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THE RETURN OF CHRIST:
INTERPRETING REVELATION
BY ITS ALLUSIONS

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ABSTRACT

Revelation is surely the most difficult book to interpret in the NT. Yet it is filled with OT allusions which can be especially helpful in understanding it. In this paper, the use of allusions to interpret the book is illustrated for Rev 19:11-21, the passage describing the second coming of Christ. It is suggested that these allusions and other contextual considerations support a premillennial eschatology.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Although the author is in agreement with the doctrinal statement of IBRI, it does not follow that all the viewpoints espoused in this paper represent official positions of IBRI. Since one of the purposes of the IBRI report series is to serve as a preprint forum, it is possible that the author has revised some aspects of this work since it was first written.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Revelation is probably the most perplexing and difficult work in the whole canon of Scripture. Some interpretations reject its inspiration, but even ignoring these, there are still a larger number of really different interpretations than for any other book in the Bible. Some see its overall fulfillment mostly in the first centuries of the Christian era; others, mostly near the end. Still others see the events described happening throughout church history; yet others deny the visions correspond with specific historical events at all. The "millennium" of Revelation 20 is placed in the future by some and in the present by others. For some it comes before Christ's return, but others put it after.

In regard to details the same puzzling variety is seen. We are not surprised by divergences in explaining such mysteries as the name of the beast, apparently coded by the number 666; or the identity of the harlot, a city on seven hills with the name of the ancient flatland city of Babylon. Nor, perhaps, should we be alarmed that the "locusts" of chapter 9 have been interpreted historically as the Turks, supernaturally as demons, and technologically as helicopter gunships! Of more concern is the fact that the "angels" of the seven churches have been seen not only as angels, but also as human messengers, pastors, bishops and even the "spiritual realities" of the churches themselves. Still worse, the rider of the first horse in chapter 6 has been identified as diversely as Christ and Antichrist. If we can't tell the good guys from the bad guys, we really are in trouble!

In view of such diversity, one is tempted to give up in despair or disgust and turn to more worthwhile pursuits. Yet if we accept the Bible as God's word and Revelation as a part of that Bible, then this response is inconsistent with our profession and with God's revealed nature as the One who has made all Scripture profitable. In addition, Revelation promises a blessing (1:3) for all who will read and obey it -- perhaps because God knew we would be tempted to quit.

But how can we obey it if we don't understand it? How, for instance, can we avoid "the mark of the beast" if we don't know what it is? Could it be Sunday observance (as Seventh-Day Adventists claim), or the use of credit cards, or membership in the World Council of Churches, or an international computer identification code?

Doubtless, some of the book is not going to be understood until it happens. And anything we *have* to know in Scripture is sufficiently clear -- or will be, when the time comes. Biblical Christianity, after all, is not a puzzle to be solved or a cult for the clever; it is a Redeemer to be trusted and a life to be lived.

Still, the task of understanding Revelation is not to be ignored. Paul spent only a few weeks planting the church in Thessalonica, yet he still took time to teach them eschatology. We are nearer the end than they were, so the subject should hardly be less important for us.

But how do we begin? If we start with the wrong system of interpretation, we might never break free of it to find out what the book is really about. Rather than taking a chance on guessing the right system and getting into it from the start, we should use some sort of inductive approach which is flexible enough that our misconceptions may be corrected as we study. Even our hermeneutical principles may need to be open to revision as our study of the book progresses.

One approach to Revelation which has promise along these lines is the comparison of Scripture with Scripture -- of one part of Revelation with another, and with other parts of the Bible. This technique seems to be commended frequently in Scripture itself, e.g., Acts 17:11; Ps 119:97-100; John 5:39; 2 Tim 3:15-16. But what Scriptures do we compare with Revelation, since we might easily go astray if we equate passages which are actually unrelated? Here, it seems, the book of Revelation provides something of its own guidelines. Though the book does not have any formal quotations from Scripture, it does have numerous allusions. For instance, although the United Bible Societies' *Greek New*

Testament (3rd ed.) lists no OT quotations in Revelation, its footnotes (lower set) give over 725 cross references to passages in the OT and other NT books. Most of these are verbal allusions or topics apparently similar. Thus, we suggest, a reasonable way to approach the book would be to collect as many such references as possible for each passage and then examine each one carefully to see if it can shed light on the passage. This is what we propose to do here.

Unfortunately, such a study for the whole book of Revelation could easily take years. In this paper we shall make a start on such a project by examining only one connected passage, namely Rev 19:11-21. We shall seek to locate parallel materials in the OT, elsewhere in Revelation, and elsewhere in the NT, discussing those which seem to have some relevance and trying to understand our chosen passage thereby.

