

MAKING SENSE OF REV 20:1-10? HAROLD HOEHNER VERSUS RECAPITULATION

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The purpose of this article is to offer a critique of Harold Hoehner's 1992 essay on Rev 20:1-10¹ with special reference to his arguments against the thesis I advanced in an earlier article.² The present study is warranted if only because, apart from his consideration of the history of interpretation relative to 20:1-10, Hoehner gives more attention to recapitulation, as argued in my article, than to any other issue.

In my essay I contended that the text in question records a recapitulatory sequence of visions whose contents are related to Christ's second advent in 20:7-10 and thus to his first advent and the interadvent age in 20:1-6.³ The validity of this thesis was—and I believe still is—substantiated by three lines of argument, each of which I will summarize and then defend against Hoehner's objections.

I. THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN THE EVENTS DEPICTED IN REV 19:11-21 AND REV 20:1-3

In support of my thesis I observed first that the nations' destruction-after-deception in 19:11-21 does not logically cohere with their protection-from-deception in 20:1-3 and that premillennial attempts to explain their coherence in terms of chronological progression are unconvincing. Specifically I challenged the premillennial postulate that "the nations" of 20:3 are survivors of the battle in 19:19-21. I urged that this claim simply presupposes that the order of the visions in 19:11-20:3 reflects the sequence of events in history. I also observed that John's assertions to the effect that all the nations will fall at Christ's return (19:18, 21; cf. 12:5; 19:15) are contrary to the proposal that "the nations" will survive his coming.⁴

In response to these arguments, Hoehner cites first the words *kai eidon* in 20:1. He urges that they are an indicator of historical sequence in 19:11-

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¹ H Hoehner, "Evidence from Revelation 20," *A Case for Premillennialism A New Consensus* (ed D K Campbell and J T Townsend, Chicago Moody, 1992) 235-262

² R F White, "Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev 20 1-10," *WTJ* 51 (1989) 319-344

³ Hoehner consistently misstates my thesis in his essay He summarizes it in at least three different ways (1) that 20 1-10 is a recapitulation of 19 11-21 ("Evidence" 245, 247), (2) that 20 1-3 is a recapitulation of 19 11-21 (*ibid* 251), and (3) that 20 10 is a recapitulation of 19 11-20 10 (*ibid* 259) As the reader can see, none of these summaries is accurate

⁴ White, "Recapitulation" 321-325 (323-325 relate to the premillennial view)

20:3 since in 19:11, 17, 19 they introduce “a rapid succession not only of visions but also of the unfolding developments in history.”⁵ Certainly one can agree that there is historical as well as visional (revelatory) progress between the visions of 19:11–21. But how do we arrive at this conclusion? As I read Hoehner’s comments I find no indication that the presence of *kai eidon* told him anything about the historical relationship among those visions. Rather, he discerned that relationship from the content of the visions. It seems to me that this approach is entirely proper and indeed is suited to all the visions in Revelation. Thus when we consider the question of historical progress between 19:11–21 and 20:1–3, the presence of the words *kai eidon* in 20:1 is not relevant. The only relevant point is the content of the visions.⁶

Hoehner turns next to my argument that the premillennial view of “the nations” in 20:3 is contrary to John’s description of the battle casualties in chap. 19. He argues that the nations destroyed in 19:19–21 are only the wicked of the nations. Hence the nations of 20:3 are the saints of the nations.⁷ Initially, let me say that I agree with Hoehner that “the destruction in 19:19–21 does not mean that every person of every nation is going to be destroyed.”⁸ But I do not see why it follows from this fact that Hoehner is right to interpret *ta ethnē* in 20:3 as “the saints of the nations.” In arguing this point Hoehner cites a number of passages to show that there will be nations in the future and that saints will come from the nations.⁹ These matters, however, are not in dispute. The issue is whether Hoehner is justified in interpreting the referent of *ta ethnē* in 20:3 as the saints who remain at Christ’s return.

