

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

Greg K. Beale

Review Article: J. W. Mealy *After the Thousand Years*

The understanding of the millenium continues to be a source of fascination for theologians. The publication of a major study on the subject deserves the full-scale examination which is here offered by Dr Beale of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. Dr Beale is well-qualified to review Dr Mealy's book in virtue of his authorship of the major commentary on Revelation which he will shortly be publishing in the New International Greek Testament Commentary.

I. Introduction to Mealy's World

J. W. Mealy's *After the Thousand Years* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992. 273 pp. hb. £35.00) in the JSNT Supplement Series (Vol. 70) is an attempt to forge a bold, new interpretation of the millennium in Revelation 20. It is fitting to dedicate a review article to this work, since it represents an attempt at a new approach to the millennium and since a monograph on the millennium of Revelation 20 has not been attempted for almost forty years (the last was H. Bietenhard's *Das tausendjährige Reich* [Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1955], who argued for a fairly traditional premillennial perspective). After an introductory overview of various approaches to the millennium (pp. 18-58), Mealy sets out in the remainder of the book to establish his own interpretation (pp. 59-242). He concludes by reassessing how his view compares with previous interpretations (243-245), and then makes some final remarks on practical implications of his work (245-248).

Revelation 20 is a notoriously thorny passage and it takes a bold interpreter to write an entire book on it. Mealy is to be commended for attempting to interpret Revelation 20, not merely in its immediate context, but in the context of the entire book (note his methodological comments in this respect on pp. 13, 18, 28, 119, 173, 236). He tries to survey meticulously the prior use of the language and images as they occur in the book before he begins to comment on the primary passages of concern in Revelation 19-21. Hence, he rightly attempts to let the book interpret itself. The bulk of the book, which he

reserves for setting forth his argument (pp. 59–242), consists of trenchant and detailed exegesis, including many outstanding exegetical insights.

His emphasis on context is presented in a fourfold methodological agenda setting out criteria which any plausible interpretation of the millennium should meet:

1. It will be able to demonstrate that the literary function of the millennium . . . within the book of Revelation hinges on clear contextual ties with other parts of the book.
2. It will be able give an account of these ties and their workings that is reasonably compelling from a literary standpoint.
3. It will be able to demonstrate that the contextual ties it has identified combine to rule out the received interpretation [i.e., premillennial] and suggest its replacement with a different one.
4. It will be able to provide an exegesis of the main section under consideration (Rev. 19.11–21.8) that not only interprets it plausibly in the context of its wider connections, but that also shows that a satisfactory (and ideally, more satisfactory) account can be given of the main section in and of itself (pp. 18, 236)

Setting out such an excellent programmatic method is easier than actually executing it successfully. But whether or not one agrees with Mealy's conclusions, it must be acknowledged that he has carefully attempted to follow these criteria.

In brief, the salient points of Mealy's thesis are the following: (1) Rev. 19 narrates the parousia of Christ at which time the present cosmos will be destroyed and a new cosmos will be created; (2) the binding of Satan, which occurred at the parousia, consists in the confinement of Satan in the realm of the dead along with the rest of the dead nations who had been defeated and judged at the end of chap. 19; Satan can no longer deceive these nations because they now see him for who he is, just as powerless as them and suffering the same temporary 'millennial' punishment as them (20:1–3); (3) during the thousand years all of the saints reign over a fully recreated earth (20:4, 5b–6); (4) at the conclusion of the thousand years Satan is released from his confinement along with the dead nations who are resurrected, and, again, he deceives them so that they rebel against Christ a second time (20:5a, 7–8); (5) then both Satan and the nations are judged a second time (20:9–10), (6) prior to which they are given a 'second chance' to repent; everything after 20:10 recapitulates so that (7) 20:11–12 repeats from a negative perspective the first judgment of Rev. 20:4–6, which there was portrayed from a positive viewpoint; (8) 20:13–15 is another version of the second judgment at the end of the millennium already described in 20:7–10, and (9) the picture of the new Jerusalem in

Rev. 21 recapitulates the parousia when the reign of the saints together with God and Christ is established (cf. 19:7-9; 20:4, 5b-6).

As far as I am aware, Mealy's above points #5, #6 and #7 are completely unique to him (for his full discussion of these three features see especially pp. 162-189; though see p. 52 for an anticipation of #6). Mealy acknowledges that much in his thesis is not absolutely new. Indeed, his above points #1 and #9 have been held by numerous commentators. Ironically, traditional amillennialism has affirmed point #1, and some premillennialists have held to point #9. Even points #2-#5 are not completely unique to him. Here he is dependent in a number of ways on other previously formulated perspectives from recent times (especially that of Wolfgang Metzger, pp. 47-57, 243-244). However, his overall scheme is new in the manner in which he integrates prior views into his unique contributions.

A tabular comparison of Mealy's chronological scheme of Rev. 19:11-20:15 with that of traditional amillennialism and traditional premillennialism may be helpful, especially with respect to the different order of the various resurrections:

Traditional <i>Amillennialism</i>	Traditional <i>Premillennialism</i>	Mealy's <i>Premillennialism</i>
1. Incarceration of Satan and reign of <i>spiritually resurrected</i> saints during the millennium, which occurs during the church age (20:1-5a, 6)	1. Battle between Christ (at His second coming) and the beast, who leads ungodly forces, all of whom are defeated (19:11-21).	1. Battle between Christ (at His second coming) and the Beast, who leads ungodly forces, all of whom are defeated (19:11-21).
2. Final battle between Christ (at His second coming) and a released Satan, together with the beast, who lead ungodly forces living in the last generation of history, all of whom are defeated (19:11-21 = 20:7-10).	2. Incarceration of Satan and millennial reign of <i>physically resurrected</i> believers (20:1-5a, 6).	2. Destruction of old cosmos and recreation of new cosmos immediately following Christ's defeat of the beast and his forces.