Why did we choose Rev 19:11-21? Primarily because it narrates the second coming of Christ, a central theme of Revelation and of eschatology as a whole. Also the passage has a reasonable number of cross references; according to my count of UBS footnotes, there are two per verse, slightly above the book average of 1.8. We shall suggest others not listed there as well. In addition, the passage impinges on the millennial question without being wholly taken up with such.

Our format will be to move through the passage verse by verse, noting parallel passages and discussing each, seeking to draw things together at the end. In the commentary which follows, I use my own rather literalistic translation.

COMMENTARY

(11) AND I SAW HEAVEN STANDING OPEN, AND
 BEHOLD! A WHITE HORSE! AND HE WHO SAT UPON IT
 WAS CALLED FAITHFUL AND TRUE, AND IN
 RIGHTEOUSNESS HE JUDGES AND WAGES WAR.

The form "I saw" is extremely common in Revelation, far too

frequent to be a divider only of major structures. It is probably to be read naturally as a reminder that John actually saw these things, even though he was "in the Spirit," that is, having a vision of some sort.

The reference to "heaven opened" is somewhat like Rev 4:1; there, however, a door is opened to admit John to heaven, whereas here heaven is opened to let Christ and his armies come to earth. Clearer parallels are thus found in references to heaven being opened at the descent of the Spirit as a dove during Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:16), and when the sheet is lowered in Peter's vision (Acts 10:11). The idea of God intervening into human affairs seems to be the emphasis here.

The "white horse" finds its closest verbal parallel in Rev 6:1, but the meaning of that passage is more disputed than this one is. In our passage the rider is clearly identified as Jesus Christ. Consequently our passage sheds light on 6:1 rather than vice versa.

The color white is frequently used in Revelation. Where its significance is discernable, it seems to symbolize righteousness or purity (see esp. Rev 3:4,5,18; 7:13-14). The OT background for white garments also includes the idea of purity as one possible meaning (Isa 1:18). White horses occur twice in the visions of Zechariah (1:8, 6:3,8), but they are grouped with horses of other colors and no point is made of the color differences.

The phrase "one who sits upon" is used frequently in Revelation for God the Father and occasionally for Christ. The object is regularly the throne, a standard symbol for rule, rather than a horse as here. In antiquity, the horse was not used in agriculture, nor as the common means of transportation, but principally for warfare. As the context goes on to show, Christ is here coming to wage war.

The epithet "faithful and true" has been used already in Rev 3:14 to describe Jesus' testimony, presumably during his earthly ministry. Here, by contrast, the phrase seems to refer to his promise-keeping and righteousness as he comes to avenge and

deliver.

Though we shall later see thrones set up (20:4) and judgment pronounced (20:11-15), it is probably better in this context to think of judging as avenging by means of warfare.

Numerous OT passages speak of the Lord coming "to judge the world in righteousness" (e.g., Ps 9:8; 96:13; 98:9). The "shoot from the stem of Jesse" will also judge righteously, according to Isa 11:4, a context of deliverance and vengeance which has several parallels with our own, as we shall see below. A similar context in Zech 14:3 speaks of the LORD going out to fight the nations "as in a day of battle."

(12) NOW HIS EYES WERE A FLAME OF FIRE, AND
UPON HIS HEAD WERE MANY CROWNS, AND HE HAD
A NAME WRITTEN WHICH NO ONE KNEW EXCEPT
HIMSELF.

The reference to Jesus' eyes is paralleled in the opening Christophany of Rev 1:14. It is apparently explained, by combining Rev 2:18 and 23, as depicting his ability to search the hearts. The closest verbal parallel in the OT is the angelic description of Dan 10:6. While this may be a theophany, the person is probably only an angel since he is helped by Michael in 10:13. In view of John's two attempts to worship angels (Rev 19:10; 22:8), it is not unreasonable to suggest that their physical appearance is overwhelming and it is not always easy to distinguish them from God.

Less parallel verbally but probably closer in content is Isa 11:3-4. Here the prophet seems to be saying that the Messiah will not be deceived by appearance or hearsay, but he will judge rightly. This seems to be the thought of Rev 2:23, above, and is probably the significance of Christ's fiery eyes in our passage.

The "many diadems" of Christ may be contrasted with the dragon's seven (Rev 12:3) and the beast's ten (13:1). In our own context, Christ will later be called "King of kings and Lord of

lords." As he rules over other crowned persons, he effectively has many crowns himself. Satan's offer to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world (Matt 4:8-9) has been rejected. Now the Father has given him these kingdoms (Ps 2:6-9; Dan 7:13-14; perhaps this is the significance of the book in Rev 5 and 10: Messiah's commission, or his title-deed to the earth) and he is coming to take possession.

We are not told where Christ's "name" is written, but the context suggests either on his head or his diadems. The former would parallel the beast and the harlot, both of which have names on their heads (13:1; 17:5). As their names seem to characterize them, so perhaps Christ's name characterizes him.

