

Revelation

1:3 “he who reads and those who hear” One person would read aloud, and others, who probably could not read, would listen. See note 1 Timothy 4:13.

1:11. “and to...and to...and to,” etc. This repetition of “ands” is the figure of speech Polysyndeton (“many ands”), and the purpose is to give emphasis to each member of the list (Cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*).

1:19. This verse shows that the book of Revelation is in the future. The verse has often been seen as dividing the book of Revelation into three parts: the things which were seen (past), the things that are (present) and the things that will be (future). However, that is not the case. The early introduction of Revelation, 1:2, notes that the book is about what John “saw.” John got the vision by revelation, and after he had seen it, was told to write it down. In contrast, Paul got some of the vision also, but was forbidden to write it down (2 Cor. 12:3-7). A careful reading and understanding of the verse reveals that it is the direction from the Lord for John to write what he saw. John was to write the things that he saw, and “what they signify,” or “what they mean.” This is a common meaning of the word “are” in this type of context (cp. Matt. 9:13; 12:7; Luke 15:26; Acts 2:12; 10:17. Cp also Thayer’s Greek Lexicon). The Greek word *kai* can be translated “and” or “even,” and in this case, “even” is the meaning before the last phrase, which emphasizes that fact that these future things are about to come to pass. E. W. Bullinger, in *Commentary on Revelation*, does a very good job explaining this verse.

1:20. “messengers.” The messengers of the synagogues. See note on Revelation 2:1.

2:1. “messenger.” The Greek is *aggelos* (#32 ἄγγελος; pronounced an-ge-los). The word means “messenger,” and can refer to either human messengers (Luke 7:24) or divine messengers, who we know as “angels” (Matt. 1:20). Usually in English Bibles, when *aggelos* refers to divine messengers, the word is not translated, but is transliterated as “angel.” In Revelation 2:1, the “messenger” is human. When Paul wrote the seven Church Epistles, he wrote them directly to the “holy ones,” the Christians. However, when Jesus Christ wants a letter communicated to the Jewish congregations after the Rapture, he writes to the “messenger” of the congregation. Bullinger writes about this “messenger.” After saying that there is no “angel” or “messenger” connected with the Christian Church, he says:

“But we do meet with the word Angel in connection with the *Synagogue* (though not in the Old Testament). There, there was an officer, who was called *Sheliach Tzibbur*...*Tzibbur* meaning the *Assembly*; and *Sheliach*, the *Angel* or *Legate* of the Assembly, and the Leader of Divine worship, from...*shalach*, to send. The chief officer [of the Synagogue] was the *Archisynagogos*, or “Ruler of the Synagogue”; and after him came the *Sheliach Tzibbur*; or “Angel of the Assembly,” who was the mouthpiece of the congregation. His duty was to offer up public prayer to God for the whole congregation. Hence his title; because, as the messenger of the assembly, he spoke to God for them.” (E. W. Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation* (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 1984), pp. 66, 67).

The reason that Jesus would write his letter to the “messenger” of the Synagogue was that the messenger of the synagogue would then communicate the letter to the people. The use of “messenger of the congregation” is more supporting evidence that the

Rapture occurred earlier, and Jesus was writing to Jews who were left on earth after the Rapture.

2:7. “the Spirit.” This is clearly the Lord Jesus Christ. If you take away the chapter divisions, and even the verse divisions, and start reading from Revelation 1:10, it is clear that Jesus Christ commanded John to write a letter to the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, and that what we refer to as Revelation 2:1 is simply the continuation of the conversation between Jesus and John that started in Chapter 1. The description of Jesus is unmistakable, especially since he describes himself in 1:18 as “I was dead, and Look!, I am alive for evermore....” In the letter he asks John to write, Jesus refers to himself as “the Spirit.” We can understand this because when Jesus was resurrected, his body was still flesh and bone (Luke 24:39), but it was spiritually empowered. 1 Corinthians 15:44-46 says Jesus was raised “a spiritual body.” When he first appeared to his disciples, they thought he was a spirit, an incorporeal being (a *pneuma*; Luke 24:37), but he denied that, and had them touch his body to feel its flesh. Nevertheless, because Jesus’ new body was spiritually empowered, Jesus is called “the Spirit” in many places in the NT. These include Acts 2:4; 10:19; Romans 8:16, 26, 27; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; and 22:17. (Cp. also note on Acts 2:4 and *The Gift of Holy Spirit* by STF).

