

Eternal Conscious Torment vs Annihilation 003

Revelation 14:11

January 11, 2026

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If you could locate Revelation 14:11, that would be fantastic. This is Part Three of a series that we started entitled *Annihilation versus Eternal Torment*. To be honest with you, I am surprised anybody even shows up for this. It is such a scary topic. I expect to see an empty room when I start teaching this, but you guys are here. Praise the Lord.

We introduced the controversy in our first week together, and it has to do with the merging of a couple of ideas: conditional immortality is being wedded together with Annihilationism.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum explains those positions. Although he does not embrace these positions, he gives a good explanation of what these positions represent, and he says:

"Conditional immortality means that the soul is not inherently immortal."¹

In other words, when God created people, He never designed them to live forever. Immortality means no death, no point where you stop existing.

Fruchtenbaum goes on, and he says:

"...immortality is not part of the make-up of the soul—"²

According to this belief.

"...Rather, immortality is a gift—"³

That is why this false belief is called 'conditional immortality.'

"...immortality is a gift for the saved only—"⁴

The only people that become immortal are believers. So, what happens to the believer at death? They live forever. What happens to the unbeliever at death? They go into hell for a season, and then they just disappear.

So Fruchtenbaum writes:

¹ Fruchtenbaum, A. *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 707-8

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

"So at death, the unbeliever simply becomes non-existent, and only the believer continues to exist..."⁵

That view merges with what is called Annihilationism, and what it says is this: "The unsaved soul is annihilated," kind of like the Death Star destroying a planet in 'Star Wars.'

That is what Annihilationism teaches: that you go into hell—these people are not denying hell, but they are denying the perpetual existence in hell for unsaved people—and you are in hell for a while—it is like a bad weekend trip or something—and then you are gone.

"...What Annihilationism says is this: the unsaved soul—"6

Which, according to Annihilationism, is not immortal because immortality is only given to the saved.

"...the unsaved soul is annihilated after a temporary period of punishment. These people do believe that the unsaved soul goes to hell, but not for eternity, only temporarily. Eventually the unsaved soul is annihilated after suffering a duration of punishment."⁷

This is a view that has been a minority opinion floating under the radar for a long time. It is not the majority view in church history, as I will tell you. Suddenly at the end of last year, it sprang to life as a major influencer named Kirk Cameron—a Hollywood actor now Christian—has come out in defense of that view. Now everybody's looking at it.

Kirk Cameron did not invent it, but he brought it to the surface. So—pardon the pun—hell has become a hot topic.

Here is a headline related to Kirk Cameron.

It says:

"Kirk Cameron Denies 'Eternal Conscious Torment,' Is Now An Annihilationist?"⁸

You can go to his social media and see him talking about this and all of the people who are on board saying, "Absolutely, Kirk, this is the right view. I have always believed this, but I was too afraid to articulate it," et cetera, et cetera.

That is why we are dealing with this in this mini-series. Under Point Number One, we introduced the controversy. Here with Point Number Two I am giving you my best case as to why hell will not just last forever, but unbelievers will last in hell forever.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Fruchtenbaum, A. *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 707-8.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <https://protestia.com/2025/12/06/kirk-cameron-denies-eternal-conscious-torment-is-now-an-annihilationist>

After looking at those Biblical texts, I will give you some theological arguments for why we believe in eternal conscious torment. Then I will try to let the other side speak under Point Number Four and Five. Then I will teach you how to respond to their arguments. Then we will wrap up with an examination of church history, which I do not think we will spend a lot of time on.

I just want to show you that hardly anyone ever taught this. The Protestant reformers never taught anything like this. You find it in the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses. You will find this conditional immortality idea if you are dealing with Seventh-Day Adventists.

A fellow on TV named Doug Batchelor, who has a show called 'Amazing Facts'—he is a very winsome, articulate speaker—is very down on a lot of the things we believe at this church, like the Pre-Trib Rapture. He is very down on eternal conscious torment.