What does it mean that no one knows the name except himself? Obviously this ignorance could not include God. A similarly mysterious name is given those who conquer in Rev 2:17, but that is not explained either. Perhaps the idea is that the name is *now* unknown, but it will be revealed at his coming. This suggestion would parallel the unknown time of the Lord's return (Mark 13:32) and perhaps the mysterious utterance of the seven thunders (Rev 10:4) and the secrets of paradise which Paul could not reveal (2 Cor 12:4). In this case, 1 Cor 2:9 would summarize the basic idea: the eschaton will be beyond present experience or imagination. Here specifically, the eschatological revelation of who Christ is will surpass our expectations.

Another possibility is that Jesus (being God) is so far above us that we cannot *ever* fully know him. Paul speaks of Christ being given the "name above every name" (Php 2:9-10). The angelic theophany announcing Samson's birth (Jdg 13:21-22) says his own name is "wonderful" or "incomprehensible" (13:18); the same epithet is applied to the Messiah in Isa 9:6. This idea is clearly Scriptural as well. In either case, Revelation here reminds us that we don't know it all.

(13) AND HE WAS DRESSED IN A GARMENT DIPPED IN BLOOD, AND HIS NAME WAS CALLED "THE WORD OF

GOD."

The manuscripts of Revelation differ on whether Christ's garment is "dipped/dyed" or "sprinkled" with blood. In the latter case an allusion to blood-sprinkling in atonement might be involved (cp Ex 24:8; Lev 16:14-15). In either case the allusion to Isa 63:1-3 (where both ideas occur) is unmistakable. The passage is striking in that God appears to be wearing the blood-stained garment (vv 5-6) and Revelation applies it to Jesus. The parallels between the two passages are substantial: both picture the day of God's wrath and redemption; both mention the actor's righteousness; both use a winepress analogy; perhaps both picture the actor as doing all the avenging by himself.

Yet in Isa 63 the speaker's robe is bloody because he has (already) trampled his foes; it is *their* blood which stains his robe. In our passage, it appears that Christ has not yet trampled them, as that is what he is coming to do. Is the color of the robe symbolic of what is about to do, or could it be Christ's own blood which colors his robe? In the former case, Christ's vengeance is emphasized; in the latter, his atoning work. If the latter is the case, then perhaps a contrast is also being made with the saints: their robes have been made white in his blood (Rev 7:13), but he has bloodied his garments in cleansing theirs! Either or both of these two ideas would be appropriate in a passage on both deliverance and vengeance.

Only here and in John's Gospel do we have unmistakable references to Jesus as the "Word of God." John 1:14,18 gives what seems nearest to an explanation of this term: Jesus is the one who explains God. I suggest an analogy with human behavior here. Just as among men no one knows what another is thinking unless the other reveal it, so with God. As our word reveals ourselves to others, so God's word reveals himself to mankind. Jesus is thus the epistemological mediator between God and man.

In addition, the close connection between the Word and creation in John 1:1-5 reminds us of the Genesis refrain "and God said." Jesus is the ontological mediator between God and creation. We

can thus combine these ideas under the category "mediator." Jesus is God's mediator in creation, revelation, redemption and now, in our passage, in judgment. With a word he will slay God's enemies, pronounce judgment, condemn or vindicate.

(14) AND THE ARMIES [THAT ARE] IN HEAVEN
FOLLOWED HIM ON WHITE HORSES, BEING DRESSED IN
PURE WHITE LINEN.

On several occasions the coming of the Lord is described as accompanied by "the holy ones." Among these, Zech 14:5 is clearly eschatological, with a context of spectacular geological and astronomical events (14:6,7,8,10), the LORD becoming king over all the earth (14:9), the supernatural destruction of enemies (14:12-15) and (apparently) the rescue of his people (14:11,14). Another such passage, Jude 14-15, also seems eschatological, though the aorist must be understood as a translation-equivalent of the Hebrew prophetic perfect. Less likely is Deut 33:2-3, where the LORD comes from Sinai, Seir and Paran. This is somewhat reminiscent of Isa 63:1, where the speaker comes from Edom, but in Deuteronomy the context rather suggests the theophany at Sinai. This passage is probably a source of the idea, found in both the NT and rabbinic literature, that the Law was mediated through angels (Acts 7:53; Heb 2:2).

Who are the armies? In the OT the phrase "armies of heaven" is frequently used for stars (e.g., Deut 4:19; Ps 33:6), but sometimes clearly for angels (1 Kings 22:19; Neh 9:6), and there are a number of passages where it is unclear which of the two is intended (e.g., Isa 34:4; Dan 8:10-11). I know of no examples where humans are included. Yet Paul speaks of Jesus "bringing with him" believers who have died (1 Thess 4:14) and Rev 2:27 indicates that believers will take part in shattering the nations. Probably both humans and angels are included.