2:8. “messenger.” See note on Revelation 2:1.

2:12. “messenger.” See note on Revelation 2:1.

2:18. “messenger.” See note on Revelation 2:1.

2:19. “and...and...and.” This repetition of “ands” is the figure of speech Polysyndeton (“many ands”), and the purpose is to give emphasis to each member of the list (Cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*).

2:22. “am throwing.” The Greek is *ballo* (#906 βάλλω), to cast or to throw, and the verb is in the present tense, active voice, indicating that this punishment is, to some extent, going on at the present. Almost all translations put the verb in the future tense “will cast,” and it certainly is true that her punishment will be more acute in the future. However, sexual sin always has harmful effects in the present.

“a bed of suffering.” The Greek simply reads, “a bed,” and the suffering is implied from the context. This is great irony. Jezebel has ruined the lives of many through sexual sin, so God will cast her onto a bed, where she will suffer.

2:23. “kidneys.” The Greek is *nephros* (#3510 νεφρός) and literally means “kidneys.” We get our modern word nephrology, the study of the kidneys, from the Greek word. The Word of God points to the fact that our kidneys, bowels, and belly (or womb) are part of our mental/emotional life, not “just physical organs.” Our “gut,” including our intestines, bowels, kidneys and stomach contain as many nerve cells as our brain, and studies are now showing that our “gut” contributes significantly to our emotional life and health. We have “gut feelings,” get upset stomachs upon hearing bad news or have an upset stomach or irregular bowels when facing emotionally difficult times. Bible commentators used to think that “kidneys,” “bowels,” and “belly,” were in the Bible because the ancients did not know what they did and assumed they were the center of human emotion. Now we know that the ancients, and the Word of God, were correct all along, and the arrogance or “modern” medicine, upon discovery of the brain, had just assumed the ancients were ignorant.

Other words to study besides “kidneys” are “bowels” and “belly.” Although in our modern world, we use “mind” to place and emphasis on our thoughts and “heart” for our emotions, biblically, the word “heart” was more closely associated with the mental life while “bowels,” “kidney,” and “belly” (which is the same word as “womb”) were more associated with the emotional life. The Old Testament reveals the same truth that the New Testament does. The Hebrew word for “kidney” is *kilyah* (Strong’s #3629). Below is a list of some pertinent verses showing the relation of the kidney to our emotional life.

Psalm 7:9 (KJV) ...God trieth the hearts and reins [kidneys].

Psalm 16:7 (KJV) ...my reins [kidneys] also instruct me in the night seasons.

Psalm 26:2 (KJV) Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins [kidneys] and my heart.

Psalm 73:21 (KJV) Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins [kidneys].

Jeremiah 11:20 (KJV) But, O LORD...that triest the reins [kidneys] and the heart,....

Jeremiah 17:10 (KJV) I the LORD search the heart, *I* try the reins [kidneys],....

Jeremiah 20:12 (KJV) But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, *and* seest the reins [kidneys] and the heart,....

2:26, 27 Quoted from Ps. 2:8, 9.

3:1. “messenger.” See note on Revelation 2:1.

3:7 Referring to Isaiah 22:22.

“messenger.” See note on Revelation 2:1.

3:9 “bow down” See note on “pay him homage” Matthew 2:2.

3:14 “ruler” The Greek is *arche* (#746 ἀρχή) can and should be translated “ruler” in this verse, as the NIV does. See *One God & One Lord* Appendix A.

“messenger.” See note on Revelation 2:1.

3:19. “are my friends.” The Greek word we translate as “are...friends,” is *phileo* (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the Greek verb *phileo* in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we say, “love,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of *phileo* here, and confuse it with *agape* love. *Phileo* love has a deep attachment, like the attachment of true friends, while *agape* love does not necessary have any feeling of attachment at all, which is why we can “love” (*agape*) our enemies. Jesus takes a special interest in those who have taken a special interest in him (“You are my friends if you do what I command” John 15:14), and he reproves, disciplines, and prunes those with whom he has a special friendship relationship. In the REV we could have tried to stick with a verb and used “friendly” or “fond,” but these seem to weak. Also, the Greek verb *phileo* is in the present tense. Given that, it seemed that using the phrase, “are...friends” was the best way to bring the meaning of the Greek into the English. For a more complete understanding of *phileo*, see the note on John 21:15.