In this latter connection, consider the broader context of Revelation. In only four of its twenty-one instances (15:4; 21:24, 26; 22:2) does *ta ethnē* (*to ethnos*) clearly refer to those who are saints, and we learn that fact not from the term itself but from the saintly actions predicated of those referred to by the term. In every other instance besides 20:3 (2:26; 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:2, 9, 18; 12:5; 13:7; 14:6, 8; 16:19; 17:15; 18:3, 23; 19:15), *ta ethnē* (*to ethnos*) is clearly and consistently differentiated from *hoi hagioi*. *Hoi hagioi* denotes that which has been redeemed from *ta ethnē*, while *ta ethnē* denotes that from which *hoi hagioi* have been redeemed. In my view, then, Hoehner’s proposal involves special pleading, for it is clearly contrary to the pre-

⁵ Hoehner, “Evidence” 252

⁶ This is also true of Hoehner’s earlier remarks on *kai eidon* (ibid 247–248) He is right to say that these words “usually denote the next vision seen by John” (ibid 247) But then he asserts that they indicate chronological progress, basing this assertion on the content of John’s visions (ibid 248) Clearly Hoehner’s own argumentation belies his claim that chronological progression should be inferred from *kai eidon* and the sequence of visions indicated thereby

⁷ Ibid 252

⁸ Ibid In my article I said as much when I noted that the only survivors of the Divine Warrior’s coming would be those who had been redeemed from among the nations and constituted as his kingdom-protectorate (White, “Recapitulation” 324)

⁹ Hoehner, “Evidence” 252

ponderance of the evidence pertaining to the usage of *ta ethnē* (*to ethnos*) in the broader context of Revelation.

Hoehner's claim is also at odds with the usage of *ta ethnē* in the immediate context of 20:3. In 19:15; 20:8 the term unequivocally refers to those whom Satan has deceived into waging "the war" against the Divine Warrior and his holy-warrior saints (16:13-14; 19:19-20; 20:8-9). In fact the only trait that distinguishes the nations of 20:3 from the nations of 19:15; 20:8 is the fact that Satan's deception and God's destruction of the former are temporarily forestalled. This predication hardly qualifies as the sort of saintly action attributed to the nations in 15:4; 21:24, 26; 22:2. We note then that twice in the immediate context of 20:3 John reinforces the conventional sense of *ta ethnē* as "the anti-saints." For him to have used the term in 20:3 in the sense of "the saints of the nations" would have been totally lost on his readers.

For these reasons I believe we ought to reject Hoehner's approach to the meaning of *ta ethnē* in 20:3 and conclude that the nations in that text are "the anti-saints" (the wicked). This conclusion means that if we read 19:11-20:3 as an historical chronicle there is a discrepancy between the events depicted in 19:11-21 and 20:1-3. This discrepancy can be very credibly resolved if we are willing to consider an alternative to the premillennialist's approach to 19:11-20:10. The alternative I have in mind is of course that of recapitulation.

II. THE RECAPITULATION OF REV 19:11-21 IN 20:7-10

My second argument favoring a recapitulation approach to Rev 20:1-10 was that 20:7-10 recapitulates 19:11-21 and its parallels (especially the parallel in 16:12-21). I will again briefly rehearse my supporting points and then interact with Hoehner's objections to them. Before I do that, however, I must respond to Hoehner's attempt to dismiss my point concerning the *hotan* clause in 20:7. I observed that though the *hotan* clause of 20:7 does indeed signal historical progress in the events John describes, only the content of his visions preceding 20:7 can tell us conclusively whether that historical progress applies to all the events described before 20:7 or to some of them.¹⁰ Hoehner responds to this point by asserting that 20:7-10 "is not a new vision but a continuance of the vision that began in 20:4 or 20:1 or more likely 19:11."¹¹ Since Hoehner does not support this assertion, we are left to surmise that it is based in his appeal to *kai eidon* in 20:1 and his interpretation of "the nations" in 20:3. I have already indicated why I believe those arguments are without merit, so I will comment here only on Hoehner's claim that 20:7-10 is part of a visional sequence that probably begins in 19:11. As far as I can tell, the only plot line resumed and concluded in 20:7-10 is the one that correlates with the *hotan* clause in 20:7—namely, the one introduced by the *archi* clause in 20:3. No evidence has yet come to

¹⁰ White, "Recapitulation" 325-326

¹¹ Hoehner, "Evidence" 257

my attention to substantiate assertions that the visional sequence concluded by 20:7–10 has its beginning at any point other than 20:(1–)3.

We come now to the four factors I cited in favor of the proposition that 20:7–10 is a recapitulation of 19:11–21.

1. *The use of Ezekiel 38–39 in Rev 19:17–20; 20:7–10.* I believe the recapitulation of 19:11–21 in 20:7–10 is indicated first by John's use of Ezekiel's Gog-Magog prophecy (chaps. 38–39) in both 19:17–20 and 20:8–9.¹² Against this observation Hoehner raises four objections.