<p>3. Destruction of old cosmos and recreation of new cosmos (20:11; 21:1ff).</p>	<p>3. Final battle between Christ and a released Satan, who leads his forces, all of whom are defeated (20:7-10).</p>	<p>3. The first judgment of the ungodly also immediately following Christ's defeat of them (19:11-21; 20:11-12).</p>
<p>4. Final <i>physical</i> resurrection and judgment of all unrighteous and righteous (20:5b, 12-15).</p>	<p>4. Destruction of old cosmos and recreation of new cosmos (20:11; 21:1ff).</p>	<p>4. Incarceration of Satan and millennial reign of <i>physically</i> resurrected believers (20:1-5a, 6).</p>
<p>5. Everlasting reign of God, Christ and saints in new cosmos (21:1-22:5). (Note: most forms of Post-millennialism overlap with the above scheme, except at step #1, where the incarceration of Satan happens during the yet future millennial reign of the saints, after which Christ's second coming occurs).</p>	<p>5. Final <i>physical</i> resurrection and judgment of all unrighteous (20:5a, 12-15).</p>	<p>5. Final battle between saints and a released Satan, who leads <i>physically</i> resurrected unbelievers, all of whom are defeated (through divine intervention (20:7-10)).</p>
	<p>6. Everlasting reign of God, Christ and saints in new cosmos (21:1-22:5).</p>	<p>6. The second and final judgment of the ungodly (20:13-15). This recapitulates chronologically the event of point #5 above.</p>
		<p>7. The saints' millennial reign together with God and Christ continues on into eternity.</p>

Mealy contends that he is reviving the earliest interpretation of the millennium found in church history (p. 243), though this is far from evident. It is more accurate to say that Mealy's detailed scheme possibly could fit into the general perspective of these early views but it is not clear that this is so, since they only briefly and more vaguely set out their views. The Epistle of Barnabas 15 and especially the Apocalypse of Elijah 4:26–5:39 may equate the millennial period with the eternal, new creation, and view it not merely as a beginning phase of the eternal new age (Mealy holds to the latter view). Mealy's perspective approaches closer to that of Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* V.23.2; V.28.3; V.33–36), Hippolytus (*Fragments on Daniel* II. 5–6 in the Roberts and Donaldson edition of *Ante—Nicene Fathers* V) and possibly Methodius (*Banquets of the Ten Virgins* 9:1; *Extracts From the Work on Things Created* 9). Like Mealy, all three of these fathers appeared to hold to a literal millennium as a beginning of the new age (though Methodius is less clear in his view). There is certainly no hint of a subsequent revival of evil in the Apocalypse of Elijah or the Epistle of Barnabas.

II. The View That the Final Attack by the Wicked Nations in Rev. 20: 7–9 Is the Fulfillment of the Prediction of the Resurrection of the Wicked in 20:5a ('the rest of dead did not come to life until the thousand years was completed')

A crucial linchpin of the argument, as well as the most unusual and striking part of the thesis, is the contention that the nations which Satan deceives at the conclusion of the thousand years have been literally resurrected. Immediately following their resurrection, they undergo a second satanic deception and rebel against Christ a second time (20:5a, 7–8). His view that the final onslaught of the evil nations in vv 7–8 is the fulfillment of the prediction of v 5a ('the rest of dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed') is contrary to almost all commentators of different millennial persuasions who instead see 20:12–15 as the fulfillment of 20:5a. This placing of 'the release of Satan and the resurrection of unrepentant humanity precisely on top of one another in time' Mealy offers as 'a fact which has gone by completely unnoticed in scholarly discussion' (p. 124), though he does cite U. Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assoc., 1944 [1881], 747–748), as the 'only published commentator consulted' who also holds this view.

However, others have made the same observation. John Gill, in his early nineteenth century commentary on Revelation asserts the same view (*An Exposition of the New Testament* III [Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, 1811], p. 863; therefore, Smith was not the 'first exegete'

to hold this view [*contra* Mealy, p. 244], though some may have preceded even Gill). Others also have identified the besiegers of vv 8–9 with the rest of the dead in v 5, but have viewed vv 8–9 as portraying a resurrection which is symbolic of a final resurgence of evil human hordes rising up against God's people (so B. H. Carroll, *An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Book of Revelation* [New York: F. H. Revell, 1913], p. 287; A. Pieters, *The Lamb, the Woman and the Dragon* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1937], pp. 321–323). It is noteworthy that Carroll and Pieters contend that the first resurrection of 20:4–6 is a figurative one since they see the purported resurrection of vv 8–9 to be figurative for the historical revival of the attempted reign of evil among nations who are already living bodily on the earth.

Mealy's identification of vv 8–9 as the fulfillment of v 5a has two strong *prima facie* arguments in its favor (see pp. 124–126). First, the phrase 'when the thousand years were completed' of v 7 is almost identical to the phrases 'until the thousand years were completed' of vv 3b and 5a, which respectively prophesy Satan's release from his prison and the resurrection of all unbelievers. Therefore, it is natural to identify all three verses as discussing events which are to happen at precisely the same time. Accordingly, vv 7–9 appear to develop vv 3b and 5a by indicating their fulfillment. If at the end of the thousand years Satan will be loosed (v 3b), and if at the end of the same period the rest of the dead are to rise (v 5a), then vv 7–9 *must* be viewed as fulfilling vv 3b and 5a. In this light it is natural to take the phrase 'they ascended' in v 9 as synonymous with 'they came to life' of v 5a.

The second factor in favor of Mealy's contention is that vv 7–9 are closer in context to the purported antecedent prophecy of v 5a than are vv 11–15, which the majority of commentators view as the fulfillment of v 5a. Mealy argues that only by first understanding Rev. 20:1–10 according to his scheme can 20:11–15 be understood correctly.