5:1 “written within and on the back” The fact that the document mentioned in this verse is written “within” and “on the back” lets us know that in this case the word *biblion* (#975 βιβλίον) refers to a scroll and not a “book,” although the first books were being published by the time John was writing. A scroll is written “within,” because that is where the writing appeared when the scroll was rolled up, and “on the back” when the back of the scroll was written on also.

5:2 “break” The Greek is *luo* (#3089 λύω). Normally, “loose,” but here it refers to breaking the seals, the only way to open and unroll the scroll. That was, in fact, the purpose of the seal. One could tell the scroll had been opened if the seals were broken.

5:4 “cried and cried.” Cp. NIV, HCSB. The literal is “cried much,” with *polus* (#4183 πολύς) meaning “much,” and the word for cry, *klaio* (#2799 κλαίω), in the imperfect tense. The imperfect tense of the verb shows that John began crying and kept on crying. This taken together with the word for “much” is painting a picture of John continuing to cry and cry, while no one “was able” (also imperfect, v. 3) to open the scroll. For more on the word *klaio*, see entry on Matthew 2:18.

6:12 “sackcloth” The Greek is *sakkos* (#4526 σάκκος). Similar to burlap, sackcloth was rough and made of goat hair, which was black.

6:16 Referring to Hos. 10:8.

11:2. “42 months.” Daniel 9 speaks of 490 years from the command to build Jerusalem until the Messiah (Dan. 9:25-27). This will consist of two periods of sevens, one for 62 and one for 7. The sevens are years. After the 69 sevens (483 years) the Messiah is killed. After 483 years there was to be another 7 year period (verse 27). The “ruler who will come,” the antichrist, will make a 7 year covenant with Israel. However, in the middle of the 7 years, he will break that off. The last 7 would have followed the first 69 sevens immediately except God intervened with the Administration of the Sacred Secret. After 3 ½ years of the seven years of Tribulation, the Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel and rules the world. During this last 3 ½ years, God protects some of the people of Israel from the antichrist. This 3 ½ year period is referred to in three different ways in Scripture.

1) Time, Times, and Half a time (i.e., a year, 2 years, and half a year): Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 12:14.

2) 42 months: Rev. 11:2; 13:5.

3) 1260 days. Rev. 12:6. (1260 days is 42 months of 30 days each).

Daniel 12:11 and 12 refer to an extension on the 1260 days needed to gather the nations for Judgment (probably 30 days), and then judge them (probably 45 days): (Matt. 25:31ff), Also, the 1260 days that the two witnesses prophesied (Rev. 11:3) started in the first 3 1/2 years and ends in the second, and does not equate to the 1260 days of Rev. 12:6. After the 1260 days, 42 months, or 3:1/2 years of the reign of the Antichrist, comes the battle of Armageddon.

11:15 Quoted from Exod. 15:18 (Ps. 146:10).

12:1 The “woman” in this chapter changes her identity. The woman in verse 1 is the constellation Virgo, which on the night of Christ’s birth was indeed “clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet,” i.e., the sun was in the center of the constellation, with the moon just below her feet (Earnest Martin, *The Star that Astonished the World*). The woman in verse 4 about to give birth is Mary. The woman in verses 6 and 13, from whom the Messiah came, is Israel, whom the Dragon ruthlessly persecutes during the Tribulation.

12:3 “diadems” The Greek is *diadema* (#1238 διάδημα). The diadem is different from a “crown.” Diadem is an English loanword, “properly the sign of royalty among the Persians, a blue band trimmed with white, on the tiara, hence a symbol of royalty generally; *royal headband* (BDAG).

12:5 Quoted from Ps. 2:9.

12:6 “woman” See note on verse 1.

12:7 This war is separate and distinct from the war that occurred when the Devil originally fought with God and dragged a third of the angles down with him (12:4). This war occurs in the time of the book of Revelation when the Devil is cast out of heaven and no longer is able to come before God (cp. Job 1:6; 2:1; Rev. 12:10).