Then, finally, the conclusion will be "Who Cares?" I will go ahead and give you the conclusion now: if this thing gets let out of the bag, then it will put a wet blanket on missions. The struggle you have to go through to be a missionary and to get the Bible translated into remote dialects will lose its urgency if people just have a bad weekend trip after they die, and then they explode and cease to exist.

Here are the texts that we looked at last time related to why eternal conscious torment is very real. We walked through Daniel 12:2.

Eternal conscious torment is all over the teachings of Jesus. In fact, if it was not Jesus speaking about these things, it would be hard for me to believe they are true. He clearly taught eternal conscious torment: Matthew 25:46; Mark 9:47-48; Matthew 8:12; Luke 16:19-31.

It is in the teachings of Paul—eternal conscious torment. 2 Thessalonians 1:9. It is in the general epistles, in particular: Hebrews 6:2.

There are a ton of teachings in the Book of Revelation that, in my mind, make it indisputable. The Bible teaches eternal conscious torment. In fact, your strongest verses favoring eternal conscious torment as opposed to Annihilationism show up in the Book of Revelation. That becomes a reason why we need to teach the Book of Revelation, right? Because a lot of churches will never teach the Book of Revelation, or they will approach it as something just symbolic with no literal reference behind the symbols.

With that being said, notice Revelation 14:11. This refers to those that take the mark of the beast in the Tribulation. They are unbelievers, in other words.

It says:

"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever [aion, αἰών] and ever [aion, αἰών]..." (Revelation 14:11)

There is our word 'aionios [αἰώνιος].' In this case, it is 'aion, [αἰών].' (Sometimes pronounced 'eon,' as in 'eons of time.')

It is repeated. That is the smoke going up forever and ever on these unbelievers.

Then it says:

"...they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever has the mark of his name" (Revelation 14:11).

What would an Annihilationist do with this? Well, one of the things they do is say, "Well, notice that it is just the smoke going up forever and ever."

They try to make this argument that there is this annihilation of someone, and the result is so profound that the smoke goes up forever and ever. That is what they are saying. Well, have you ever heard of that saying, "Where there is smoke, there is fire?" And where there is fire, something is being consumed. Where there is smoke, there is fire, and where there is fire, something is being consumed.

When that smoke keeps going up forever and ever and ever and ever, it implies that people are in this state of torment forever and ever and ever. Now let us focus on the two 'aion's [αἰών]' translated 'forever' and 'ever.' Flip one chapter to the right and look at Revelation 15:7.

It says:

"Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever" (Revelation 15:7).

Now, that is the exact same Greek construction: two 'aion's [αἰών]' back to back. There is no way you could ever conclude that that structure is referring to something temporary in Revelation 15:7, because we all know that God is eternal and He exists forever.

So, when John uses that same construction, the 'aion [αἰών]' repeated—'forever and ever'—in Revelation 14:11 to describe what beast-worshipers will experience in the next life, you cannot play this game of, "Well, it is eternal in Chapter 15, but it is not eternal in Chapter 14." That is an inconsistent reading of the Bible.

Go back a few chapters. If you could look at Revelation 10:6. (This is a great way to test interpretations of the Bible: when you see a phrase, ask, "How does the writer use the same phrase elsewhere in the same book?").

Revelation 10:6.

John writes:

"...and swore by Him—" (Revelation 10:6)

Who is 'Him'? That is God.

"...who lives forever and ever—" (Revelation 10:6)

That is the same identical expression.

"...WHO CREATED HEAVEN AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE EARTH AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE SEA AND THE THINGS IN IT, that there will be delay no longer" (Revelation 10:6).

There is a second example where this same expression is used of God. Nobody, in Chapter Ten, is going to argue that God ceases to exist. Let me show you one more.

Go back to Revelation 4:9 for a minute.

Revelation 4:9 says:

"And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him—" (Revelation 4:9)

Now, who is the 'Him?' It is God.

"...who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever" (Revelation 4:9).

That is the same Greek expression. You will notice that three times it is used of God in the Book of Revelation.