These two factors clearly have not been adequately noticed and dealt with by former commentators, and they provide a basis for Mealy's view which gives it a viability which henceforth cannot be ignored by commentators on the Apocalypse. In fact, the *prima facie* nature of these two arguments could have the force of shifting the burden of proof to those disagreeing with Mealy's position. Has Mealy demonstrated that his thesis is probable? A number of considerations show that, while impressive on a surface reading, the thesis needs more substantiation before it can be judged to be persuasive. The majority of the remaining portion of this review will focus on these considerations.

First, a direct reply to the cumulative force of these two arguments

is in order. To say that 20:7–9 *must* be equivalent to 20:5a may be to insist on an overly precise time scheme. The precision demands that, if at the end of the thousand years Satan will be loosed (v 3b), and, if at the end of the same period the rest of the dead are to rise (v 5a), then vv 7–9 *must* fulfill v 5a, since vv 7–9 record the first events to happen after the millennium consisting of both Satan's and the nations' rebellion. As noted above, according to most traditional millennial views the resurrection of v 5a is identified with 20:11–15, which is seen to occur at the end of the thousand years immediately after the final rebellion of vv 7–9. The rebellion, according to traditional views, is seen as very brief so that the directly following judgment can with *general* accuracy be seen as also coming at the end of the thousand years. Therefore, according to the consensus view, even though 20:11–15 come after the events of 20:7–9, the former can still legitimately be said to happen after the thousand years are over. It is a logical fallacy to think that this could not be the case. Accordingly, vv 7–9 would specifically fulfill the prophecy of v 3b and vv 11–15 would fulfill the prophecy of v 5a.

Nevertheless, Mealy's notion is possible. However, it is not demanded by the language of the text. Other than the overly precise temporal identification of v 5a with vv 3b, 7–8, he has not adduced enough evidence to show that his overall analysis is probable.

In addition to the two *prima facie* arguments, he gives seven other arguments for his view that 20:8–9 refer to the resurrection which is predicted in 20:5a.

A. Appeal to the Use of Isa. 24:21–22

First, Mealy appeals to Isaiah 24:21–22 ('So it will happen in that day, that the Lord will visit the host of heaven, on high, and the kings of the earth, on earth. And they will be gathered together as prisoners in the pit, and will be confined in prison; and after many days they will be visited'). Mealy argues that 20:3, 7–10 reflects the pattern found in the Isaiah text (pp. 124–125; cf. pp. 99–101). Isa. 24:21–22 can be read to say that ungodly heavenly and earthly beings will be punished in the latter days, confined in a prison and later be punished again. This could generally support Mealy's view, since it is an Old Testament precedent portraying evil heavenly beings together with unbelieving earthly kings as being confined in a 'prison.' However, the depiction could also generally fit into competing views as well. Whereas, Mealy (and perhaps many pre-millennialists) sees the portrayal as describing an incarceration starting after Christ's second coming, others see that Satan, his angels and their earthly representatives underwent inaugurated judgment

at the cross and resurrection, and will experience consummated judgment at the eschaton. The Isaiah text could fit into both schemes.

However, there are other possible interpretations of Isa. 24:21–22. It is not obvious that ‘the host of heaven, on high’ refers to heavenly, angelic beings, but may be another way of referring to earthly powers. If that is the case, only earthly authorities are in mind in the passage, which would not lend support to Mealy’s thesis (e.g., J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953 {orig. 1865}], 410–411). Furthermore, the phrase ‘in that day the Lord will visit’ of v 21 may well be temporally parallel with ‘after many days they will be punished’ (v 22). Indeed, this is consistent with the pattern elsewhere in Isaiah and the prophets where ‘latter-day’ language can be used in the same contexts in a synonymously parallel relationship with other latter-day language or concepts to indicate events occurring at the same time as one another and not subsequent to one another (Isa. 1:26a with 1:26c; Jer. 21:7 with 21:3–6; cf. Jer. 31:31 with Jer. 31:33; cf. Jer. 49:6 with Jer. 48:47; cf. Joel 3:1 [2:28] with 2:21–27). Indeed, the introductory phrase ‘in that day’ occurs repeatedly in the following chapters (25:9, 26:1, 27:1, 27:2, 27:12 and 27:13; cf. 27:6). It is likely that all of these phrases are synonymous and refer to the end-time judgment of God’s enemies and consequent deliverance of His people, which occur virtually simultaneously. If the prophesied event of Isa. 24:21 is temporally parallel to that of Isa. 24:22, then the passage as a whole would not fit into Mealy’s scheme.

B. Appeal to the Use of Isa. 14:9–15

Secondly, Mealy refers to Isaiah 14:9–15 as the background for Satan’s inability to deceive the nations any longer (p. 129). The passage describes a figure called ‘the king of Babylon’ who descends into the realm of the dead and is shamed before the inhabitants there. As with Isaiah 24, Isaiah 14 provides a precedent for an evil king consciously existing in an underworld ‘pit’ with other evil kings. Again, only in a general manner does this support his view, as it does other competing viewpoints. All views of Rev. 20:1–3 envision some form of a binding of Satan, and could likewise make appeal to the language and imagery of Isaiah 14 as a general precedent.

Therefore, Mealy’s use of Isaiah 14 is an example of arguing from the ambiguous to the clear, as was the case above with Isaiah 24. There is no unambiguous precedent anywhere for an eschatological two-stage deception by Satan of the nations. It is also curious that Satan would no longer deceive the nations because they see him along with them being punished in the underworld during the

millennium, and then that Satan would again be able to deceive them once they have been resurrected (129–130). It is understandable that Mealy must formulate the nations' willingness to be deceived a second time by Satan as a 'great irony.' This is a major problem which needed more discussion by Mealy.

C. Appeal to the Use of Isaiah 26

Mealy refers to Isaiah 26 as a third argument supporting his view that 20:8–9 refer to the resurrection which is predicted in 20:5a. For example, he suggests that in Isaiah 26:21 ('the earth will reveal her bloodshed and *no longer cover her slain*;' pp. 134–135) both a literal and figurative resurrection can be discerned. But he needs to demonstrate such a double meaning with further evidence before it can be considered a viable view. More broadly, to enhance the plausibility of his view of Isaiah 26, he contends that Rev. 19:11–20:10 parallels Isaiah 24:1–27:1 in six significant ways (pp. 100, 133), which lend support to his overall scheme. But the parallels also fit easily into other schemes, as was true with points 'A' and 'B' above.