Hoehner contends first that, though the Gog and Magog of Ezekiel fit well with Revelation 19, the Gog and Magog of Revelation 20 are not the same as the Gog and Magog in Ezekiel.¹³ In defense of this differentiation Hoehner lists six points.¹⁴ But when we consider those differences we find that they are not as compelling as Hoehner would have them be.

We discover that the first three differences Hoehner lists could be applied to Rev 19:11–21, whose similarity to Ezekiel 38–39 Hoehner accepts.¹⁵ Consider the following.

In his first two points, Hoehner urges that the Gog and Magog of Ezekiel are different from the Gog and Magog of Revelation 20 because "Gog and Magog" in Revelation 20 refers to the nations of the earth and not to Ezekiel's "enemy from the north" or "prince and land" (Gog and Magog respectively). But Gog and Magog, whose presence is necessarily implied in Rev 19:17–18 by the quotation there from Ezek 39:17–20, also appear as the nations of the earth in Revelation 19 (v. 15) and not in so many words as they appear in Ezekiel.

Hoehner argues for a third difference between the Gog and Magog in Ezekiel and Revelation 20 based on his supposition that in Revelation 20 Gog and Magog assail the saints but in Ezekiel they assail Israel. Hoehner could say the same, however, of Gog and Magog in Revelation 19. Indeed he acknowledges as much in his comments on Revelation 19.¹⁶ It is also worth noting that, contrary to Hoehner's point, the Gog-Magog assault on Israel in Ezekiel is not necessarily distinct from the Gog-Magog assault on the saints and Jerusalem in Revelation. If the Israel assailed in Ezek 38:15–16 is the Israel resurrected and reconstituted as God's kingdom in Ezekiel 36–37, then this renewed Israel may well be counted among the saints referred to in Rev 20:9. Also against Hoehner's alleged difference is the observation that Gog and Magog cannot go against Jerusalem in 20:9 without having already gone against Israel. If only for the sake of the argument, then, we should note that, consistent with Ezekiel 38, John's

¹² White, "Recapitulation" 326–328

¹³ Hoehner, "Evidence" 258

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ Hoehner's fifth and sixth points show that he accepts the similarity between Ezekiel 38–39 and Rev 19 11–21 ("Evidence" 258)

¹⁶ Hoehner, "Evidence" 246–247

account of the assault on Jerusalem in Rev 20:9 necessarily implies an assault on Israel.

If then Hoehner's first three points demonstrate the difference between Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 20, they do the same for Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 19.

Hoehner finds a fourth difference between Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 20: In Ezek 39:4, 17 Gog and Magog are slain on the mountains of Israel, while in Rev 20:8-9 fire devours them. But this is a selective use of the OT prophet's account. In Ezekiel 38-39 Gog and Magog are both slain with a sword and devoured by fire: In 38:22; 39:6 the Divine Warrior fights Gog and Magog with fire, while in 38:21; 39:17-21 he slays them with a sword (on the mountains of Israel). Little wonder then that John should represent Gog and Magog's fate both as consumed by fire in Rev 20:9 and as slain with a sword in 19:17-19, 21.¹⁷ Hence John's depictions of God's victory over the Gog-Magog nations by sword in Revelation 19 and by fire in Revelation 20 are not mutually exclusive. They are complementary accounts fully consistent with Ezekiel 38-39 (especially 38:21-22).

Hoehner's fifth point—that the great feast after the battle in Ezek 39:17-20 differs from Satan's being cast into the lake of fire after the battle in Rev 20:10—is indeed a difference. But it is not a difference that precludes the identification of Gog and Magog in Revelation as the Gog and Magog of Ezekiel. The two accounts of the battle aftermath are not mutually exclusive. In fact, since Hoehner appeals to progressive revelation to affirm that the later revelation of Revelation 19-20 gives details not given in the earlier revelation of Ezekiel 38-39, why not account for the difference he cites here by appeal to progressive revelation?¹⁸

Hoehner's sixth point—that in Ezekiel 38-39 the Gog-Magog events fit chronologically before the restored millennial temple, while in Revelation 20 those events fit after the millennium—fails to appreciate the broader context of sequential parallels between Revelation 20-22 and Ezekiel 36-48.¹⁹ With others I would observe that the saints' resurrection and reconstitution as God's kingdom in Rev 20:4-6 parallels Israel's resurrection and reconstitution as God's kingdom in Ezekiel 36-37.²⁰ Similarly God's