12:13 “woman.” See note on 12:1.

13:1 “diadem” See note on 12:3.

13:8. “slain from the foundation of the world.” The versions of the Bible are divided as to how the Greek text should be translated. The KJV, for example, translates the Greek the same way as the REV, while the NASB, for example, does not connect the word “slain” with the prepositional phrase, “from the foundation of the world,” and has, “*everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.”

Both of the above interpretations involve God’s foreknowledge and fore-planning. “Slain from the foundation of the world” is the natural reading of the Greek text, the phrases being in that order in the Greek. There should be no problem understanding this. From the time that God planned to create the human race, He also had a plan for its redemption. Jesus was both known, and we, the Church, were even chosen in him, before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20; Eph. 1:4). The Church, and Jesus did not literally exist before the foundation of the world, but were in the mind of God. God then revealed what He had in his mind via the prophecies He gave in the Old Testament.

The Church could not be said to be chosen in Christ if the plan of salvation was not plotted out beforehand, so Eph. 1:4 makes no sense if the sacrificial death of Christ was not plotted out beforehand. Thus it makes perfect sense for the text to say that Jesus was slain before the foundation of the world—it was part of God’s plan for the salvation of mankind.

That being said, if the natural reading of the Greek text is “slain from the foundation of the world,” what would be a reason for moving the words of the Greek text around to create the reading in the NASB? The major reason is that the concept that the lamb was “slain” from the foundation of the world is “difficult,” and so some think that it is more natural that the Author meant the verse as the NASB has it. However, as we have seen, the death of Christ was part of God’s plan from the foundation of the world. Thus, there is really no problem at all if the verse says he was slain from the foundation of the world.

Another reason some theologians like the translation as the NASB has it is that then it is more clearly espousing the Calvinist doctrine that people’s names are written in the book of life before the foundation of the world, i.e., God predestines them either to salvation or damnation long before they are born. After all, if people’s names are written in the book of life before the foundation of the world, then God knows, and even determines, the fate of every person. This is not what Scripture teaches. God gives each person freewill to make his or her own choices. God wants all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), and we are the ones who decide whether we are saved or not.

14:5 “without blemish” See note on Ephesians 1:4.

14:13. “let them rest.” Cp. HCSB, NAB. We believe this should be taken as a command clause. See entry on John 9:3, “let the works of God be revealed in him.”

14:20 A Roman stadia is about 600 feet. The total distance is about 180 miles.

16:14 spirits, namely demons. Genitive of apposition.

16:21 “talent.” The Greek is *talantaios* (#5006 ταλαντιαῖος) The Roman weight is somewhere in the neighborhood of 90 pounds.

18:2 “haunt” The Greek word *phulake* (#5438 φυλακή) can mean either a prison or the prison guard, or the act of guarding or watching. In this case, the demons (unclean spirits or “birds”) are not in prison in Babylon, but live there and keep watch there. Thus “haunt” is a good translation to communicate that.

18:22 When Jerusalem was about to be destroyed by the Babylonians, Jeremiah prophesied that the sound of the millstone would not be heard in her (Jer. 25:10). It was a happy sound that was a staple of family life. The women would grind meal together and enjoy each others company, and there would be fresh bread to eat. When the sound of the millstone is not heard, family life is pretty much non-existent.

19:10 “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” The testimony “of” Jesus (genitive of relation: testimony about Jesus; most likely also includes the sense of the genitive of origin, i.e., the words or testimony that Jesus gives) is the spirit (the general attitude, the essence, “the inner content” (Lenski)). In contrast to false prophecy, true prophecy will elevate Jesus.

19:12 “diadem” See note on 12:3.

19:20 “sulfur” The word “brimstone” is an old word for sulfur.

20:4 “came to life” The dead are dead, and not alive in any way. This verse does not mean that living souls had been enjoying heaven by joining their dead bodies, or any such thing.