White horses and white garments have already been discussed above (verse 11). Righteousness and purity seem to be the emphasis here.

(15) AND FROM HIS MOUTH A SHARP SWORD GOES FORTH, THAT WITH IT HE MIGHT STRIKE THE NATIONS, AND HE HIMSELF WILL SHEPHERD THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AND HE HIMSELF WILL TREAD THE WINEPRESS OF THE WINE OF THE WRATH OF THE ANGER OF GOD THE ALMIGHTY.

Here Christ is pictured rather grotesquely with a sword coming from his mouth. This picture, given previously in Rev 1:16 and 2:12,16, seems to demand a figurative interpretation, as does the "Lamb standing as if slain" of Rev 5:6.

The figure of God's word as a sword appears in Heb 4:12 and Eph 6:17. The destructive power of even the human tongue is also so pictured in Ps 57:4.

My soul is among lions,/ I must lie among those who breathe forth fire,/ Even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows,/ And their tongue a sharp sword.

However, the closest parallel to our passage occurs in the Servant section of Isaiah, where the Servant says that God has made his "mouth like a sharp sword" (Isa 49:2). Though once called Israel (49:3), the Servant is the one who will regather and restore Israel (49:5-6) and who will also bring salvation to the Gentiles (49:6). John's allusion thus draws our attention to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, whereas the figure itself suggests that Christ will destroy his enemies with a word just as he once created with a word.

Christ's striking the nations is strongly paralleled in Isa 11:4:
With righteousness He will judge the poor,/ And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth,/ And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,/ And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.

Paul uses similar words to describe Jesus' destruction of "the lawless one," whom Christ "will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming" (2 Th 2:8).

The identification of Paul's "lawless one" with John's "beast" is obvious. All this reinforces the natural interpretation that our passage is describing Christ's second coming rather than (say) the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

John continues on to picture Jesus' activity as that of shepherding, but (significantly) with a rod of iron. This clearly alludes to Ps 2:9, if the Hebrew verb there is pointed to read "shepherd" (with the LXX) rather than "break" (with the MT), even though the latter seems more natural in that context. John elsewhere alludes to "shepherding with a rod of iron" in Rev 2:27 and 12:5. The former is an eschatological promise to the overcomer and the latter a prediction regarding the male child born to the woman clothed with the sun, presumably Jesus Christ. Significantly, the verb in the last of these (12:5) is a *present* infinitive, apparently implying extended rule rather than momentary destruction. Taking the three passages together suggests that Jesus and his overcomers will be involved in an extended period of rule against opposition beginning with his return, thus something of a silver age.

John has already employed the winepress analogy to picture God's judging wrath in Rev 14:19,20. There the action is located "outside the city," presumably either Babylon (14:8) or Jerusalem (11:8). The same theme occurs in Isa 63:1-6 (discussed above, verse 13), as well as in Joel 3:13. The latter passage locates the carnage in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (3:12), the location of which is otherwise unknown, yet it pictures God as speaking from Zion and Jerusalem (3:16). Both OT passages reflect God's judgment on the nations ("peoples," Isa 63:3,6; "nations," Joel 3:9,11,12) as well as deliverance for His people ("mighty to save," Isa 63:1; "year of redemption," 63:4; "salvation," 63:5; "restore Judah and Jerusalem," Joel 3:1; "on behalf of My people," 3:2; "a refuge for His people," 3:16). The Joel passage also contains the eschatological elements of astronomical darkness (3:15) and geological changes (3:18) which mark Zechariah 14 (see our discussion above, verse 14). Thus the winepress allusion draws our attention to these passages while its imagery suggests the smashing and bloodshed of the battle to come.

(16) AND HE HAS A NAME WRITTEN ON HIS GARMENT
AND ON HIS THIGH. "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF
LORDS."

As suggested above (verse 12), the name characterizes its possessor. John has already designated the Lamb by this title in Rev 17:14, where the beast and his ten kings are gathering to fight him. The battle there predicted is here about to be narrated, or else its description is here recapitulated. The name itself seems to be explained in 17:14. Christ alone has the authority and power to rule all the earth, so he will take it away from Satan and his henchmen.

The embroidering of a name on a garment seems natural enough, though I know of no Scriptural examples. The inscription "Holy to the Lord" is engraved on the high priest's turban (Ex 28:36-37); eschatologically it will occur even on the bells of horses (Zech 14:20). Likewise the fourteen stones on the ephod were also engraved with names, in this case those of the tribes of Israel (Ex 39:6,14).