¹⁷ Notice further that in the context of Rev 16 17-21 (the parallel to 19 11-21) God fights Babylon, the consort of the Gog-Magog nations, with fire. The "Babylon appendix" in Rev 17 1-18 24 makes clear that "the cup of the wine of his fierce wrath" given to Babylon in 16 19 contains (among other things) fire ("[Babylon] will be burned up with fire" [18 8], "they [saw] the smoke of [Babylon's] burning" [18 9, 18]). Note also 14 8-10 and 19 12 ("his eyes are a flame of fire")

¹⁸ As I see it, the "new details" derive from the fact that in John's vision Ezekiel's Gog-Magog prophecy has been given a more protological, cosmopolitan cast that effectively resolves the tension between the referents of John's own eschatological vision and the idiom of Ezekiel's pre-Christ horizon. See R. F. White, "The Millennial Kingdom-City Epic Themes, Ezekiel 36-39, and the Interpretation of Rev 20 4-10" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Kansas City, KS, November 21, 1991)

¹⁹ See further White, "Millennial", *Victory and House Building in Revelation 20 1-21 8 A Thematic Study* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1987) 139-179

²⁰ Interestingly M. F. Rooker places the fulfillment of Ezek 36 16-38, 37 27-28 (and chaps 40-48) in the millennium. (This is not to say that Rooker and I would agree on the interpretation

victory over the nations hostile to the saints in Rev 20:7–10 mirrors God's victory over the nations hostile to Israel in Ezekiel 38–39. And, likewise, the restoration of God's sanctuary-city on a great and high mountain in an earth renewed to its Edenic glory in Rev 21:9–22:5 reflects the restoration of God's temple-city on a very high mountain in a land renewed to its Edenic glory in Ezekiel 40–48. Given this broader context of parallels between Revelation 20–22 and Ezekiel 36–48, we could easily say that the events of John's prophecy fit chronologically with the events of Ezekiel's prophecy and that the specific sequence of resurrection and kingdom reconstitution followed by victory over the nations in Revelation 20 is identical to the sequence we see in Ezekiel 36–39.

To this point we have urged that Hoehner's list of supposed differences between Ezekiel 38–39 and Rev 20:7–10 do not invalidate my contention that the use of Ezekiel 38–39 in Revelation 19–20 indicates the recapitulation of Rev 19:11–21 in 20:7–10. But Hoehner raises a second objection to my contention. He observes that I use an outside passage to explain the relationship between 19:17–21 and 20:7–10 when I should let the text stand on its own with its "clear and natural chronological progression."²¹ In response, we should note first that by Hoehner's own admission John has made both 19:17–21 and 20:7–10 at least "*reminiscent of*" Ezekiel 38–39.²² By so much John has himself frustrated Hoehner's hermeneutical dictum, for to say there are reminiscences of Ezekiel's prophecy in both of John's visions is to say in effect that John's readers must recall that one outside passage to understand both of his visions. Moreover, if I am one who does not "let the text stand on its own," notice that I am not alone in this activity. Hoehner himself goes to a passage outside Revelation 20—namely, Ezekiel 38–39—in an effort to bring out the differences between Gog and Magog in Revelation 20 and Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38–39, just as I turned there to bring out their similarities. Furthermore, as for the "clear and natural chronological progression" of the text, it is of course precisely the reminiscences of Gog and Magog in both Revelation 19 and Revelation 20 (among other things) that makes the notion of chronological progression between the two appear unclear and unnatural. And finally, as stated, Hoehner's words seem to advocate the hermeneutical autonomy of the immediate context—a principle that no one, not even Hoehner (as we have just seen), practices, much less takes seriously on a theoretical level. If, however, by his words Hoehner means simply to highlight the hermeneutical priority of the immediate context, then I appreciate the reminder. But I do not know how I have ignored or violated this principle in the present connection.

of Rev 20 4–6) Surprisingly, Rooker does not address the time of the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38–39 despite its bearing on the case for premillennialism. See Rooker, "Evidence from Ezekiel," *A Case for Premillennialism* 119–134

²¹ Hoehner, "Evidence" 259

²² *Ibid* (italics mine)

Hoehner's third objection to my argument from John's use of Ezekiel's prophecy is that, since Revelation is later in the progress of revelation than Ezekiel, Revelation 19–20 gives new details not explained in Ezekiel 38–39.²³ This argument is only as strong as Hoehner's claim that the Gog and Magog of Revelation 20 are not the Gog and Magog of Ezekiel 38–39. Since I have argued that that claim is specious, I do not believe we can give any credence to this argument from the progress of revelation. Moreover something I said in my article bears repeating, though I add here a new emphasis to reflect Hoehner's interests: If John really expected us to interpret the revolts in Revelation 19–20 as different events, he certainly did us no favors by describing both revolts in language, images and plot that are reminiscent of one and the same event in Ezekiel's prophecy.