20:10. “They will be tormented day and night to the ages of the ages.” This is usually translated as, “They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” This verse has been used to teach the eternal torment of the damned, i.e., those people who die unsaved. However, the unsaved are not tormented forever. The verse contains a hyperbole (pronounced hy-per'-bow-lee), an exaggeration of the truth. The reality is that the Devil, his demons, and some extremely evil people, will burn in the lake of fire for a very, very long time before dying and being consumed. However the reality of a long time is exaggerated by hyperbole to burning forever to intensify the horror of the punishment.

One of the best-known principles of biblical exegesis is that God’s Word is internally consistent, which means that verses cannot contradict each other. If verses appear to contradict, any unclear verse must be interpreted in harmony with the clear verses on the subject. The Bible is very clear about the destruction of the wicked, and says in many different ways in many places that the unsaved will be totally destroyed. In contrast, there are a few verses that seem to say the unsaved will not be destroyed. When we look at them more closely, however, we see that these few unclear verses can be explained from grammar or customs, and shown to be actually consistent with the clear verses.

The Old Testament says over and over in many different ways that the wicked will be destroyed and be gone forever. They will “be no more” (Ps. 37:10; Prov. 10:25); “be forever destroyed” (Ps. 92:7; cp. Ps. 73:17-19; cp. Ps.145:20; Prov. 13:13 KJV); “die” (Ezek. 18:4, 20; 33:13-16); “perish” (Ps. 1:6; 37:20; Isa. 41:11); “perish forever” (Job 20:7); “be as nothing” (Isa. 41:12); and have “everlasting ruin” (Ps. 52:5). It is said that moths will eat them up like a garment, and worms devour them like they devour wool (Isaiah 51:8); they will fly away like a dream, no more to be found (Job 20:8). The

wicked will “burn...with no one to quench the fire” (Isa. 1:31); “be consumed like dry stubble” (Nahum 1:10; cp. Isa. 29:20); and will “vanish like smoke” (Ps. 37:20) because “his [God’s] fire will consume them” (Ps. 21:9). No one will see them any more (Job 20:9).

These many clear verses do not portray eternal torment, but total destruction. Notice the way Malachi refers to the future of the wicked.

Malachi 4:1

“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them.”

Like the other Old Testament verses we have seen, this is not a picture of eternal torment, but of total destruction. Nothing, not one root or branch, will be left to the wicked. Later on in Malachi, the same picture of total destruction is put a different way: “[the wicked] will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things” (Mal. 4:3). The wicked are not pictured as being tortured forever, but eventually will become “ashes.”

Still another way God portrays the destruction of the wicked is by saying they will be “cut off.” The phrase “cut off” is used in several different ways in the Old Testament. It is used of physical death (1 Sam. 24:21; 1 Kings 18:4; Isa. 53:8), and it is also used of people who will be “cut off” in the next life (Ps. 12:3; 37:9, 22; Nahum 1:15). Just as when a person was cut off in his first life and ceased to exist, so when he is cut off after the Judgment he will cease to exist.

We have just seen more than a dozen different ways the Old Testament says that wicked people will eventually cease to exist. The New Testament continues the same idea, saying that the wicked are totally consumed and become non-existent. John the Baptist compared the wicked with chaff that is burned (Matt. 3:12). Jesus compared the unsaved to trees that do not produce fruit and so are cut down and burned (Matt. 7:19); to weeds that are gathered and burned (Matt. 13:40); and to vine branches that do not produce fruit and so are cut off and burned (John 15:6). None of these illustrations give the impression that the burning lasts forever. Instead, they all convey the simple truth that was well known in the biblical culture: chaff, weeds, or wood that are thrown into a fire burn for a short time then are completely consumed. If John or Jesus knew that people burned forever in the lake of fire, then they should have added some comments to make their illustration clear. They did not add any comments because their illustrations were perfectly clear, and fit the rest of Scripture. Just as the chaff, weeds, or wood, burn for a time in the fire and then are consumed, the wicked suffer some retribution in the lake of fire and then die and are burned up completely.

Another New Testament illustration that teaches the destruction of the ungodly is the comparison of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to the destruction of the wicked. God, “by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly” (2 Pet. 2:6 ESV). This is very clear teaching that the wicked, like Sodom and Gomorrah, will be burned to ashes, not tormented forever.