We all know that God will never cease to exist. So, when you see the same expression in Revelation 14:11, it is also talking about something eternal. Here is what Arnold Fruchtenbaum says of this, as he is critiquing Annihilationism in his excellent book, 'Footsteps of the Messiah.'

He says:

"The...argument against annihilationism is also based on the expression 'for ever and ever.' This expression is used a total of thirteen times in the Book of Revelation...it is used of God, and they—"9

That is, the Annihilationists.

"—all agree that when it is used of God, it emphasizes eternity and immortality. Once it is used of the saints in Heaven, and they certainly believe that in the case of the saints in Heaven, these are eternal, immortal beings. Then it is used once of Satan in the Lake of Fire, and twice of the unbeliever in the Lake of Fire. But in these last three cases..."10

⁹ Fruchtenbaum, A. *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 717-18

¹⁰ Ibid.

Do you notice what they have done here? They have taken three cases, and made them say something that they do not say in the remaining ten cases.

Once you see that happening, you say, "Uh-oh, there is an inconsistent reading of the Bible going on here. Why are we doing it? Why are we treating some parts of the Bible using the exact same language with one standard and then we are going to treat the minority of cases with a completely different standard? It looks like somebody is trying to read their own belief system into the Bible."

You can use this exercise not just with this issue, but with any issue to discern or ascertain if it is true.

Fruchtenbaum writes:

"Then it is used once of Satan in the Lake of Fire, and twice of the unbeliever in the Lake of Fire. But in these last three cases, they want to make it only temporary. If ten times they agree that it means 'eternal,' they cannot then turn around and make these last three times mean something temporary. If it is true that it teaches that the immortality of God and the saints in Heaven, it must also teach the immortality of Satan—"11

We know that Satan will last forever because he is a fallen angel. We are told in Luke 20:35-36 that angels do not die.

"...If it is true that it teaches the immortality of God and the saints in Heaven, it must also teach the immortality of Satan and unbelievers in the Lake of Fire. Again, we must deduce our theology from the Scriptures—"12

That is what is called exegesis. 'Exegesis'? What does that even mean? It comes from the Greek preposition 'ek,' which is a preposition meaning 'out of.' In other words, I am drawing from the Bible—out of the Bible—what it says. That is my job as an exegete. That is your job as a Bible reader.

It is the opposite of eisegesis, which comes from the Greek preposition 'eis,' which means 'into.' An eisegete is someone who reads into the text things that are not there, because they have some kind of predetermined theology or preference.

By the way, this is the exact same battle with the United States Supreme Court. One of the great issues of our time is who should interpret the Constitution and how should they do it? Well, there is a school of thought that says, "Well, the Constitution is whatever the judge says it means."

One can just read into the document all kinds of things that are not there: like the right to an abortion—which, fortunately, was overturned. That is the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision.

¹¹ Fruchtenbaum, A. *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 717-18

¹² *Ibid.*

They say, "There is a strict wall of separation between church and state, so we have to take the Ten Commandments down from the schoolhouse wall." Well, the First Amendment never says a 'strict wall of separation between church and state.'

So, all of these things are read into the document, largely because people are trying to get things passed in America that they know the majority of people would not embrace or vote for. That is their approach to the United States Constitution.

There is a completely different approach championed by people like the late Robert Bork and others who said, "No, that is not our job as judges. We are going to be exegetes, and we are going to draw out from the document what it says, according to what the Founding Fathers intended."

It is the same exact battle with Scripture: you are either eisegeting or exegeting. As for me and my house, we are not eisegetes. We are going to be exegetes because we are dealing with the Word of God here, and we are not in any position to correct the Word of God. Even parts of it that I do not like or find uncomfortable.

That is what Fruchtenbaum is saying here:

"...we must deduce our theology from the Scriptures, not interpret the Scriptures by our preconceived theology or our emotional preferences."¹³

Because—if you want to argue from an emotional standpoint—I would rather be an Annihilationist than an eternal conscious torment guy. But that is not what the Bible says, and I am not in any position to correct God. We are here to be corrected by the Bible, not to rewrite the Bible.