Hoehner's fourth and final objection to my argument from John's use of Ezekiel 38–39 is that it only causes the reader to confuse the beast and the false prophet with Satan and makes the text inconsistent in its accounts of their being cast into the lake of fire.²⁴ I do not see why any confusion and inconsistency should result, especially since the recapitulationist reading of the relevant accounts in 19:20; 20:10 explicitly affirms "that at the second coming the devil is cast into the lake of fire shortly after the beast and the false prophet are cast there."²⁵ As I see it, what is really at stake is whether Hoehner is right when he says, "John is very clear that [the] one event [involving the beast and the false prophet] occurred before the Millennium and the other [event involving Satan] occurred after the Millennium."²⁶ To the contrary, the only thing that is "very clear" is that here Hoehner begs the question of the premillennial interpretation of Revelation 19–20. In actuality, unless Hoehner's considerations of the relationship between 19:11–21 and 20:7–10 can at least shift the burden of proof to preconsummationists ("amillennialists"),²⁷ his premillennial view of 19:20; 20:10 is no more suited to the context than the preconsummationist view.

In sum, I believe that John's use of Ezekiel 38–39 in both Revelation 19 and Revelation 20 continues to confound premillennial interpreters of Rev 19:11–20:10. Hoehner's arguments notwithstanding, John's use of the Gog-Magog pericope in both 19:11–21 and 20:7–10 establishes at least a *prima facie* case for us to understand the latter as a recapitulation of the former.

2. "The battle" in Rev 16:14; 19:19; 20:8. I contend that the recapitulation of 19:11–21 in 20:7–10 is indicated secondly by the verbal parallels in the accounts of the Gog-Magog revolt in 20:8 and the Armageddon revolt in

²³ From my point of view, Hoehner's premillennial understanding of Revelation 19–20 involves more than merely "giving new details not explained in Ezekiel 38–39." It involves positing an eschatological paradigm that competes with the paradigm in Ezekiel 36–48.

²⁴ Hoehner, "Evidence" 259.

²⁵ White, "Recapitulation" 326.

²⁶ Hoehner, "Evidence" 259.

²⁷ V. S. Poythress has proposed the term "preconsummationist" and its cognates to better describe what has been traditionally known by the term "amillennialist" and its cognates. See Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 36.

16:14; 19:19. John describes both revolts as “the war” for which Satan gathers the nations against Christ and his people (*polemos* with the article in 16:14; 19:19; 20:8). In support of that observation I noted that in Revelation anarthrous *polemos* refers to the activity of warfare in general, while articular *polemos*—which we find only in 16:14; 19:19; 20:8—refers to a specific episode of war.²⁸ Against this argumentation Hoehner offers two objections: (1) “War” without the article refers to the international campaign against Christ and the saints in 12:17; 13:7. (2) “The war” refers not to one event but to various aspects of the great conflict between Christ and his saints and Satan and his hosts.²⁹

Before I reply to these objections I need to point out that Hoehner redefines (misinterprets?) my phrases “the international campaign against Christ and his people” and “the war” as general references to the great conflict between Christ and his people on the one hand and Satan and the nations on the other. In my article, however, I use the phrases in question with specific reference to the final, age-ending battle on the great day of Christ’s second coming.³⁰ Hoehner’s redefinition of my terms muddles the discussion of the point I raise here. Keeping this problem in mind, what can we say about the particulars of Hoehner’s counterargument?

As for Hoehner’s first objection, I have no problem taking anarthrous *polemos* in 12:17; 13:7 as a general reference to the great conflict between Christ and Satan. Hoehner’s comment, in fact, affords me the opportunity to make clear that I intended as much (among other things) when I observed that anarthrous *polemos* in Revelation “designates the activity of warfare in general.”³¹

Turning to Hoehner’s second objection, the contexts of 16:14; 19:19 falsify his claim that “the war” refers not to one event but to various facets of the great conflict. In those texts articular *polemos* can only refer to one particular facet of the great conflict—namely, the second-coming battle between Christ and his saints and Satan and the anti-saint nations (16:15; 19:11, 14–15). Confirming this point is the literary-theological linkage between the plot lines of 16:14–16 and 19:19–21. That linkage—which is widely recognized but ignored by Hoehner—tells us that articular *polemos* in 19:19 has the same referent as articular *polemos* in 16:14 and that the article with *polemos* in 19:19 is in fact anaphoric, referring back to the use of *polemos* in 16:14.

