martyrs; but he immediately adds, "they came to life again." This is the most important word in the entire passage. The exegete must decide whether or not it means resurrection; and upon this decision will be determined how he interprets the entire passage. The present commentator is convinced that it means resurrection (see note below), and for this reason, no weight can be placed on the statement that John saw the souls of the martyrs.

Some commentators see three groups in this passage: the saints in general (those who sat in the thrones), the martyrs (those beheaded), and the living saints (those who had not worshiped the beast nor received its mark). It is a fact that the language of the Greek text is irregular and could allow for such an interpretation. "Souls" is in the accusative case, and the following phrase — "who had not worshiped the beast" — is in the nominative. But it is John's grammatical style to be careless about his cases and to follow oblique cases by a nominative. Furthermore, the following statement — "they came to life again" — governs both groups and cannot be applied to living saints.

The phrase "their testimony to Jesus" (literally, "because of the testimony of Jesus") is difficult to interpret. See the note on 19:10 and references. Often this idiom in John is a subjective genitive and refers to the witness which Jesus bore to the salvation of God which his followers accepted (see 1:2, 9). In the present passage, as in 19:10, the objective genitive fits the context better. The faithful saints had been beheaded because of the testimony they had borne to Jesus Christ.

The phrase "they came to life again" is the translation of a single Greek word, *ezesan*. The crux of the entire exegetical problem is the meaning of this word. It is true that the word can mean entrance into spiritual life (John 5:25), but it is not used of any "spiritual resurrection" of the souls of the righteous at death. The word is, however, used of bodily resurrection in John 11:25; Rom. 14:9; Rev. 1:18; 2:8; 13:14; and most commentators admit that this is the meaning in vs. 5:

"The rest of the dead did not come to life again until the thousand years were ended." If *ezesan* in vs. 4 designates spiritual life at conversion, or life after death in the intermediate state, we are faced with the problem of the same word being used in the same context with two entirely different meanings, with no indication whatsoever as to the change of meaning.

No objection can be raised on the ground that it is not possible to speak of a spiritual and of a literal reality in the same context. Jesus does this very thing in speaking of the dead and of the resurrection (John 5:25-29). However, this passage does not provide a true analogy to the passage in the Apocalypse. There is this all-important difference. In the gospel, the context itself provides the clues for the spiritual interpretation in the one instance and the literal in the other. Concerning the first group who are to "live," the hour has already come. This makes it clear that the reference is to those who are spiritually dead and who enter into life upon hearing the voice of the Son of God. The second group, however, are "in the tombs," i.e., they are not the spiritually dead but the physically dead. Such dead are to be brought back to life again. Part of them will experience a "resurrection of life," i.e., a bodily resurrection which will lead them to the full experience of the spiritual life that is already theirs. The rest will be revived to a "resurrection of condemnation," i.e., to the execution of the decree of divine judgment which rests upon them already because they have rejected the Son of God and the life he came to bring (John 3:18, 36). The language of these words makes it indubitable that Jesus wishes his hearers to know that he is speaking of two experiences of "living": a present spiritual resurrection, and a future bodily resurrection.

In Rev. 20:4-6, there is no such contextual clue for a similar variation of interpretation. The language of the passage is quite clear and unambiguous. There is no necessity to interpret either word spiritually in order to introduce meaning to the passage. At the beginning of the millennial period, part of the dead come to life; at its conclusion, the rest of the dead come to life. There is no evident play upon words. The passage makes perfectly good sense when interpreted literally. Natural, inductive exegesis suggests that both uses of *ezesan* are to be

taken in the same way, referring to a literal resurrection. We can do no better than to repeat the oft-quoted words of Henry Alford,

If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned, where certain *psychai ezesan* at the first, and the rest of the *nekroi ezesan* only at the end of a specified period after that first, — if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means *literal* rising from the grave; — then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything.⁵

There is an obvious parallelism between this passage and Dan. 7.

Dan. 7	Rev. 20
9. As I looked, the thrones were placed	Then I saw thrones
10. The court sat in judgment	seated upon them were those to whom judgment was committed
22. Judgment was given to the saints of the Most High	mitted
And the time came when the saints received the kingdom.	They came to life again and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁶

They . . . reigned with Christ a thousand years. Our note on the earlier part of the verse proves that the idea of saints sharing Christ's messianic reign is a common one in the New Testament. However, this is the only passage in the entire Bible which teaches a temporal *millennial* kingdom, and there is only one other passage in the New Testament which may envisage a temporal reign of Christ between his parousia and the *telos*: I Cor. 15:23-24.⁷

Verse 5. **The rest of the dead did not come to life again (*ezesan*) until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.** The *first resurrection* refers back to vs. 4 to the

⁵Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1872), IV, 732.