As well as illustrations and comparisons about the destruction of the unsaved such as those we have seen above with trees, weeds, or Sodom and Gomorrah, the New

Testament uses more than half a dozen Greek words to describe it, and they each refer to death and destruction, not continued life in torment. If we are going to arrive at the true meaning of Scripture, we must pay careful attention to the vocabulary it uses because God chooses His vocabulary carefully. When it comes to the total annihilation of the wicked, God uses many different Greek words to make the point again and again that the wicked will be destroyed. Sometimes the same Greek word is translated into English in different ways. For example, *apollumi* is sometimes translated “destroy” and sometimes “perish,” but if we follow the Greek words and understand their meanings, we can arrive at truth no matter how the translators brought the Greek into English.

1. ***Apōleia*** (Strong’s #684 ἀπόλεια). *Apōleia* means “the destruction that one experiences; annihilation” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by Arndt and Gingrich; abbreviated BDAG). Jesus said that the road is narrow and the gate small that leads to “life,” while the broad road and broad gate leads to “destruction.” Philippians 3:19 and 2 Peter 3:7 say the end of ungodly men and the enemies of God is “destruction,” and Romans 9:22 speaks of vessels (i.e., people) prepared for “destruction.” It is important to pay attention to Hebrews 10:39, which contrasts believing, which results in the “saving of the soul (KJV), and unbelief, which results in annihilation (KJV says “perdition”). To contrast *apōleia* with other words that mean destruction or total destruction, perhaps “annihilation” would be a clear translation. The end of the enemies of God is destruction; annihilation, not eternal torment.
2. ***Apollumi*** (Strong’s #622 ἀπόλλυμι). *Apollumi* means “to cause or experience destruction” (BDAG). The Gospel of Matthew says that we are to fear God, who is the one who can “destroy both soul and body” in Gehenna (Matt. 10:28), and John 3:16, using the same Greek word, says that the unsaved will “perish,” but those who believe will have everlasting life. Romans 2:12 also says the unsaved will “perish.” These verses give more clear evidence that the fate of the wicked is everlasting destruction, not everlasting torment.
3. ***Esthiō*** (Strong’s #2068 ἐσθίω); in some lexicons listed as the unused root, *phagō*, Strong’s #5315 φάγω). *Esthiō* means “do away with completely; consume; devour” (BDAG). James 5:3, speaking of wicked people, says their gold and silver will “eat your flesh like fire,” and Hebrews 10:27 speaks of a “fire that will consume the enemies of God.” Hebrews 12:29 says God is a “consuming fire,” and the Greek word for “consuming” is *katanaliskō* (Strong’s #2654 καταναλίσκω), which means “consume” (BDAG), to do away with completely. That is exactly what fire does to things, it burns them up until they are totally consumed. The translation of Hebrews 10:27 in many versions, that a fire will “consume” the enemies of God is simple, clear, and accurate. There is no “eternal torment,” but there is everlasting death, the unsaved are consumed in the lake of fire.
4. ***Exo lethreuō*** (Strong’s #1842 ἐξολεθρεύω). This is an amplification of *olethros* (2 Thess. 1:9) below, and means to destroy completely. Peter used it in Acts 3:23 (quoting Deut. 18:19) to show that anyone who did not listen to the prophet who was foretold to come (i.e., the Messiah), would be completely destroyed and not be part of the people of God. *Exo lethreuō* is used frequently (over 200 times) in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was made around 250 BC, and it sometimes refers to a person’s destruction in this life, and sometimes refers to their complete destruction in the next.

That is certainly the way Peter used it in Acts 3:23, while an example of the everlasting destruction of the wicked in the Old Testament is Psalm 37:9.