D. The Interpretation of 'the Four Corners of the Earth' in Rev. 20:8 as Entrances to the Realm of the Dead

A fourth argument is Mealy's identification of 'the four corners of the earth' in Rev. 20:8 from where the nations are said to be gathered, as the edges of the world understood to be the entrances (or exits) of the realms of the dead. He proposes 1 Enoch 18 and Rev. 7:1 in support (appealing also to a few commentators). However, the 1 Enoch passage does not contain the image or language of 'the four corners of the earth' nor does it refer to the human dead (his appeal to Ps. 61:3 is unpersuasive). The latter passage of Rev. 7:1 could be taken as Mealy proposes.

On the other hand, the angels 'standing on the *four corners of the earth*' in 7:1 could just as easily refer to their sovereignty over the *whole world*. This latter view is supported by Isa. 11:12 and Ezek. 7:2, where the phrase 'four corners of the earth (or "land")' is a figure of speech for the entire earth (or land, as a synecdoche of the part for the whole; so also Pirke Rab. Eliezer XVIII; cf. 2 Bar. 6:4–7:2). The idea of the angels' universal sovereignty is enforced by the following phrase explaining that they also 'hold the four winds of the earth' (substantiated by Jer. 49:36, Dan. 8:8, Dan. 11:4, 1 En. 18:2, 4 Ezra 13:5, Matt. 24:31 and Mk. 13:27, where 'the four winds of heaven' figuratively refer to the whole earth; cf. also Ezek. 37:9, Dan.

7:2 and Zech. 6:5, where also the phrase 'four winds of heaven' is used likewise).

Therefore, Mealy's perspective may be applicable to the phrase in Rev. 20:8. However, more conceivable is the notion that the 'four corners of the earth' is merely to be taken as a Semitic way of referring, not now to the whole land of Israel, but to the entire earth, since the nations mentioned arise from outside of Israel. Therefore, there are no clear precedents for Mealy's notion but there are precedents for the contention that the imagery is a semitism for universality.

E. Argument that the Phrase 'They Ascended upon the Breadth of the Earth' in Rev. 20:9 Refers to Resurrection from the Dead

Fifthly, the idea that the phrase 'they [the nations] *ascended* upon the breadth of the earth' refers to resurrection is possible (p. 136). Parallels of ἀναβαίνω elsewhere in the book are noted, but only possibly Rev. 11:12 refers to resurrection. The other uses refer to the seer being caught up to the heavenly dimension (4:1), to an angel ascending in some figurative manner (7:2) and to demons arising from an abyss (9:3) or beasts arising from a sea, from an abyss or from the earth (11:7; 13:11; 17:8). Mealy contends that the sea or earth from which the beasts arise suggest the realm of the dead or the grave from which the beasts come. This is conceivable but far from clear. In fact, in his discussion of the ascending beasts he does not acknowledge the generally accepted allusions to Daniel 7 (Daniel 7:3, 21 in Rev. 11:7; Daniel 7:2-7, 20, 24 in Rev. 13:1-2; Daniel 7:17 in Rev. 13:11; Daniel 7:11, 17, 23, 26 in Rev. 17:8; e.g., see G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John*, [Lanham: University Press of America, 1984], pp. 229-241, 252-255). There is no hint of the nations' resurrection from the realm of the dead in Daniel 7 itself, but rather a mere reference the sea and earth as the multitude of earthly nations from which the four kingdoms mentioned therein arise. The nuance of the realm of evil is probably included with 'sea' in Daniel 7:2-3 but not clearly the realm of the dead. While some may think John pays no attention to the OT contexts to which he alludes, this at least must be demonstrated in a case by case manner. But to fail even to show awareness of this generally acknowledged OT background is not to give the serious study required for the topic at hand (on p. 204 Mealy does briefly mention Dan. 7:2 as possible background for Rev. 17:1, 15). Furthermore, Mealy's conclusion that the beast's ascent from the abyss in 11:7 and 17:8 is a literal reference to a person who has been resurrected from the dead (especially in the light of 13:3, 14; pp. 92,

98) not only ignores the probable OT background of Daniel but is an overly literal reading of the texts without any interaction with other mainline views affirming a figurative ascent (e.g., Minear, *I Saw a New Earth* [Washington/Cleveland: Corpus, 1968], 247–260). At least, he should give reasons for a literal instead of figurative reading.

Mealy concludes the discussion of ἀναβαίνω in Rev. 20:8 by saying its closest parallel is Dan. 12:2, where the LXX has ‘many of those who sleep in *the breadth of the earth will arise.*’ However, in Daniel ‘breadth of the earth’ has a different meaning, referring to the place from where the dead arise, whereas in Revelation it refers to the place where the rebellious proceed to attack, or, even on Mealy’s interpretation, it is the place where the dead come after being resurrected. Rather, the language of 20:8–9 depicts only an attack against God’s people with no imagery of resurrection. This is borne out by the allusion to Ezekiel 38 which continues in Rev. 20:9–10, where also is found the unique parallel of the multitudinous, end—time enemy (38:15, 22) who will ‘ascend [ἀναβαίνω!] upon the land’ (Ezek. 38:11,16; cf. 39:2; Targ. Ezek. 38:9) and be judged by fire from heaven (39:6) and by ‘fire and brimstone’ (38:22). Some LXX versions of 38:11 even refer to the whole land of Israel as a ‘city’ which is to be attacked (‘I [Gog] will ascend upon . . . the ones inhabiting a *city land* [πολις γη, ms. 198];’ one Latin version [La^w] reads only *civitatem*). There is no obvious resurrection imagery in the Ezekiel language.