⁶See Hans Bietenhard, *Das tausendjährige Reich* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1955), pp. 21-2.

⁷For a discussion of this passage, see G. E. Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), pp. 177ff.; for chiliasm in Jewish apocalyptic, see *ibid.*, pp. 159ff.

souls of the saints and martyrs who came to life. Commentators usually recognize that the resurrection of "the rest of the dead" is the eschatological resurrection. Emphasis is often laid on the fact that John does not speak of a *second* resurrection; but it is implied in the statement, "the rest of the dead did not come to life again [as the participants in the first resurrection had done] until the thousand years were ended." As a matter of fact, if the first resurrection is different from the resurrection of vs. 5, "the rest of the dead" never do come to life as the others had done. Two resurrections are implied in the twofold use of *ezesan*; and a "second resurrection" is described if not labeled as such in vs. 12. The New Testament does not elsewhere clearly teach a twofold resurrection, although it is implied in such passages as John 5:29 and I Cor. 15:24-25. Paul nowhere in his epistles speaks of the resurrection of unbelievers; he is altogether concerned with the destiny of those who are in Christ. If the first resurrection includes all saints and martyrs, "the rest of the dead" includes all who have not known and believed in Christ. Their resurrection does not occur until after the millennium; it is described in vs. 12, when the rest of the dead are raised to stand before God's throne of judgment.

Verse 6. **Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power.** The "first death" is the death of the body which all men, except those living at the parousia, experience. The second death is eternal death in the lake of fire (vs. 14; see Matt. 10:28 where the death of the body and soul are contrasted). These blessed ones are called **priests of God and of Christ** because they have access into the immediate presence of God, and because they also share his reign in his messianic kingdom (1:6; 5:10). Just how we are to conceive of their participation in Christ's reign we cannot know. The saints will be in their resurrection bodies, while the people who make up "the nations" (vs. 8) are living out their natural existence. Many have taken offense at the thought of such mingling of the redeemed and unredeemed orders. We can only suggest that after the first Easter morning, Jesus in his resurrection body enjoyed forty days of intercourse with his disciples (Acts 1:3). God has yet many marvels in his redemptive purpose.

(5) The Final Destruction of Satan and Death (20:7-15).

Verses 7-8. **And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth.** This verse possibly suggests the reason for the temporal reign of Christ during the millennium. A burning theological question is the justice of God in judgment and condemnation. Paul is concerned "that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God" (Rom. 3:19). While God does not need to vindicate his righteousness, Paul is concerned to make it crystal clear that God has so dealt with men that those who suppress the truth are without excuse (Rom. 1:20). In the present instance, even after Christ himself has reigned over men during the millennium, when the deceiver is set free from his prison, he finds the hearts of men still responsive to his seductions. This makes it plain that the ultimate root of sin is not poverty or inadequate social conditions or an unfortunate environment; it is the rebelliousness of the human heart. The millennium and the subsequent rebellion of men will prove that men cannot blame their sinfulness on their environment or unfortunate circumstances; in the final judgment, the decrees of God will be shown to be just and righteous.

Gog and Magog are biblical names for the nations who are rebellious against God and hostile to his people. In Ezek. 38:1, Gog is the prince of the land of Magog and comes from the north in the latter days to do battle with God's people. In Revelation, both words represent the hostile nations.

While the New Testament has little to say about a temporal messianic kingdom, Ezekiel's prophecy has the same basic structure as Rev. 20. Chapters 36-37 picture the salvation of Israel, restored to their land and blessed with the messianic salvation (see 36:24-29). The goal of the prophetic expectation, "you shall be my people, and I will be your God" (Ezek. 36:28) is now realized. David, God's servant, will rule over his people, and God will dwell in their midst (37:25, 28). However, the blessing of the messianic kingdom is not the end. The kingdom is disturbed by an eschatological war led by Gog from Magog (chapters 38-39); and only after the divine victory do we have a picture of the eternal new order, which in Ezekiel is described

in terms of a rebuilt temple in the new Jerusalem (chapters 40-48).⁸ This structure of a temporal messianic kingdom followed by the eternal kingdom in the new age is the same as that in Revelation.