5. ***Katastrophē*** (Strong's #2692 καταστροφή). 2 Peter 2:6 says that God reduced Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes as an example of what would happen to ungodly people. Some Greek texts include the word *katastrophē*, which means “condition of total destruction” (BDAG), which is why the ESV reads that God “condemned them to extinction....” The ESV has chosen a good English word to separate *katastrophē* from other Greek words that mean destruction; “extinction.” That exactly describes the fate of the unsaved. Not eternal torment, but extinction.
6. ***Olethros*** (Strong's #3639 ὄλεθρος). *Olethros* means “a state of destruction, destruction, ruin, death” (BDAG). 2 Thessalonians 1:9 says that people who do not obey God will be punished with everlasting “destruction. Perhaps simply to distinguish *olethros* from other Greek words that mean destroy, it might be helpful to use “destroy completely” a definition in Friberg's Greek Lexicon.
7. ***Phthora*** (Strong's #5356, φθορά). *Phthora* means the “total destruction of an entity” (BDAG). 2 Peter 2:12 says that the wicked will be caught and “destroyed.” Galatians 6:8 uses the same Greek word and says that people who sow to the flesh reap “corruption,” while people who sow to the Spirit and reap everlasting life. Since *phthora* means “total destruction,” and in Galatians is contrasted with everlasting life, “total destruction” would be a good translation of *phthora* in both 2 Peter 2:12 (the wicked are totally destroyed) and in Galatians 6:8 (the wicked reap total destruction).
8. ***Thanatos*** (Strong's #2288 θάνατος). *Thanatos* means “death; the termination of physical life” (BDAG). Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is “death” in contrast with the gift of God, which is “life.” The clear choice the Bible sets before people is the choice between life and death, not between “everlasting life in pleasure” and “everlasting life in pain.” Each person is given the choice between everlasting life and everlasting death. The end of people's first life is “death”—no life, no body, no consciousness—until the resurrection. At the resurrection God raises the body from the dead and re-animates it with life. At that point, saved people go on and live forever, but the unsaved are thrown into the lake of fire which is called the “second death” precisely because it is like the first death; people burn to the point they have no consciousness, life, and no body. The second death is mentioned four times in Revelation (2:11; 20:6, 14; and 21:8) and two of those are in the same chapter as Revelation 20:10, the verse we are commenting on. Since the Bible cannot contradict itself, it cannot say that the lake of fire is the second death and also say people live forever in torment. One of those statements would have to be figurative, and the figurative verse is the one that says people will burn forever; they are the figure hyperbole, exaggeration.

It is sometimes stated that death is not really death, but just “separation from God.” Although there are times when the word “death” is used in a limited way, such as when describing the “spiritual death” of an unsaved person (Eph. 2:1), the word death still means something is dead. For example, when a person is referred to as spiritually “dead,” their spiritual life is not just separated from God, it is “dead.”

When the Bible says the unsaved will “die,” the way to see whether the word “death” is used in a limited sense or its standard meaning is to study the whole scope of Scripture on the subject. In this case, the many clear verses that say the wicked will be

destroyed lets us know that when God says the unsaved will die a second “death,” He is using “death” in the standard way, meaning there is no life at all.

Most orthodox theologians acknowledge that a sinner’s body is destroyed after he dies, but they assert that it is the “immortal soul” of a sinner that remains in torment forever. The concept of the “immortal soul” came into Christianity from Greek philosophy. It is widely believed to be a biblical concept, but it is never mentioned in the Bible. Much has been written showing the soul is not immortal, but it is too much information to expound in this commentary article.³³ The most common use of “soul” in the Bible is its being used to mean a person, an individual, such as when Acts 27:37 says there were 276 “souls” on board the ship (KJV). This is true both in the Old Testament, where “soul” is a translation of the Hebrew word *nephesh*, (pronounced ně'-fesh) and the New Testament, where it is the translation of the Greek word *psuche* (pronounced soo'-kay). However, due to the common belief that the “soul” lives on after the body dies, it is important that we highlight some verses that show that the soul, as well as the body, is destroyed.

The clearest verse that shows the soul can be destroyed is Matthew 10:28. Jesus was teaching people not to fear men, but to “be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna].” This clear teaching by Jesus should have settled the point that both the body and the soul are “destroyed” in the lake of fire. The soul does not live on forever in torment. Ezekiel 18:20 says that soul that sins will die (KJV). Hebrews 10:39 mentions people who “believe to the saving of the soul” (KJV; the word soul is in the Greek text, but not translated as “soul” in many versions). It contrasts those saved souls with the people who draw back from God resulting in destruction (annihilation; Greek = *apōleia*; see #1 above).