Why is the name located on the thigh? This was a common location for wearing a sword (Jdg 3:16,21; Ps 45:3; Song 3:8) and would fit our military metaphors here except that Jesus' sword comes from his mouth. Perhaps consistency should not be pressed in such a symbolic passage.

Another possibility involves the idea of an oath. At least in Patriarchal times, oaths were sometimes made on the thigh of the person sworn to (Gen 24:2,9; 47:29). Perhaps the name on Christ's thigh reflects God's oath that all will bow to him (Isa 45:23; cp Php 2:9-11), a promise that will be brought to pass as Jesus carries out his military commission as Messiah (Ps 2:7-9).

(17) AND I SAW AN ANGEL STANDING IN THE SUN,
AND HE CRIED OUT IN A LOUD VOICE, SAYING TO ALL
THE BIRDS THAT FLY IN MID-HEAVEN, "COME,
GATHER TOGETHER FOR THE GREAT DINNER OF GOD,

(18) THAT YOU MAY EAT THE FLESH OF KINGS AND THE FLESH OF GENERALS AND THE FLESH OF STRONG MEN AND THE FLESH OF HORSES AND OF THOSE WHO SIT ON THEM, EVEN THE FLESH OF ALL, BOTH FREE AND SLAVE, BOTH SMALL AND GREAT."

I have found no close analogies to the angel standing in the sun. The woman in Rev 12:1 is clothed with the sun, and the face of Christ in Rev 1:16 and of the angel in 10:1 shine like the sun. These seem to speak of the glory of each, and it is possible that this is the only point being made in our passage.

However, it is also possible that some idea of the universality of the angel's message is in view, that he is calling all birds throughout the world. Ps 19:6 says of the sun that "nothing is hidden from its heat." In this case, our passage is somewhat like that of the eagle announcing the three woes in Rev 8:13, who speaks to all those on earth, or like Satan's going out to the four corners of the earth to gather Gog and Magog against the saints (20:8). This also fits the universal terminology of our verses, in which mankind is categorized (as in Rev 6:15 and 11:18) in such a way as to include all kinds, or at least all that might be in the beast's army.

The call to the birds to come and dine is clearly an allusion to Ezekiel, principally 39:17-19, but also to 39:4. A similar picture occurs in prophecy against Egypt in Ezk 29:5. This allusion is probably one of the strongest arguments for a recapitulation in Rev 20, since the call of Satan to Gog and Magog (20:8) is drawn from the same passage in Ezekiel (38:2,3,14,16-18; 39:1,6,11). However, it appears that John does not always mean to equate his vision with the OT item to which he alludes. For instance, his reference to the two witnesses in Rev 11:4 as "the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord" is clearly alluding to Zech 4:2-3,11-14, yet few would want to identify the two witnesses of Revelation as Joshua and Zerubbabel. The occurrence of similar remarks about birds eating Pharaoh (pictured as a sea monster) and his fishes (army?) in Ezk 29:5 shows that similar things have happened at other times in history. Yet I

would score a point for the amillennialists here.

(19) AND I SAW THE BEAST AND THE KINGS OF THE EARTH AND THEIR ARMIES GATHERED TOGETHER TO MAKE WAR WITH THE ONE WHO SITS UPON THE HORSE AND WITH HIS ARMIES.

The beast and the kings reappear for the first time since Rev 17:11-14, where we are told that they are going to fight against the Lamb and be conquered by him. This may be a recapitulation, but it looks more like a dramatic device in which events yet to be narrated are intimated in advance to whet the appetite and arouse the interest of the reader. In Rev 16:13-16, frog-like spirits go out from the dragon, beast and false prophet to gather the "kings of the whole world" for the "war of the great day of God, the Almighty." Our passage seems to be the continuation of this one, the final showdown between Christ and the beast.

The OT has several similar pictures, notably Psalm 2, Ezekiel 38, Joel 3, and Zechariah 12 and 14. All but the first use eschatological terminology. In Psalm 2, the "kings of the earth" plot rebellion against the Lord and His Anointed (2:2); God answers by installing His king at Zion (2:6); and the rulers are warned to submit before the wrath of the Son is kindled (2:11-12).

In Ezk 38:2-6, armies from north, east and south (at least) will invade Israel, and God will destroy them with sword, pestilence, rain, hail, fire and brimstone (38:21-22). In Joel 3:2, all nations will be gathered to the valley of Jehoshaphat where God will judge them. The scene is clearly military rather than judicial, a battle instead of a courtroom scene (3:9-10). God will bring down His mighty ones (3:11; angels? armies?), but the means of recompense is not stated, unless the remark about the Lord "roaring" from Zion (3:16) is a hint.