Verse 9. The armies of evil march up against the camp of the saints and the beloved city as though to do battle with them, but no battle ensues. Fire came down from heaven and consumed them. The word for "camp" is properly a military installation; but here, it is used of the residence of the saints. Clearly, they are pictured as having their capital in the beloved city, Jerusalem. No actual battle occurs; God intervenes and destroys those who would destroy his people. It is impossible, in view of progressive revelation, to believe with the dispensationalists that the Jewish temple is to be restored and the literal bloody sacrificial system reinstated. These belong to the old covenant which has passed away (Heb. 8:13). However, the saints in the millennium must have some center, and there is no difficulty in supposing that the millennial rule of Christ will have an earthly center in the holy city in the holy land.⁹

Verse 10. Again as in the battle of Armageddon, the emphasis in the divine victory is not on the defeat of the hosts of men who have fought against the Messiah and his people, but upon the destruction of the powers which have stood behind them. The devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet were. Here is the final destruction of the ultimate root of evil. Jesus himself had spoken of "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). Hell was planned not for men but for the devil; but those who follow him must share his destiny.

They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. It is impossible to visualize the actual terms of this verse. The devil and his angels are spirits, not physical beings; fire belongs to the material physical order. How a lake of literal fire can bring everlasting torture to nonphysical beings is impossible to imagine. It is obvious that this is picturesque language describing a real fact in the spiritual world: the final and ever-

⁸See G. Ernest Wright, "The Faith of Israel" in *The Interpreter's Bible*, I, 372.

⁹W. H. Simcox, *The Revelation of S. John the Divine* (Cambridge: University Press, 1893), p. 185.

lasting destruction of the forces of evil which have plagued men since the garden of Eden.

Verse 11. After the destruction of Satan, John witnesses the final judgment, the destruction of the old order, and the inauguration of the eternal state.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it. This is the preparation for the final judgment. Some interpreters are greatly interested in the time and place of judgment and theorize that there are several different and distinct judgments taught in the New Testament: the judgment of the nations to decide which nations enter the millennial kingdom (Matt. 25:31-40); the judgment of believers before the judgment seat of Christ in heaven to receive their rewards for what they have done in the body (II Cor. 5:10); and the great white throne judgment of the present passage which is a judgment only of unbelievers. Such a scheme of eschatology cannot be proved but rests upon unsupported inferences. For instance, the final issue of the judgment of the nations is not the millennial kingdom but is either eternal life or eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46). This is clearly the final judgment which decides the eternal destiny of men. The judgment seat of Christ is also the judgment seat of God before which all believers must stand (Rom. 14:10). Scripture is not primarily interested in what concerns many students of the Bible, viz., in a scheme or chronology of prophetic events, and such efforts to differentiate between several different judgments do not have sound biblical support. However, the fact of judgment is solidly rooted in biblical thought. Paul affirms it unequivocally (Rom. 2:6-10).

The throne is *white* displaying the glory and majesty of God. John does not identify "him who sat upon it," but usually in the Revelation, it is God who sits on the throne (5:1, 7, 13).

From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. This statement undoubtedly involves poetic imagery; in the face of the glory and grandeur of the presence of God, the natural universe flees away. But it is more than poetry; it is the expression of an important theological truth. This statement takes us back to the first anticipation of the end at the opening of the sixth seal (6:12ff.). This describes a great cosmic convulsion when the sun became black, the moon became like blood, the stars fell, the sky vanished,

and the mountains were shaken (see our note *in loc.*). This announcement of the end is now fulfilled in the statement of our passage.

Behind such statements is a profound theology. Earth was created to be the dwelling place of man, and man as a creature of God stands in solidarity with the rest of creation. Therefore, the created world is pictured as sharing the results of man's sin, finding itself in bondage to decay, groaning and travailing until now (Rom. 8:19-22). The old order is a fallen order, laboring under the curse of man's rebellion. Therefore, before the new redeemed order can be inaugurated, God's judgment must fall upon the old order; but this judgment is not one of destruction but the prelude to re-creation. This motif of the judgment of nature and the new creation runs throughout the Old Testament prophets and is pictured with great variety of detail, but always with the same basic motif. Sometimes the picture is one of a simple regeneration of the old order as it stands with the curse lifted (Isa. 11:6-9); sometimes it is pictured in terms of a complete transformation in a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65:17).¹⁰ In the prophetic hope, there is considerable variety of emphasis on the elements of continuity and discontinuity between the old and the new orders; in the New Testament, the element of discontinuity is more strongly emphasized than in the Old Testament, except in Isa. 65:6. Thus Peter anticipates a dissolution of the heavens and the melting of the elements with fire. However, the end of this judgment upon the old order is not its final destruction but the emergence of a new order. "We wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (II Pet. 3:13). The same is true of John's vision. The old order passes away to make room for the new.