I appreciated what Fruchtenbaum said there in that last sentence. I think Revelation 14:11 is very strong in terms of eternal conscious torment.

Let us go to our second text from the book of Revelation. Let us go to Revelation 20:10.

This is dealing with the casting of Satan one day into the lake of fire, along with some of his buddies that have been thrown in there a thousand years earlier: the beast and the false prophet. I will talk about those two guys in a moment.

It says:

"and the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

This is Satan, along with two human beings. There is our Greek construction, 'forever and ever,' which is the same Greek construction used to describe the saved in heaven and God Himself. If the saved in heaven last forever at the point of creation, and God

¹³ Fruchtenbaum, A. *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 717-18

has always lasted forever, then we cannot play a game of, "Well, you know what? Those in the lake of fire will not last forever."

The laws of exegesis, language, and logic will not allow you to do that. It does not matter how strong the emotional appeal of the other side is.

Let us look at one more in the Book of Revelation. Go back one chapter to Revelation 19:20.

It says:

"And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two..." (Revelation 19:20)

What two? The false prophet and the beast.

"...these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone" (Revelation 19:20).

Now, you will notice that this is right when Jesus comes back at the end of the seven-year Tribulation. He takes the beast, who is the Antichrist, and his assistant, the false prophet, and one of His first orders of business when He reclaims authority over the earth in preparation for His thousand year rule, is to take those two and put them into the lake of fire. They are the first two that go in.

All the unbelievers at this point are in a different place called Hades, which is going to be summoned later on after the thousand years are over. Those people will be brought out of Hades, in a resurrected state now, and they will stand before the Lord at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Because their names are not found written in the Lamb's Book of Life, they will be cast into the lake of fire.

You will notice that the beast and the false prophet go into the lake of fire a thousand years before anyone else. You will also notice that Satan does not go into the lake of fire immediately. When you look at Revelation 20:1-2, Satan goes into a different locale, called 'the abyss.'

It says:

"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;" (Revelation 20:1-2).

Jesus comes back—we are not talking about the Rapture now; we are dealing with the end of the seven-year Tribulation—His feet touched Planet Earth, and now He's preparing the world for His thousand-year Kingdom.

He takes the Antichrist and the false prophet who were such troublemakers for seven years. They go into the lake of fire. Satan goes to a different location called the abyss.

You say, "Well, why does God not just throw them all into the lake of fire?" Well, because the devil is God's devil. Satan only exists in any sense of power because God allows it, and God actually uses Satan for His purposes.

Paul complained about a thorn in the flesh, a messenger from Satan. 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. But then he said, "I thank God that I have it." He looked at it as a gift, even though he asked the Lord to take it away, because it was this thorn in the flesh—a messenger from Satan—that kept him humble and usable and pliable.

Paul, as a man who was caught up to the third heaven, who heard things 14 years earlier that a man is not fit to hear, could easily be lifted up with pride, but God kept Paul humble so He could use him. Thank God for that, or we would not have two thirds of the New Testament epistles or the missionary journeys.

God kept Paul on a short leash: would not let him get arrogant, kept reminding him of his limitations. And God used the devil to do it.

God has one great purpose for Satan, and we will read about it here in just a minute. It is at the end of the book of Revelation, where he is let out of the abyss to reveal the rebellion happening in the hearts of the mortals—these would be Tribulation survivors who are believers that enter the kingdom in mortal bodies and repopulate the earth; they have children, and their children have children, and the earth is repopulated with mortals.

You get to the end of the thousand years, and you have got a whole bunch of mortal unbelievers inhabiting the earth that will not dare say a word about Jesus, because Jesus at that time is ruling with a rod of iron, but the Lord knows what is going on in their hearts.

He actually lets Satan out of the abyss to reveal this rebellion so people can understand once and for all that the reason people rebel against God has to do with their nature, not their environment. All the sociologists tell us that people commit crimes because of their environment, but the Bible says, "No, people are rebellious because of their nature."