Furthermore, in its attack against Israel Babylon was described as ‘going forth on the plain of the earth in order to inherit tabernacles not his own’ (Hab. 1:6, LXX, a variant of which [ms. 544] compares the Babylonians to ‘demons,’ which could fit better with Mealy’s view; for parallels with ‘breadth of the earth’ also cf. Judith 2:20–21). Therefore, in addition to the Ezekiel background, the wording from Habakkuk is also drawn on to depict the end-time foe’s attack against the saints. The former OT episode foreshadowed the latter.

Josh. 11:4–5 (LXX) similarly portrays Israel’s enemies: ‘they and their kings with them went forth, as the sand of the sea in multitude . . . and all the kings assembled in person . . . and encamped . . . to make war with Israel.’ Likewise 1 Sam. (=1 Kgs.) 13:5: ‘And the Philistines gather together to war [συνάγονται εἰς πόλεμον] with Israel, and come up upon Israel . . . people as the sand by the seashore for multitude; and they come up and encamp’ (cf. Josh. 9:2; 2 Sam. [=2 Kgs.] 17:11–13). The accounts of these attacks at the early point of Israel’s history may have helped shape the accounts of the attack at the latter end of Israel’s history narrated in Ezekiel 38–39 (on which see above). In similar fashion these OT accounts may

also stand in the background in Rev. 20:8–9 and function analogically, if not typologically. The language of ‘going forth’ in Joshua or ‘ascending’ (ἀναβαίνω) in 1 Kings and Ezekiel 38 points to a non-resurrection portrayal. These specific texts unfortunately are not mentioned by Mealy.

F. The Attack Prophesied in Ezekiel 39 Is Different from the Attack Portrayed in Ezekiel 38

Sixth, Mealy maintains that Ezekiel 39 predicts an attack of Gog and Magog at the second coming of Christ and Ezekiel 38 predicts another, different attack of Gog and Magog at the end of the millennium (pp. 130–133; 187–188). According to his view, Rev. 19:17–21 refers to the Ezekiel 39 attack which occurs at Christ’s parousia and launches the millennium and 20:8–10 alludes to the Ezekiel 38 attack which occurs after the millennium. His only argument for distinguishing Ezekiel 38 and 39 from one another is that Ezekiel 39:23–29 concludes with a reflection on God’s restoration of Israel, so that the attack in chapter 39 must occur around the time of that restoration, whereas the attack in chapter 38 occurs after Israel has been restored to the land and has enjoyed a long period of peace there. His contention about Ezekiel 38–39 needs detailed demonstration, since, if it is acknowledged that Ezekiel 38–39 refer to the same attack, then the scheme set up by Mealy would be significantly weakened.

Mealy’s view is not an unimaginable scenario for Ezekiel 38–39, but more exegetical argument is needed to make it plausible than the bare two or three sentences stated (Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1952], p. 398, is cited as agreeing that John had this view of Ezekiel 38–39, but Kiddle adds ‘such exegesis of a prophetic oracle seems utterly pointless and misleading to our generation; it arises out’ of a ‘rabbinical method of reasoning’). Mealy cites no more evidence nor does he cite any OT commentaries or periodical literature in support of his view. Indeed, the consensus opinion by major OT commentators is that Ezekiel 39:1–20 recapitulates chapter 38 and that the two chapters prophesy two versions of the same attack (Cook, *Ezekiel*, 406–408, 417–418; Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 286, 294; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 298; Stuart, *Ezekiel*, 351–363; Allen, *Ezekiel*, 207–209; cf. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 521, 527, whose conclusions line up generally with the preceding).

The concluding mention of restoration at the end of Ezekiel 39 is a flashback to other hopes recorded earlier in Ezekiel 34–37. Such kinds of flashbacks are characteristic of Ezekiel and prophetic literature. Most see the concluding comments about restoration from

exile in 39:23–29 as a summary or retrospective reflection on the same theme in chapters 34–37, serving as a transition between 34:1–39:24 and 40:1 ff. (e.g., Cook, *Ezekiel*, 422; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 529; Allen, *Ezekiel*, 208–209). Ezekiel 39:1–8 ff. is most naturally taken as a continuation of the narrative in chapter 38. There is no break between the two chapters to hint at the kind of temporal dislocation which Mealy wants to see. Another possible, though less clear line of analysis, is to see Ezekiel 39 recapitulating chap. 38, as above, but being fulfilled in the Selucid forces of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the second century B. C., who are typological of the forces at the end of history which will attempt to annihilate the church (J. G. Aalders, *Gog en Magog en Ezechiël* [Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1951], and T. Boersma, *Is the Bible a Jigsaw Puzzle?* [St. Catherine's, Ontario: Paideia, 1978] 120–125).

Mealy does admit tellingly that his own explanation of Ezekiel results in a 'rather cryptic double presentation' by the prophet (p. 187). The burden of proof rests on someone wanting to see different attacks, since on the surface both in Ezekiel and Revelation the two attacks appear to be versions of the same one.

G. *The Appeal to Purported Precedents in Biblical Tradition for a Final Attack by Resurrected Unbelievers against the Saints*

As a seventh line of evidence supporting his view that 20:8–9 refer to the resurrection which is predicted in 20:5a, Mealy adduces examples from biblical tradition. He argues that these examples provide precedents for a belief that the wicked dead would be resurrected at the end of the age, and then attempt again to oppress God's people in a final, climactic battle. However, as hard as Mealy searches, he is unable to supply a parallel anywhere in OT, Jewish or Christian literature where there is an expectation that at the final resurrection the wicked who rise from the grave will mount one last attack against God (he acknowledges repeatedly that his interpretation of Rev. 20:7–10 may not be obvious to readers of John's book [pp. 189, 241]). All of the examples to which he appeals refer only to the punishment of the resurrected wicked. This is an especially weak feature of the thesis. His conclusion at this point is important because it becomes the basis for his positing of 'a second chance' theology (185–186, 247–248), for which he also offers no precedents. In his view the judgment for a lifetime of sin and rejection of Christ comes at the parousia and occurs in the underworld during the millennium, but when the wicked are raised at the close of the thousand years, they have a surprisingly clean slate. According to the proposed prophetic scenario of Rev. 20:7–10, the wicked will not accept the

Lord when they are raised but will once again rebel against Him. Their final judgment is based solely on their one act of final rebellion.