Zechariah 12 pictures a gathering of "all the nations" (12:3) against Jerusalem. God will defeat them by striking horse and rider with blindness and fear (12:4), and "the clans of Judah" will

apparently fight on God's side as well (12:6). Zechariah 14 is probably a continuation or recapitulation of the same incident, separated by a section on the repentance of Israel. The nations gather against and take Jerusalem (14:2); God intervenes to fight them, taking His stand on the Mt. of Olives (14:4); the enemies are destroyed by a combination of some supernatural plague, panic on man and beast, and the cooperation of Judah (14:12-15). If these passages refer to the same incident as ours, then believers take part in the fighting to some extent.

(20) AND THE BEAST WAS TAKEN, AND WITH HIM THE FALSE PROPHET WHO PERFORMED THE SIGNS BEFORE HIM, BY WHICH HE DECEIVED THOSE WHO TOOK THE MARK OF THE BEAST AND THOSE WHO WORSHIPED HIS IMAGE. THE TWO WERE THROWN ALIVE INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE WHICH BURNS WITH SULFUR.

The allusion back to Rev 13:13-17 is clear, where the miracles of the second beast (not identified as the false prophet until 16:13) and the mark of the beast are described. A similar passage is 2 Th 2:9-12, which speaks of the "lawless one" as coming with deception and miracles to deceive those who prefer wickedness. His destruction is to come by "the breath of [Christ's] mouth" (2:8), which in our passage is only expressly applied to his armies. Since these passages are almost certainly referring to the same event, such phenomena warn us not to build too much on arguments from silence, e.g., to assume that our passage has the armies of heaven only sitting and watching while Christ does all the fighting with one word.

The lake of fire is first mentioned here, and then again in Rev 20:10,14-15. It is clearly John's term for the eternal state of the lost. Something similar may be in view in Isa 30:33, where the king of Assyria is cast in a wood fire kindled by the breath of God. Similarly Isaiah ends with all mankind going out (of the holy city on the new earth?) to see the corpses of men whose "fire shall not be quenched" (66:24). The passage is cited by Jesus in Mark 9:48 as a description of Gehenna. The passage most similar to ours is Dan 7:11, where the fourth beast is slain and thrown

into the fire.

(21) AND THE REST WERE KILLED BY THE SWORD
BELONGING TO HIM WHO SITS ON THE HORSE, THE
SWORD WHICH COMES FROM HIS MOUTH, AND ALL
THE BIRDS WERE GORGED ON THEIR FLESH.

The destruction of armies gathered against the Lord is narrated in Ezk 38:21-22, Zech 12:4-6, and 14:12-13, as noted above (verse 19), but the details are dissimilar. Closest is Isa 11:4, where the "branch" from Jesse will "strike the earth with the rod of his mouth" and kill the wicked "with the breath of his lips." Also very similar is the reference in Isa 30:27ff, where "the name of the Lord" comes from a distance; "his tongue is a consuming fire"; he "shakes the nations back and forth in a sieve"; he disposes of the king of Assyria as noted above (verse 20).

If one consistent figure is employed, then the destruction of the armies leaves enough for the birds to feast on. An ironic role-reversal may be in view here also: as man since Gen 9:2 has been feeding on the birds, now the birds will feed on man!

Possibly the disgrace of non-burial is also in view here. Eccl 6:3 suggests that being a miscarriage is preferable to having no burial. Though Jehu is inclined to bury Jezebel in spite of her wickedness, her body was eaten by dogs before he could do so (2 Kings 9:34-37). Jeremiah frequently refers to this as a curse upon sinners (Jer 8:2, 16:4,6, 25:33).

SUMMARY ON METHOD

Having gone through Rev 19:11-21 verse by verse, we have found numerous places where allusions to material found elsewhere in the Bible shed light on our passage. Some of these insights can be presented in the form of a free, explanatory paraphrase as follows:

(11) John in his vision saw Jesus Christ about to intervene into the affairs of human history at his second coming. Christ will come in purity to bring vengeance on his enemies as the One who

keeps his promises and does what is right. (12) He will then be revealed as fully God, and the Father will have given him the right and power to rule everything. His judgment will be based on what men are really like inside, so no one will get away with anything. (13) As the one Mediator between God and man -- in creation, revelation, redemption, and now in judgment -- he will descend to trample his enemies. (14) His triumph will be shared by the pure in heart, both men and angels, who will come with him. (15) With an all-powerful word of command he will strike the unbelieving nations, displaying God's anger, and set up a period of stringent rule over those who survive. (16) All this will fulfill God's promise to give him universal rule. (17,18) The birds will be called together to feast on all who oppose him, whatever their station in life. (19) The Antichrist and his allies will in fact seek to resist Christ, (20) but the Antichrist and his propogandist who used miracles to lead so many astray will be taken and cast into eternal punishment. (21) Then Jesus will speak the word which destroys Antichrist's armies, and they will be disgraced by becoming food for the birds.