You can put man in a perfect environment and he will still be wicked. If you educate a blue collar thief, he is going to become a white collar thief if his nature is not changed. We all see examples of very rich people that still commit crimes.

I remember the actress Winona Ryder going through Beverly Hills, ripping off outfits and things like that from the stores—stealing clothes. I thought to myself, "Why is she doing that?"

She is not doing it because of poverty. She is not doing it because of a lack of resources. She is one of the richest, most wealthy people on planet Earth. Why would she act that way?

Well, she has a nature that is at war with God. The thousand-year reign of Christ proves this once and for all. History is pedagogical. God uses eras of history to teach humanity lessons. We cannot learn any other way.

Who is God using to teach this lesson? He is using the devil. That is why the devil goes into the abyss, whereas the beast and the false prophet go into the lake of fire—because the devil is God's devil, and God has one more purpose for Satan.

At any rate, what happens in Revelation 19:20 is that the beast and the false prophet are the first that go into the lake of fire. Then a thousand years pass.

By the way, the beast and the false prophet that go into the lake of fire are human beings—because it says of the beast in Revelation 13:18:

"Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six" (Revelation 13:18).

'Man'—that is the Greek word 'anthropos,' from which we get the word 'anthropology,' doctrine of man. As a new Christian, I remember listening to a guy named Harold Camping on the radio. Do you remember him? He predicted the end of the world a bunch of times when I was a student or a teacher at the College of Biblical Studies. He had written a book predicting the end of the world in 2010 or something like that.

My students were all asking me about it. What do you think of it? So I said, "Well, let us just take a five minute break." I went up to my office, and I had a Harold Camping book on my shelf where he was predicting the end of the world in 1994. I brought the book up in front of the class, and I said, "This is what I think of Harold Camping's predictions. He does this stuff all the time."

At any rate, he is the one I heard on the radio that said the Antichrist is not a person; he's just a system.

You can hear people saying this today, "Oh, there is not a real antichrist that is coming." There is this human tendency to make things less than what they are going to be. "Oh, it is just a system of thought."

But the Bible does not teach that. The Bible, describing the Antichrist, uses the Greek word 'anthropos.' He is a human being—the beast that goes into the lake of fire.

Then you go over to 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

Describing the Antichrist, Paul says:

"Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy—" (2 Thessalonians 2:3)

I have taken some heat for this, but I do believe that 'apostasy,' better translated 'departure' is a reference to the Rapture.

"Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction" (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

There is the Greek word 'anthropos' again, used to describe the Antichrist. In fact, the Antichrist is called the son of destruction. There is only one other person in the whole Bible that is called the 'son of destruction.' Anybody know who that might be? Judas.

You will find that in John 17:12. Why are Judas and the Antichrist, the only two people in the Bible called the 'son of destruction'? Because those are the only two people that we know of Biblically that Satan enters.

In John 13:27, relative to the betrayal of Christ at the hands of Judas, it says that Satan entered Judas. And halfway through the Tribulation, once the dragon, or Satan, permanently loses access to heaven, he goes to the earth knowing he has but a short time. I think he goes into the Antichrist.

It is more of an inference, but when you look at Revelation 13:4, it says:

"...they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?'" (Revelation 13:4).

The people in that time period are worshiping Satan because he is the one that is directly empowering the Antichrist. I think he, in Chapter 13, goes into the Antichrist just like he went into Judas. Because in Chapter 12 he loses his access to God's throne. In Chapter 13, I think Satan actually possesses the Antichrist.

That is why those two guys are called the 'son of destruction.' They are the only two guys in the Bible that I know of called the 'son of destruction.' So if Judas is a person, so is the Antichrist, right? Judas was not a system of thought. Jesus actually called Judas, up until the very end, His friend.

What happens to tie this together? What happens when Jesus comes back? He takes the Antichrist and the false prophet, who are both human beings, and He puts them into the lake of fire.

In other words, "Satan, you are over here in a timeout: the abyss for a thousand years, because I have one more purpose for you."