The remaining question: What is the significance of articular *polemos* in 20:8? Hoehner would evidently agree that it does not have the same gen-

²⁸ White, “Recapitulation” 328–330

²⁹ Hoehner, “Evidence” 259 With respect to Hoehner’s second objection see also *ibid* 247, where Hoehner refers to “the war between the unholy trinity and the world, especially against the saints,” citing 12 17 parenthetically (with 14 12 and 17 6)

³⁰ White, “Recapitulation” 329–330 I use the phrases “the final battle at Christ’s return” (*ibid* 329), “the battle at Christ’s return” (*ibid*), “the final battle” (*ibid*), “the battle on the great day of Christ’s second coming” (*ibid* 330), “the age-ending battle at Christ’s return” (*ibid*)

³¹ *Ibid* 329

eral reference as anarthrous *polemos*.³² But does it have the same referent as the only other occurrences of articular *polemos* in 16:14; 19:19? Hoehner denies this conclusion, saying that “we should not think that the articular noun always means the same thing in different settings.”³³ But to make this statement is to beg the question: Hoehner simply presumes that the noun is “in different settings,” that “the war” after the millennium (20:8) is not “the war” at the end of this age (16:14; 19:19). In addition I did not argue that “the articular noun always means the same thing.” Rather I argued that the parallels in wording and plot in 16:14; 19:19; 20:8 point most naturally in the direction of identical settings and hence to an anaphoric usage of the article with *polemos* in 20:8.³⁴ Hoehner, however, simply writes these observations off.³⁵ Perhaps he will yet explain why the pre-consummationist reading of those parallels is not the most natural. Meanwhile I will have to stand by my proposal that we take 16:14–16; 19:11–21; 20:7–10 as three portrayals of the battle between Christ and Satan at Christ’s return, the first portrayal being from the combined perspective of Satan, the beast and the false prophet, the second being from the perspective of the beast and the false prophet, and the third being from the perspective of Satan.

3. *The end of God’s wrath according to Rev 15:1.* In favor of the recapitulation of 19:11–21 in 20:7–10, I observed thirdly that since in 15:1 the bowl plagues are said to bring an end to God’s (temporal) wrath against the nations, God’s wrath against the nations in chap. 20 must coincide with Christ’s second-coming wrath against the nations in chaps. 16 and 19.³⁶ This argument Hoehner discounts by saying that it requires us to identify the whole series of bowl judgments with Christ’s second coming in 19:11–21.³⁷ Such a conclusion, however, is not careful with the specifics of my argumentation. I explicitly affirmed that because 19:19–21 concludes the plot line that was begun but dropped in 16:16, Christ’s wrath in 19:19–21 must coincide with “*the last plague of God’s wrath in 16:17–21.*”³⁸ Based on this coincidence, I affirmed that Christ’s second-coming wrath in chap. 19 must fall within the time frame that 15:1 stipulates for the completion of divine wrath against the nations. My follow-up question: Must not God’s wrath in chap. 20 also fall within the time frame stipulated in 15:1—that is, within the time frame of the seven last plagues? I do not see how we can

³² This is indicated by Hoehner’s comment that articular *polemos* “in 20 7–10 refers to ‘the war’ between Christ and Satan just after the 1,000 years” (“Evidence” 259–260)

³³ *Ibid* 259

³⁴ White, “Recapitulation” 329–330

³⁵ Hoehner’s only remark about the parallels comes in these words “Though there are parallels [between ‘the wars’ of 19 17–21 and 20 7–10], they are not one and the same battle” (“Evidence” 260)

³⁶ White, “Recapitulation” 330–331

³⁷ Hoehner, “Evidence” 260

³⁸ White, “Recapitulation” 331 (*italics mine*) This coincidence is assured by the fact that in Biblical divine-warfare scenes cosmic shaking, such as we see in 16 17–21, accompanies the Divine Warrior’s advent, which we anticipate in 16 15 and see in 19 11–21

follow premillennialists like Hoehner in placing the wrath in chap. 20 after Christ's return in chap. 19, when by doing so we will be saying—contrary to 15:1—that God's wrath against the nations is not completed within the time frame of the seven last plagues.³⁹ In other words it is incumbent on premillennialists like Hoehner to show how their approach to Revelation 19–20 can be made consistent with the claim of 15:1.