This paraphrase, to be sure, is a very limited substitute for the original. It is certainly clearer, and may help someone who has not done the sort of work we have to gain a better insight into what is going on. However, not being inerrant, the paraphrase by "clarification" may in places have replaced what John (and God) intended by something quite different.

Artistically, the paraphrase is prosaic and rather flat, though doubtless a better writer could improve the situation. Yet stylistic enhancement by the addition of new figures might be no real improvement at all. A more artistic paraphraser would merely replace God's metaphors by his own -- in C. S. Lewis' phrase, the master's metaphors by the student's. Furthermore, no paraphrase can do justice to the richness and economy of the original figures. Apparently these original figures often do double duty even beyond the natural ambiguity of a figure: they not only (1) give a vivid metaphor or symbol of the reality being described, but also (2) call attention to an OT parallel passage.

The use of figures in Revelation has a price, of course: figurative language is looser than literal, there is more room for misunderstanding. But what alternative exists when one is describing what "eye has not seen"? No language has a large vocabulary for objects which have never entered human experience, and even if one did, how would anyone know what the words meant? Clearly this raises serious problems in deciding what is figurative and what literal for events that have never yet happened. Yet if we are not to reduce the book of Revelation to mere mystification, we must be cautious in assuming things are figurative without good warrant. Even clearly symbolic items in Scripture are often actual physical events as well, for example, baptism and the Lord's supper.

In any case, setting passages in Revelation beside other Biblical passages to which they actually allude still involves interpretive problems similar to those faced in harmonizing parallel passages in the Gospels. Does the allusion in Revelation refer to the same thing as the OT reference or to a similar thing? (Recall our remark on the lampstand-olive trees in Rev 11:4, verse 18, above.) How far are we to press arguments from silence in deciding such questions? (Does Rev 19:21 require that Christ do all the fighting while the rest of the heavenly army merely watches?) If we decide the events pictured are the same, does one passage give the literal picture and the other the figurative, or are both figurative, or both literal but complementary? It appears we must work on listening to the material in each passage rather than rushing in too quickly to explain.

THE MILLENNIAL QUESTION IN OUR PASSAGE

In concluding this paper, I would like to address the millennial question as it relates to our passage. I trust this will be an example of listening to the material in the passage rather than of rushing in too quickly to explain!

We noted in discussing verse 18 a point that seemed to favor an amillennial perspective. Ezk 38-39 is used in both Rev 19:18 and 20:8, which suggested they may both refer to the same event and

that chapter 20 recapitulates chapter 19. Perhaps there are more such features in our passage, but I have not noticed any. Admittedly, it is easier for amillennialists to see them than it is for premillennialists, at least for one with a temperament like mine. One value of listening to other viewpoints is to see things we haven't seen before, some of which are really there!

In this passage I see two kinds of data that seem to point to a premillennial position: (1) indications of continuity with chapter 20; and (2) "silver age" features in passages alluded to. Let us examine each of these in turn.

An amillennialist may concede that Rev 20 chronologically follows Rev 19, but claim that the rider on the white horse represents not the second coming but rather some such judgment in history as the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Thus the millennium is our present age. This seems to leave such an interpreter with a serious problem -- Revelation then has no clear description of the second coming! One way to avoid this problem and retain an amillennial perspective is to have Rev 20:1 begin a recapitulation by going back to (say) the atonement or ascension of Christ as that which effectively binds Satan. We will be responding to this latter sort of approach rather than to the former.

Some recapitulation surely exists in Revelation, if no more than the description of the birth of Christ in 12:5 after the references to his atoning death in 5:9,12. We cannot therefore rule out such a backward transition at 20:1, though I would think the burden of proof rests upon one who proposes it.

In our passage several features seem to indicate a chronological continuity from chapter 19 into 20. In 16:13-16, the counterfeit trinity of the dragon (Satan), the beast, and the false prophet gather armies together for "the war of the great day of God the Almighty." In 19:20-21, it appears this war now occurs: the beast and the false prophet are taken and their armies destroyed. In a recapitulation scheme, nothing is said here about what happens to Satan. On a non-recapitulation scheme, however, the verses

immediately following (20:1-3) dispose of Satan by putting him in the abyss. For a recapitulationist, this immediate reference to Satan is just an unfortunate accident, since Satan is actually cast into the Lake of Fire right away, though this is not narrated for ten more verses, after the description of the thousand-year reign. The recapitulation thus *accidentally* starts with an event which looks like the continuation of the previous narrative.