What follows is, once the Antichrist and the false prophet (human beings) are put into the lake of fire, then a thousand years elapse: that's the millennial reign of Christ.

It says:

"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss, and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand

years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years—" (Revelation 20:1-4).

For how long? A thousand years.

"The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed..." (Revelation 20:5)

I think I am seeing a pattern here.

"...This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years" (Revelation 20:5-6).

That is something you always look at when you are reading the Bible. You look for repetitions. It is like God is trying to say something.

Revelation 20:7:

"When the thousand years are completed—" (Revelation 20:7)

Anybody counting how many times the expression 'thousand years' has been used? Six times.

"...When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog—" (Revelation 20:7-8)

Not to be confused with Ezekiel 38 and 39, which speak of a different battle that happens in the Tribulation itself. It is just that by this time that battle will have become so famous. It will be the battle that is used to gauge all other battles.

It is like when someone says, "I have met my Waterloo." We do not think the literal battle of Waterloo is being refought. We are just saying this is my cosmic struggle, and the only gauge you have is a great, historical conflict.

"...and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for war; the number of them is like the sand of the sea shore..." (Revelation 20:8)

Who is stimulating this rebellion? The devil, who has been in this place called 'the abyss' for a thousand years. Now we are understanding why God did not put Satan in the lake of fire right away. He has one more purpose for Satan.

History is pedagogical. God even uses His enemies to teach humanity lessons.

"...And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city..." (Revelation 20:9)

It is a pretty big rebellion. Those involved in it are like the sand of the sea shore. That is a lot of people.

But what is big to us is pretty small to God.

"...they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet—" (Revelation 20:9-10)

"Uh-oh. You mean they are still in there even though a thousand years has passed? You mean they did not get annihilated?"

You see why I am bringing all this up? The beast and the false prophet are two human beings; they are not systems, like Harold Camping taught me as a new Christian.

I guess human beings do not dissolve.

See, so many theological issues like this are answered through a literal, grammatical, historical, contextual, consistent approach to the Book of Revelation. You can fix so many theological errors this way, and that is why the devil does not want you to read the Book of Revelation, because it is a key part of your armor in terms of the belt of truth and discerning truth from error in these last days.

"...the devil who deceived them—" (Revelation 20:10)

Finally, when God is finished with Satan, he goes into the lake of fire to join his buddies. God is now finished with Satan.

"...the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

If it says a 'thousand years' six times, what does that mean exactly? You guys ready for this? You have to come to Sugar Land Bible Church to get this insight.

Here it comes: when you see a thousand years in that paragraph, it means a thousand years.

Robert Thomas writes:

"...no number in Revelation is verifiably a symbolic number."¹⁴

¹⁴ Thomas, R. *Revelation 8 to 22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 408

You want to convert something that is a clear number in the Book of Revelation into a symbol. Then the burden is on you to explain that. You had better have some good theological and exegetical grounding and reasons for that, because other than that, we take the Bible and its numbers at face value.

I am convinced that a thousand means a thousand.

"Well, come on, pastor. You do not take the chain literally, do you? I mean, it says Satan was chained in the abyss for a thousand years. I mean, you do not really believe there is a chain around Satan, do you?"

Well, let us try this one out. I was at work the other day. I was chained to my desk, and I was stuck there for five hours. Can you understand what I just said? Five hours is literal. The chain can be allegorical to describe, literally, my confinement at my desk.

The Bible is doing the exact same thing. Satan is chained. It is a figure of speech, meaning he is confined. But the time period of a thousand years is absolutely literal. We talk like this all the time.

Why does a thousand mean a thousand? Well, John knows how to use indefinite concepts elsewhere. Back in Revelation 20:8, he says concerning the rebellion that it was like—what kind of figure of speech is that? That is a simile.

He says that it is like the sand of the seashore.

Back in Revelation 20:3, John says:

"...he threw him into the abyss and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time" (Revelation 20:3).