4. *The accounts of cosmic destruction in Rev 6:12–17; 16:17–21; 19:11–21; 20:9–11.* My last consideration in favor of the recapitulation of 19:11–21 in 20:7–10 is to argue that the latter retells the same basic story told in the former. I say this because 20:9–11 and 19:11–21//16:17–21, like 6:12–17, can each be seen to reflect that complex of divine-warfare events in which cosmic destruction accompanies the Divine Warrior's advent.⁴⁰ In response to this argument Hoehner tries to show that the differences between the passages in question are "far greater" than their similarities.⁴¹ Let us consider those differences in order.

Against my argument Hoehner cites first his discussion of the differences between 19:11–21 and 20:7–10. I have responded to those alleged differences under sections II.1 and II.3 above.

He insists secondly that in contrast to 19:11–21, where Christ returns and completes his warfare in a short time period, Revelation 6–20 describes Christ's warfare as extending over a longer, three-and-a-half-year time period. It is not clear to me how this unsubstantiated "impression" (to use Hoehner's word) refutes my point that Revelation 6–20 contains at least three references to the cosmic destruction that accompanies the Divine Warrior's epiphany (6:12–17; 16:17–21//19:11–21; 20:9–11).

Hoehner points thirdly to the idea that the seal and bowl judgments are in "totally distinct contexts and chronological settings." Certainly there are contextual and chronological distinctions between the seals and bowls. But where is Hoehner's evidence that the seals and bowls are "totally distinct"? Specifically where is Hoehner's response to my point that the distinction cannot be total since both the sixth seal judgment in 6:12–17 and the seventh bowl plague in 16:17–21 result in the cosmic destruction that attends the advent of Christ the Divine Warrior (6:16–17; 16:14–15; 19:11–16)?⁴²

Hoehner objects finally to my argument by noting that humankind is destroyed in 19:21 by the sword but in 20:8 by fire from heaven. Why these accounts should be read as mutually exclusive is not clear. Interestingly, in Ezek 38:21–22 the Divine Warrior is said to defeat Gog and Magog both with fire and with sword (see II.1 above). Even more to the point, my

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid 331–334

⁴¹ Hoehner, "Evidence" 260–261

⁴² The phenomena that accompany the breaking of the seventh seal in 8 1, 5 are all well-known OT signals of the presence of the Divine Warrior. The connection between cosmic destruction (6 12–17) and Divine Warrior epiphany is thus evident in the seals cycle

argument did not concern the destruction of humankind but the destruction of the cosmos. Hoehner never addresses the latter issue.

Clearly and regrettably, Hoehner has failed to address the point I am raising here. Unless and until he or someone else addresses that point I must stick by my conclusion that 20:7–10 (11) is an abbreviated version of the more detailed accounts of cosmic destruction and Divine Warrior theophany found in 19:11–21//16:17–21; 6:12–17.

In connection with this matter of cosmic destruction I also discuss Heb 12:26–27, which ostensibly knows of only one cosmic destruction before the unshakable eternal state appears.⁴³ Hoehner reacts to this point in three ways. He objects again to my use of an outside passage to interpret Revelation 20 rather than relying on the immediate context for interpretive help. Once again I must note that Hoehner himself violates this principle: When he states that Hebrews 12 probably speaks not of Christ's second coming but of the advent of the new heavens and earth in Revelation 21–22 he assumes that he must appeal outside the immediate context of Hebrews 12 to interpret it properly. If, however, Hoehner only means to highlight the hermeneutical priority of the immediate context, then I again appreciate his reminding me of that principle. But, as before, I do not know how I have ignored or violated it at this point in the discussion.

Hoehner argues two other points against my appeal to Hebrews 12. He contends (1) that, since Revelation is later in the progress of revelation than Hebrews, Revelation 19–22 discloses fuller details than Hebrews 12, and (2) that Hebrews 12 probably speaks not of Christ's second coming but of the advent of the new heavens and earth in Revelation 21–22. Here again Hoehner's claims are only as strong as the arguments he advances in connection with Revelation 20.⁴⁴ In my judgment those arguments are by no means conclusively against the preconsummationist view. It therefore remains at least plausible that Hebrews 12 connects the final cosmic shaking with Christ's second advent and that Revelation 20 is consistent with that teaching.⁴⁵

III. THE MOTIF OF ANGELIC ASCENT AND DESCENT IN REVELATION

The third and final line of evidence I discussed in favor of recapitulation in Rev 20:1–10 was the function of angelic ascent and descent in Revelation. I observed that, consistent with the function of the other three instances of angelic ascent/descent in Revelation (7:2; 10:1; 18:1), the angel's descent in 20:1 initiates a recapitulatory sequence of visions having its ending (vv. 7–10) in a setting contemporaneous with Christ's return in 19:11–

⁴³ White, "Recapitulation" 334–335

⁴⁴ From my point of view, Hoehner's premillennial understanding of Revelation 20 involves more than merely "giving fuller details." It involves positing an eschatological paradigm that competes with the eschatological paradigm in Hebrews 12.