Perhaps this lack of reference to Satan in chapter 19 is a matter of emphasis. One might claim that the last few chapters through 19 picture the interadvent activity of the beast and false prophet, while chapter 20 returns to do the same for Satan. But the fact is that all three of the Satanic trinity are involved in collecting the armies in chapter 16, and the beast and false prophet are explicitly referred to in 20:10 when Satan is put in the Lake. Indeed it looks like the beast and false prophet are already in the Lake when Satan is cast in, and have been for some time (1000 years?).

Similarly, the beast and false prophet are disposed of in 19:20, with specific reference being made to the mark of the beast and the worship of his image. In 20:4 martyrs are brought to life who have died rather than receive the mark of the beast or worship his image, and they reign with Christ for a thousand years. If the beast and false prophet are truly end-time figures (rather than, say, institutions which exist throughout the whole interadvent period), then the thousand years naturally follow the time of the beast's persecuting activity. If the thousand years mean *anything* chronological, then those martyrs killed at the *end* of the beast's rule must reign a while after the beast and false prophet are off the scene. I am not aware of any clear examples (in Revelation or elsewhere) of chronological terms with a figurative use that is non-chronological.

In 19:11 it looks like Christ comes to judge and make war. In 19:15, we are told he comes to smite the nations and shepherd them with a rod of iron. Overcomers are promised a part in both of these activities in 2:26-27 and 3:21. We suggested that believers probably make up a part of Christ's army, so that they make war at his side in chapter 19. Rev 20:4, understood as chronologically

subsequent, provides a good passage which has them judging and ruling, otherwise missing from the cycle in chapter 19 if a recapitulation occurs at 20:1.

Finally, Christ comes to "shepherd" the nations with a rod of iron (19:15). We suggested earlier that the verb is not a very good one to describe a one-time destruction. This is reinforced by its use as a present-tense infinitive ("poimainein" rather than the aorist "poimanai") for the action in 12:5. As best I can tell from a quick survey, John really does distinguish "spread-out" action by the use of present-tense infinitives in the book of Revelation. These phenomena suggest that the millennium is a lengthy period following the second coming.

Our second kind of data for a premillennial understanding of the passage involves its OT allusions. Of the passages alluded to in Rev 19:11-21, two or three seem clearly to refer to "silver age" phenomena in such a way as to indicate that such an age follows the Lord's return. Let us consider these in turn.

Zechariah 14 seems to be alluded to obliquely several times in our passage (see our discussion of verses 11, 14, 19 and 21). It pictures the Lord coming with his holy ones to wage war against the nations gathered at Jerusalem; He destroys them by striking them with a miraculous plague which melts their flesh and eyes as they stand on their feet. Verses 16 and following seem to give clear testimony of a subsequent "silver age".

Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

The passage goes on to threaten drought on those who disobey. The threat hardly fits the eternal state, and the reference to "year by year" indicates that this is not some brief mop-up at the second coming. The only alternative to a millennium of some sort after the Lord's return would seem to be to deny that Zech 14 relates to the second coming. This is problematical in view of the strong and extensive eschatological language of Zech 14 and John's use of Zech 12:10 in connection with the second coming in Rev 1:7.

The parallels between the beast of Revelation and Daniel's beasts (note especially Rev 13:2) naturally draws our attention to the parallels between the destruction of each. Like Rev 19, the fourth beast is thrown in the fire (Dan 7:11), in a context of thrones being set up for judgment (compare Dan 7:9-10 with Rev 20:4) and universal dominion being given to the Son of Man (Dan 7:13-14) and the saints (7:22). The time sequence of Dan 7:21-22 is especially notable:

I kept looking, and that horn [of the fourth beast] was waging war with the saints and overpowering them until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom.

Like Rev 20, the time sequence here is most naturally read as a simple one in which the reign of the saints follows the destruction of the beast rather than following the individual martyrdoms of each saint scattered over some period of time (cp Dan 7:25-27 as well). But if the fourth beast is to be identified with the beast of Revelation, then a "silver age" seems to be implied in 7:11-12:

I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted them for an appointed period of time.

The three beasts seem to live on without power after the fourth is destroyed, perhaps a parallel to the nations which survive in Zech 14:16-19.

Lastly, Isa 30:27,33 seems to be alluded to in Rev 19:20-21, since both make reference to God defeating the nations (30:28) by his words and casting their leader (here the king of Assyria) into burning fire. This may be only a figurative picture of the destruction of the ancient Assyrians, but the terminology seems eschatological. Chapter 31 is parallel, and pictures God coming down on Mt. Zion to "wage war," destroying the "Assyrian" by "a sword not of man." The "silver age" feature would be a phrase in 31:8, "his [Assyrian's] young men will become forced laborers," certainly more appropriate to the millennium than the eternal state, if this passage is eschatological at all.

Though not putting much weight on this last passage, I would suggest that both the indications of continuity discussed above and the "silver age" terminology in these OT allusions make a strong case for a premillennial understanding of Rev 19-20.