If you want to make 'a thousand' into something other than what it says, John is pretty good at explaining himself. He can say 'short time.' He can say 'long time.'

That is what people say, "A thousand is not literal. It's just a long period of time."

Well, why did John not say that? He knows how to say stuff like that.

"Oh, 'a thousand.' That's just a metaphor. That's just a simile."

Well, John knows how to use similes through the words 'like' or 'as.' He never does that with this number, 'a thousand.' So, 'a thousand' means a thousand.

This is like the days of creation. When you see a number with the Hebrew word 'yom' all the way through the Scripture, it is a reference to a 24-hour day. Therefore, God created the world in six days.

You start to say, "Well, that really means a billion years each." You would never treat the Bible that way anywhere else. That is what is happening here.

You have the word 'year' or 'years' with a number, 1,000, and as you go through the Greek New Testament, you will see that that combination always refers to a literal period of time. If 'a thousand' does not mean 1,000, what in the world are you going to do with every other number in the Book of Revelation? Those are up for grabs, aren't they?

Maybe 'two witnesses' does not mean two witnesses and maybe 'seven thousand people' does not mean 7,000 people, and maybe 'four angels' does not mean four angels, and maybe 'seven angels' does not mean seven angels, and maybe 'one hundred forty-four thousand Jews' does not mean 144,000 Jews.

By the way, from these 144,000 Jews, there are 12,000 from each tribe. It is right there in your Bible. Revelation 7.

Well, maybe 'twelve thousand' does not mean 12,000. Maybe 'forty-two months' does not mean 42 months. Maybe 'one thousand two hundred and sixty days' does not mean 1,260 days.

If you want to play this game of a thousand not meaning 1,000 in Revelation 20, then you have a problem with every other number in the Book of Revelation being up for grabs. The Bible becomes very subjective.

It is true that the Book of Revelation is a symbolic book. That is what people always say: "The Book of Revelation is a symbolic book. The Book of Revelation is a symbolic book. The Book of Revelation is a symbolic book."

I say, "Hold the phone. I totally agree with you. It's a symbolic book. Nobody's going to argue that the Book of Revelation is not a symbolic book. However, when the Book of Revelation wants to be understood symbolically, it will tell you, 'Hey, this is a symbol.'"

For example, in Revelation 17:18: the woman. This is the harlot, who is a symbol of religion—false religion, one world religion—in the last days. Do you take the harlot literally?

No, because it says at the end of the chapter:

"The woman whom you saw is the great city..." (Revelation 17:18)

'City': that is the Greek word 'polis,' from which we get the word 'metropolis.'

"...is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth" (Revelation 17:18).

So, I am reading Revelation 17. I am seeing this woman that has universal religious influence over the whole world. Do I look at her as a literal harlot? No, because the Bible itself tells me what the harlot represents. The harlot represents a city.

Did we not see that earlier in Revelation 20:2?

"...he laid hold of the great dragon, the serpent of old..." (Revelation 20:2)

Is that a literal dragon, 'the serpent of old'? Is that a literal serpent? No, because those are identified as the devil.

So, I am reading the Book of Revelation. I am running into a dragon. I am running into a serpent. I keep reading and it tells me those are symbols for something. They are symbols for the devil.

That is how you interpret the symbolic language in the Book of Revelation. You do not just, *carte blanche*, convert things into symbols unless the text tells you to do it.

We read through Revelation 20:1-10. You saw the expression 'a thousand years' used six times. Did you see one example where John says, "Hey, here is what the thousand years mean?"

He does not do that. Therefore, 'a thousand' means 1,000. There are at least four reasons why a thousand here is literal.

Reason One: John knows how to use indefinite concepts elsewhere.

Reason Two: If 'a thousand' plus 'years' is not literal, then you go against a pattern of the rest of Scripture where a time period plus a number is always literal.

Reason Three: What do you do with all the other numbers in the Book of Revelation? They are taken literally. (Of course, revelation is a symbolic book, but when it wants to be understood symbolically, it tells you. If it does not tell you, "Hey, this is a symbol, then you take it at face value.")