⁴⁵ This preconsummationist reading of Heb 12 26–28 and Rev 19 11–21, 20 9–11 would certainly be consonant with the claim of Heb 9 28 "Christ will appear a *second* time to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (NIV, italics mine)

21 and its beginning (vv. 1–3) in a setting before that event.⁴⁶ Hoehner acknowledges that the angel's ascent in 7:2 and the angel's descent in 10:1 introduce retrospective interludes. But, he insists, "just because there may be an interlude with an angelic ascent and an angelic descent in two texts, it does not follow that this would be true for the other two angelic descents."⁴⁷ As Hoehner sees it, the phrases *meta tauta [eidon]*⁴⁸ in 18:1 and *kai eidon* in 20:1 indicate chronological progression, and so the angelic descents in 18:1; 20:1 do not introduce retrospective interludes.

In reply to Hoehner I must observe that he misrepresents my argument here: I do not argue that the angelic descents in 18:1; 20:1 introduce retrospective interludes "just" because the angelic ascent in 7:2 and the angelic descent in 10:1 do. To the contrary, in the case of the angel's descent in 18:1, only after I discuss in detail the historical viewpoint of each segment of chap. 18 do I affirm that the angel's descent in 18:1 introduces a retrospective interlude. Likewise for the angel's descent in 20:1 I urge that it introduces a retrospective interlude only after directing the reader to consider such factors as the recapitulation of 19:11–21 in 20:7–10.⁴⁹

Ignoring my argumentation, however, Hoehner cites *meta tauta eidon* in 18:1 and *kai eidon* in 20:1 as signals of chronological progression in John's narrative. I have already commented above on the irrelevance of *kai eidon* to the question of historical progress in John's visions. Hoehner's citation of the phrase in this context is however especially puzzling because the phrase appears in 7:2 and there marks the transition to what Hoehner himself acknowledges to be a retrospective interlude. As for his appeal to *meta tauta eidon* in 18:1, Hoehner merely assumes—he makes no effort to demonstrate—that the sequence of visions so introduced reflects the historical relationship of the events in those visions. As in its three other occurrences in Revelation (7:9; 15:5; 19:1), so in 18:1 *meta tauta eidon* marks the transition to (a) new vision(s) from the preceding vision(s). But, again, only the content of those visions can settle the question of their historical relationship. The presence of *meta tauta eidon*, like that of *kai eidon*, is not relevant to the question of historical progress in John's visions.

Therefore, Hoehner's objections notwithstanding, I reaffirm that the recapitulation of 19:11–21 in 20:7–10 is corroborated by the patterns associated with angelic ascent and descent in Revelation.

IV. CONCLUSION

As I review Hoehner's attempt to refute my arguments in favor of recapitulation in Rev 20:1–10, I believe we must conclude that his effort fails. Accordingly I remain convinced that the premillennial view of Revelation

⁴⁶ White, "Recapitulation" 336–343

⁴⁷ Hoehner, "Evidence" 261

⁴⁸ On the basis of his comments on *meta tauta eidon* in *ibid.* 247–248, I believe we can safely assume that, though Hoehner cites *meta tauta* without *eidon* on p. 261, he means *meta tauta eidon*

⁴⁹ White, "Recapitulation" 341–343

20 still labors under the burden of proof placed on it by the discrepancy between the events depicted in 19:11–21; 20:1–3, the recapitulation of 19:11–21 in 20:7–10, and the motif of angelic ascent and descent in Revelation. Until that burden is lifted, I and other preconsummationists will continue to challenge the “new consensus” being touted by premillennialists, and we will do so by among other things defending the view that Rev 20:1–10 makes the best sense when it is interpreted in terms of recapitulation.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Those wishing to see my exposition of Rev 20 1–6 within the framework of a recapitulation approach to Rev 20 1–10 may find such in “Millennial”, *Victory and House Building*, “Death and the First Resurrection in Revelation 20 A Response to Meredith G Kline” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society eastern region, Lanham, MD, April 3, 1992), *Jesus Christ Dragonslayer Tactical Preemption of Ugaritic Combat Myth in the Lamb Dragon Battles of John’s Apocalypse* (master’s thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1986)