Conclusion

None of the above seven lines of argument supporting the view that 20:8–9 refer to the resurrection which is predicted in 20:5a stand independently on their own as solid evidence. More evidence must be forthcoming to provide probability for the basic proposal. As it stands, the idea is possible but unlikely.

III. Other Problematic Interpretations in Mealy's Book

A. The Portrayals of Rev. 20:11–12 and 20:13–15 Depict Two Different Judgment Scenes

In addition to the analysis of Rev. 20:7–10, there are other problematic discussions. Mealy provides an overly subtle distinction between the judgment of Rev. 20:11–12 and that of 20:13–15. He proposes that the former refers to the judgment which he claims to see in 20:4–5 (apparently continuing that of 19:11–21) and the latter refers to the judgment of 20:9–10 (Mealy acknowledges that this is 'a very subtly articulated double judgment scene' which has been constructed by John [p. 187]). For example, the phrase 'the dead were judged according to their deeds' is found both in 20:12 and in 20:13, yet we are to understand on Mealy's reading that these same phrases refer to two different judgments. Also, Mealy's view works only if the resurrection assumed in 20:12, 15 and portrayed in 20:13 exclusively concerns that of the unrighteous (so p. 169), a point debated by commentators. Many see that both the righteous and unrighteous are undergoing resurrection in these verses.

B. The Reign of the Saints in the Book of Revelation (Including the Rewards to the Conquerors in Rev. 2–3) Begins Only in the Future Millennium

Mealy wants to see the reign of the saints as limited exclusively to the future millennium and on into eternity. However, to be able to do so he de-emphasizes the inaugurated eschatology of the Apocalypse. Among instances of this is his argument that Rev. 1:6 ('He made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God') says nothing about the present reign of the saints but only that they are conferred with 'an identity as priests to the King's God' (p. 32), and that they have 'citizenship' in

the kingdom but do not yet possess 'kingship' (p. 84). Their 'kingship' will come only at the parousia when the millennium is established. It would seem that anyone without a prior agenda would understand that in 1:6 both kingly and priestly authority are being conferred on the saints. Just as the saints exercise priestly authority, so it is likely that they exercise authority of the kingdom. This is also apparent from Rev. 1:9: 'I, John, your fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance in Christ Jesus.' Since Christ has begun to reign in fulfillment of OT kingdom prophecies (Rev. 1:5, 13 ff.), so those who are 'in Him' share in what He possesses. Furthermore, if the 'tribulation' and their active 'perseverance' through tribulation were a present reality, so must be their active participation in sharing Christ's kingly authority through corporate representation ('in Christ'). As they persevere through tribulation they reign ironically. To differentiate citizenship in the kingdom from kingship on the basis of 1:6, 9 is possible, but it is an overly scrupulous distinction. In addition, if the elders sitting on thrones with crowns in Rev. 4:4 represent in any way exalted Christians ruling in heaven, then the reign of saints has at least been inaugurated in the heavenly realm (note the elders on heavenly thrones in heaven also in 11:16, and their presence in heaven around God's throne in 7:11 and 19:4).

Similarly, the author repeatedly affirms that Revelation 5:10b refers to the rule of Christians on the earth which will begin only at Christ's future coming (pp. 32, 108, 110, 116, 216, 238). He translates the crucial clause 'they will reign on the earth.' But some mss. read a present tense instead of future: 'they are reigning on the earth' (supporting the present tense is A 1006. 1611. 1841. 2329. M^K, while support for the future is found in N 1854. 2050. 2053. 2344. 2351. M^A lat. co; Cyp). Both readings have equally good textual support so that internal evidence must be the deciding factor. Commentators are divided on which reading should be preferred. But Mealy does not refer to the textual problem at all. He apparently assumes without any argument the validity of the future tense reading and uses it as a key proof-text to demonstrate that it will be *on the earth* that saints will reign only during the future millennium.

On 1:6 and 5:10 Mealy apparently is following the analysis of R. Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 330–331, who, as he says, has a 'judicious discussion' on this subject (p. 32). However, Schnackenburg does not clearly argue in favor of Mealy's view (e.g., Schnackenburg says that saints 'partake of Christ's eschatological reign' and that their being called a 'kingdom' means that they are presently 'kings' as well as 'priests'). Though he underscores future fulfillment of the saints' reign in his

discussion, he appears to include in his view an inaugurated aspect of that reign. Schnackenburg's student, E. S. Fiorenza (*Priester für Gott* [Münster: Aschendorff, 1972], e.g., 330, 338), does argue along the same lines of Mealy, though he does not cite her at this point, as he does at other points. His failure to even discuss much less demonstrate his conclusion about Rev. 1:6 and 5:10 is a crucial oversight, since this conclusion is an important part of his argument against the inaugurated reign of the saints and against amillennialism (pp. 31–32).