Verse 12. John saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. This statement clearly implies, if it does not explicitly affirm, the resurrection of the "rest of the dead" (vs. 5) who did not experience the first resurrection.

Books were opened . . . and the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. John does not further identify these books, but the last phrase suggests that they are the books in which have been recorded the deeds

¹⁰This theme is worked out in detail by the present author in his book, *Jesus and the Kingdom* (Waco: Word Books, 1964), chap. 2.

of men, both good and evil. Books of judgment are referred to in Dan. 7:10. The New Testament is insistent on the justice of God's final judgment in that it will not be arbitrary and capricious, but based squarely upon the deeds of men (Rom. 2:6ff.). Jewish apocalyptic picked up this idea and frequently mentions the books in which God has kept a record of men's deeds (*Enoch* 90:20; *IV Ezra* 6:20; *Apoc. Baruch* 24:1).

It is significant that the text does not intimate that anyone was saved on the basis of his good works. This is different from Jewish apocalyptic. In the *Testament of Abraham* (13) two angels record men's deeds; on the right good deeds, and on the left evil deeds. Another angel holds scales in which he weighs the deeds of men. Another angel tests men's deeds through fire; if their works are burned, they are carried off to a place of punishment; if their works are not burned, they are declared righteous.

Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. If no one is saved by his works, there is yet another possibility: the book of life. This includes the names of all who have believed in Christ. The idea of a book in which the names of the righteous are written goes back to the Old Testament (Exod. 32:32-33; Dan. 12:1), and appears several times in the New Testament (Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 21:27).

Verse 13. And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. "Hades" (improperly translated "hell" in AV) is the abode of souls in the intermediate state and is here used synonymously with the grave (cf. 6:8). John does not mean to say that men who died on land and on the sea experienced a different fate after death; he merely means to affirm that *all* the dead, however they died, were included in this final judgment (see note on 19:20). When John says that the sea, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, he obviously means resurrection, even though this is not explicitly affirmed. Certainly, we are not to think of the souls of those who had met death by drowning remaining in the sea until the time of judgment. John merely means that all who have drowned, all who have suffered death, are revived to stand before God in judgment.

Verse 14. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This statement makes it clear that the very idea of a lake of fire is expressed symbolically. Death and Hades are

personified and pictured as being cast into the lake of fire along with the beast, the false prophet, and Satan. Obviously, it is impossible to construe this literally. John means to affirm the final and complete destruction of death and the grave. It is true that Christ has "abolished," i.e., broken the power of death by his own death and resurrection (II Tim. 1:10); but the saints still die. All that eternal life means cannot be experienced until death itself is banished from the universe.

This is the second death, the lake of fire. This statement looks forward to the next verse. The idea of a second death for Death does not make much sense. John's mind moves from the destruction of Death to the judgment of the wicked.

Verse 15. **And if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.** Apparently no one was saved by his works — i.e., on the basis of the good things which he had done which had been recorded in the books (vs. 12). Salvation is to be found alone through the Lamb of God. This accords with the teaching of Paul that "none is righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10), and that justification can be found not by works of righteousness but only through faith in Christ.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE CONSUMMATION

The chapter divisions in the Bible often do not coincide with the units of thought. The first unit in chapter 21 is directly continuous with chapter 20, giving a brief statement of the inauguration of the new age with its new Jerusalem (21:1-8). There follows another vision which describes in detail the new Jerusalem (21:9 — 22:5) whose descent has already been mentioned. After the final vision is appended an epilogue (22:6-21), which concludes the entire book.

(6) The New Creation (21:1-8).

Verse 1. **Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.** This dissolution of the old order — the disappearance of the earth and sky — has already been announced (20:11). In its place John sees a new heaven and a new earth. Throughout the entire Bible, the ultimate destiny of God's people is an earthly destiny. In typical dualistic Greek thought, the universe was divided into two realms: the earthly or transitory, and the eternal spiritual world. Salvation consisted of the flight of the soul from the sphere of the transitory and ephemeral to the realm of eternal reality.¹ However, biblical thought always places man on a redeemed earth, not in a heavenly realm removed from earthly existence.

¹For this view as found in Plato, Plutarch, and Philo, see G. E. Ladd, *The Pattern of New Testament Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 13-31.