You may say, "Oh, come on, Pastor. You know God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. Do you believe God owns the cattle on a thousand hills?"

Yeah, I believe that.

"Well, do you believe that God owns the cattle on the thousand and first hill?"

I believe that too.

"Oh, well, you did not take a thousand literally in the Bible,"

They will try to wring that one around your neck. Where are they getting that from? They are getting it from Psalm 50:10.

Psalm 50:10 says:

*"For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills"
(Psalm 50:10).*

Well, if you take 'a thousand' to be 1,000, then you must be a wooden literalist, because we all know that God owns the cattle on the thousand and first hill as well.

Answer: that is a totally different context in Psalm 50:10. Psalm 50:10 is what is called synonymous Hebrew parallelism.

The Hebrews did not rhyme sounds like our poetry does. They rhymed ideas. In Hebrew Bible, in the language of Hebrew, there is something called parallelism, where you have two lines and you have to take two lines together, because sometimes the two lines together communicate a thought.

When the second line is communicating the same idea as the first line, or vice versa, that is called synonymous Hebrew parallelism.

So, in Psalm 50:10:

"...every beast of the field is Mine..." (Psalm 50:10).

Point one: the cattle on a thousand hills. Point two: that is the wrong way to interpret Psalm 50:10 because that is synonymous Hebrew parallelism. You take two lines together.

The second line in synonymous Hebrew parallelism repeats what is in the first line, but in different language. So, the cattle on a thousand hills is not meant to be understood literally there, because it is in the context of synonymous Hebrew parallelism, which is meant to communicate what is in the first line in different language.

In Revelation 20:1-10, there is no synonymous Hebrew parallelism. To get an allegorical understanding of 'a thousand' and use Psalm 50:10 for that, you have to go to a different language and a different genre entirely, where synonymous Hebrew parallelism is in play. But it is not in play in Revelation 20:1-10, where 'a thousand' just means 1,000.

So, taken at face value, how does this whole thing work? Jesus comes back in the Second Advent. He takes two human beings, the beast and the false prophet, and throws them into the lake of fire.

Then a thousand years elapses. At the end of that time period, Satan is released to stimulate the rebellion taking place in the descendants of the mortals who survived the Tribulation.

Then, when God is finished with Satan, He says, "Join your pals in the lake of fire."

And by the way, they are still in there. That is my point. They did not disappear. They did not dissolve. They were not annihilated. It was not a bad weekend trip. They are still in there.

Look at how—this is the NASB, but the King James also translates Revelation 20:10 as follows:

"And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also—" (Revelation 20:10).

What does it say? 'Are,' not 'were.' If they got annihilated, it would say 'were,' but they are still in there a thousand years later.

If that is not clear enough, it says:

"...they—" (Revelation 20:10)

That is Satan with his two buddies.

"...will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

Here we go: 'aion [αἰών]' and 'aion [αἰών],' which is the same Greek construction used to describe the saints and God. Boy, no wonder people do not want us to study the Book of Revelation.

If you study the Book of Revelation, you can see through all of this insanity that people are floating around today related to Annihilationism.

Norman Geisler, of this whole thing I have tried to communicate, writes against the Annihilationist position:.

"There is a clear biblical example of still-conscious beings who have endured a thousand years of hell's torment. The beast and false prophet 'were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur' (Rev. 19:20) before the 'thousand years' (20:2). Yet after this time the devil 'was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet still are' (v. 10 NKJV). Not only were they alive when they entered, but they were still alive after a thousand years of conscious torment. This alone is the definitive argument against annihilationism."¹⁵

That ought to be enough, I think. Anyway, those are the best texts that I know of that criticize Annihilationism.

We will move into next week with Point Number Three of my outline: there are some arguments against Annihilationism that are not so much exegetical, but they are more theological in nature. Then, once we do those, we will give the other side a chance to talk—because they have their Bible verses—and I will explain how I think they are misusing those verses.

¹⁵ Geisler, N. L. (2005). *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 408