He also sees that the promises to the overcomers in the letters of chapters 2 and 3 have fulfillment only in the future, new creation (pp. 82–84, 216–219). However, the promise that overcomers will receive white robes (3:4–5), crowns (2:10) and will sit on Christ's throne (3:21) appears to fulfilled in some sense in 4:4 where the elders sit on thrones (so also 11:16), wearing white robes and crowns (cf. also 4:10). If the elders are associated with exalted Christians in any way (whether as identical, personified, representatively, symbolically, etc., as many commentators hold), then the promises to the overcomers begin to come true in the saints' heavenly existence (the promises probably even have application to pre-death existence in the light of such texts as 1:5, 9; 2:9; 3:11, 20; 5:10; cf. 2:17 with 3:1). Indeed, that exalted saints receive white robes at death is clear from 6:11. And the purported *consummate* respite from temporal affliction pictured in 7:15–17 (according to Mealy, pp. 216–219) also begins instead according to 6:11 and 14:13 with the saints' pre-parousia 'rest' in heaven (7:15–17 may even be a merged picture of 'already-and-not-yet,' though the expectation of rest in 21:4 is clearly future). In 2:17 overcomers are promised an eschatological meal with Christ, and in 3:20 Christ says that believers not yet having experienced death may partake of that meal with Him. If saints conclude their 'overcoming' at death (so 12:11), it makes much sense that their reward for overcoming (such as sitting with Christ on His throne in 3:21) would begin to be given in their exalted state at the time of death.

If Revelation portrays an inaugurated and consummate form of Christ's reign, it is logical that the same two-stage reign of the saints could well be posited. But it could be argued that since Christ's inaugurated reign began only after His bodily exaltation in heaven, the inaugurated reign of Christians could begin only after their bodily resurrection at the end of the age. However, Revelation also pictures believers in non-bodily form as exalted in heaven after death but before their bodily resurrection (see references above). This could certainly qualify them to be eligible candidates for an office of inaugurated kingship. The picture of elders sitting on thrones in

heaven confirms that this is in fact the case (see above on 4:4, 10). And when ascriptions like 1:6, 9 and 5:10 are applied to the saints, it is also suitable to understand them in the light of inaugurated kingship.

Therefore, it is an *argumentum ad hominem* when Mealy says that amillennialism 'has lost nearly all support by Revelation specialists in this century, on the valid grounds that it fails to do justice to the unique [futuristic?] eschatological perspective of Revelation itself' (p. 19). First, such a sweeping statement, at least, needs to be supported by significant and numerous bibliographical references of scholars on both sides, and discussion of these sources. Second, Mealy's definition of 'specialists in this century' is vague, since at crucial points he himself relies on scholars who have written very little on the Apocalypse (e.g., Schnackenburg, Metzger, etc.) or who wrote in the last century (U. Smith). Thirdly, there are significant Revelation 'specialists' who see the saints participating in inaugurated promises to the overcomers and in promised kingship (I chose randomly from commentaries on the Apocalypse and found commentators generally divided over the issue: e. g., some held to the present active reign of saints in 1:6, 9 and 5:10 together with a consummate, future stage of that reign [e.g., Minear, p. 232; Beasley-Murray, pp. 57–58, 64; Sweet, p. 130; Caird, pp. 17, 20; Alan Johnson, 424]; on the other hand some affirmed that only a future reign was in mind in the same passages [Beckwith, p. 429; Fiorenza, see *supra*; A. Y. Collins, p. 8]). We should heed Paul S. Minear's warning about making hard and fast 'temporal and spatial' judgments, especially with respect to some aspect of John's eschatology ('The Cosmology of the Apocalypse' in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation*, FS for O. A. Piper, W. Klassen and G. F. Snyder [eds.; New York: Harper and Row, 1962], 23–37).

IV. Methodological Flaws in Mealy's Research

A. *The Lack of Adequate Interaction with Other Millennial Views*

Another methodological flaw is his quick discarding of other views without adequate interaction or refutation of them at the beginning of the work. Though the majority of his work is dedicated to forging a new line of millennial interpretation, Mealy should have had more extensive summarization of various forms of premillennialism, amillennialism and postmillennialism. For example, he dedicates four and a half pages to a refutation of the 'A-Millennial' view (pp. 18–23). He agrees with Alford's dictum that it is logically and lexically incoherent to deny bodily resurrection in Rev. 20:4 and then

to assert that the same expression 'they came to life' in the very next verse (20:5a) means bodily resurrection. But he does not even explain the reasoning (much less refute it) that some amillennialists adduce for such a position. His brevity comes close to resulting in a caricature of the position.

In brief, some amillennialists contend that since the first [physical] death (v 4) is qualitatively different from the 'second [spiritual] death' (v 6; to which Mealy, p. 93, generally concurs), then it is plausible that the first resurrection (v 4, 5b-6) is likewise qualitatively different from the second resurrection (v 5a). This is the basis for some amillennial interpretations of the 'first resurrection' as an intermediate 'spiritual' one and the second resurrection as a consummately physical one.

The qualitative distinction between the two resurrections is also suggested by the same kind of qualitative antitheses between the 'first' (old) creation and second ('new') creation in 21:1, where the former was pre-consummate or incomplete, while the latter was to be consummate or complete. Strikingly in 21:4-8 there is a formal antithesis between 'the [first physical] death' and 'the second [spiritual] death.' In 21:4 physical 'death' is the focus of the phrase 'the *first things* have passed away,' which is contrasted with 'the second [spiritual] death' (21:8) and with 'the new things' of the eternal new creation (21:5). Rev. 21:1, 4 are a clear allusion to Isa. 65:16-17, where the same qualitative contrasts occur between the 'first affliction' or 'former' earth and 'a new heaven and a new earth.' Isa. 66:22 affirm that one of the qualitative differences is that 'the new heaven and new earth' will 'remain' forever in contrast to the former which passed away. Such qualitative distinctions in Rev. 21:1-8 lend further support to the possibility that the two resurrections in Rev. 20:4-6 are also qualitatively distinct (the majority of the above is from M. Kline, 'The First Resurrection,' *WTJ* 37 [1975], 366-375, the title of which Mealy cites only in a footnote without any summary).

This, among other of Mealy's criticisms of amillennialism, deserved summarization and attempted refutation. In this respect, Mealy's omission of R. F. White's 'Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev 20:1-10' (*WTJ* 51 [1989], 319-344) was unfortunate, since this article represents the most cogent argument to date for recapitulation between Revelation 19 and 20.

It is also questionable whether or not premillennialism can legitimately be called the 'majority' or 'received' view in the twentieth century among both scholars and lay people alike (pp. 11, 15, 17). To prove this and like claims (cf. p. 23) would take a massive amount of documentation and surveys.

*B. The Problem of Interpretative Conclusions in Revelation 20
Based on Parallel Texts Which Are Not Adequately Analyzed*

Almost all of the above points of criticism so far in this review concern Mealy's lack of trenchant argumentation and support for the various positions he proposes. A consistent pattern emerges from a survey of his various exegetical studies. Significant interpretations of Revelation 20 are based on interpretations of other passages elsewhere in Revelation or in the OT for which he does not provide adequate substantiation. Doubtless, and to be fair, his task is enormous. In order to argue convincingly in favor of some interpretation in Revelation 20 based on an interpretation of another passage elsewhere in the book, the interpretation of that other passage has to be established in relative depth. The task of writing a monograph on an explosive chapter like Revelation 20 virtually requires writing a small commentary on many of the significant passages elsewhere in the book and in the OT. Mealy has done an admirable and creative job, and he has attempted to approach each interpretative problem with a consistent exegetical method. However, he has failed at significant points to present a convincing case (at least to this author). Nevertheless, I commend him on attempting to accomplish a task of titanically difficult proportions.

*C. The Lack of Adequate Discussion of the Textual Problem
in Rev. 20:5a*

As a matter of methodological procedure, at the outset Mealy should have established the text of v 5a ('The rest of the dead did not come to life . . .') upon which his entire thesis rests. The clause is likely original but is omitted by several good mss. (X 2030. 2053. 2062. 2377; so also M^{K} sy; Vic Bea] either because it was abrupt and seemed out of place or, more likely, a copyist's eye skipped from the $\epsilon\nu\delta$ οφ ω 4 το τηε πολλοσινη $\epsilon\tau\eta$ and began again from there. Therefore, the clause is likely original, but Mealy should have shown awareness of the textual problem in order to avert undue criticism from any who might attempt to argue that v 5a was omitted from the original manuscript and added by a later scribe.

V. Conclusion

Though this review has focused on areas of criticism, Mealy does offer many good insights which result from his efforts toward a consistent exegetical method. Among the numerous exegetical contributions made is the interpretation of the phrase 'and the sea

(θάλασσα) is no longer' in Rev. 21:1 (pp. 193–211). He probably rightly sees a multivalent meaning of 'sea': (1) sea = the sky as a veil of separation between heaven and earth, which hides God's presence; (2) sea = the literal earthly sea which has negative, dangerous connotations from the human perspective; (3) sea = the underworld or the realm of death. Each of these aspects of the sea will be done away with in the new heavens and earth.

Also Mealy's extended discussion of both Revelation 19 and 21 as referring to events at the parousia of Christ is, for the most part, helpful and suggestive. Likewise, well argued is the polemical excursus against the contention of some that John ultimately expounds a universalistic theology (pp. 228–230). In addition, the argument that the New Jerusalem is equivalent to God's throne and temple, as well as being symbolic for His people is good (pp. 175–177).

Furthermore, this is a book which does not make the mistake of relying too much on prior secondary literature in forging its primary thesis. It is a bold attempt at a new perspective on Revelation 20. 'Paradigm shifts' are hard to accept, but Mealy has proposed one with respect to the millennium of Revelation 20, and it deserves to be ranked among other millennial positions in the history of the interpretation of Revelation 20. For this alone he should be regarded as making a significant contribution, even if the major thrust of his position has been partly anticipated by a few prior commentators (Gill, Smith, Carroll and Pieters).

Finally, it must be recalled that Mealy's identification of vv 8–9 as the fulfillment of v 5a has two strong *prima facie* arguments in its favor (see the above discussion at section II of the present article). These two factors have not been adequately noticed and dealt with by former commentators. These *prima facie* arguments provide a basis for Mealy's view which gives it a viability which cannot henceforth be ignored by commentators. In fact, the *prima facie* nature of these two arguments could have the force of shifting the burden of proof to those disagreeing with Mealy's position, though this review has called into question some of the exegetical underpinnings of these two arguments.

Mealy has been courageous to take on such an ambitious project and he is to be commended for making the first attempt at a full scale exegesis of Revelation 20 in the context of the entire book. This itself is a methodological contribution without precedent. Despite the above criticisms, his exegetical talent is evident. His monograph has caused me to think much more deeply about Revelation 20 than I would have otherwise. It is hoped that he will exercise his exegetical skills on yet future projects.

Abstract

The main contention of J. W. Mealy in his book *After the Thousand Years* is that the nations which Satan deceives at the conclusion of the millennium have been literally resurrected. Immediately following their resurrection, they undergo a second satanic deception and rebel against Christ a second time (20:5a, 7–9). His view that the final onslaught of the evil nations in vv 7–9 is the fulfillment of the prediction of v 5a ('the rest of dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed') is contrary to almost all commentators of different millennial persuasions who instead see 20:12–15 as the fulfillment of 20:5a.

Mealy's identification of vv 8–9 as the fulfillment of v 5a has one strong *prima facie* argument in its favor (see pp. 124–126): the phrase 'when the thousand years were completed' of v 7 is almost identical to the phrases 'until the thousand years were completed' of vv 3b and 5a, which respectively prophesy Satan's release from his prison and the resurrection of all unbelievers. Therefore, it is natural to identify all three verses as discussing events which are to happen at precisely the same time. Accordingly, vv 7–9 appear to develop vv 3b and 5a by indicating their fulfillment. If at the end of the thousand years Satan will be loosed (v 3b), and if at the end of the same period the rest of the dead are to rise (v 5a), then vv 7–9 *must* be viewed as fulfilling vv 3b and 5a. In this light it is natural to take the phrase 'they ascended' in v 9 as synonymous with 'they came to life' of v 5a.

Beale evaluates the exegetical underpinnings of this *prima facie* argument and raises a number of questions about the viability of the thesis.