Jesus also taught, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it” (Matt. 16:25). In this verse, the word “life” is “soul” in the Greek text, and the word “lose” and “loses” is the Greek word *apollumi*, which was covered above and refers to destruction. So although it is not clear in most English translations, the Greek text is more literally translated: “For whoever wants to save his soul will destroy it...” The word “soul” in this verse refers to the life of the earthly body, hence its usual translation as ‘life,’ but it does show that the soul can be destroyed. James 5:20 says the person who “converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death...” (KJV). Although “soul” in this verse seems to mean “person,” it includes the life of the person, the soul, which it says without salvation will die. All of these verses point to the fact that the soul is not immortal, but can be destroyed, and more verses could be added from the Old Testament, such as those that say the “soul” of sinners will be “cut off” (Lev. 7:20; 18:29; Num. 15:30, 31). Although there are many verses that indicate the soul can die, the clearest and most definitive one was our Lord saying that the soul would be destroyed in Gehenna.

We gain still another line of evidence for the destruction of the soul from the Hebrew word *Sheol*. The Old Testament made it clear that when a person died, he went to

³³ See, Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *Is There Death After Life* (Christian Educational Services, Indianapolis, 2004), pp. 17-28; Edward Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes* (Verdict Publications, Fallbrook, CA, 1982), pp. 65-76; Leroy E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington DC, 1966), pp.529- 802; Anthony Buzzard, *Our Fathers Who Aren't in Heaven* (Restoration Fellowship, Atlanta, 2006), pp. 208-225.

Sheol. Neither the Greek or English language has a good equivalent word for *Sheol*, because it is not a “physical place” where dead people go, like the grave, but rather it is a “state of being;” it is the state of being dead (cp. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*; under “hell”). Perhaps a good English equivalent of *Sheol* would be “grave-dom,” the “reign of the grave.” That *Sheol* is the state of being dead can be easily confirmed by examining the uses of *Sheol* in the Old Testament. It is undisputed that when a person dies, their body disintegrates and ceases to exist. But not only does the body cease to exist, the life (sometimes called “soul”) of the person does too. Thus, a person who is dead is dead in every way, not alive in heaven or “hell.”

There are many verses that show that when the body died, the person, both body and soul, were totally dead. Death and being in *Sheol* is compared to sleep in many verses (Job 7:21; 14:12-14; Psalm 13:3; 90:5; Dan. 12:2; John 11:11; 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:14; 5:10). The comparison is valid because just as there is no consciousness in sleep, there is none in death. Once a person dies, he does not remember God (Ps. 6:5). In fact, dead people “know nothing” (Ecc. 9:5). They cannot praise God or speak of His goodness (Ps. 30:9; 115:17; Isa. 38:18), they cannot thank God or hope in Him (Isa. 38:18); and they have no knowledge or wisdom (Ecc. 9:10). Obviously, these dead people are not rejoicing in heaven or suffering in “hell.”

When a person dies he goes to *Sheol*, which, as we have just seen, is the state of being dead where there is no knowledge, wisdom, memory, praise, or hope. Similarly, when a person dies in the lake of fire and experiences the “second death,” he will again be in *Sheol* and have total non-existence. In that light, it is important that we notice that Psalm 9:17 (ESV) says, “The wicked shall return to *Sheol*, all the nations that forget God.” Although this verse may have a couple different meanings included in it, and may refer to the first death as well as the second death, the ESV translation is certainly correct that the verse does include the idea of the wicked making a “return” to *Sheol*. Wicked people die the first time and are in *Sheol*, then are resurrected to the Judgment. If they are judged unworthy of everlasting life, they are cast into the lake of fire and die again, thus returning to *Sheol*, the state of death. Thus Psalm 9:17 is another clear verse that teaches the wicked do not suffer forever in the lake of fire. Eventually the wicked return to *Sheol* and are totally dead.

Saying that the Devil and some wicked people will be tormented “for ever and ever” is the figure of speech hyperbole, or exaggeration. Hyperbole was common in the biblical culture, just as it is common in our culture today. Common hyperboles in Western culture are when we are hungry but we say, “I’m starving,” or when we are cold but we say “I’m freezing.” The hyperbole communicates both the intensity of the feeling and the emotion of discomfort that goes with the physical feeling itself. E.W. Bullinger has six pages of biblical examples of hyperboles in his book, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, and there are many he did not list.

The hyperbole “to the ages of the ages” accomplishes two things. First, it graphically makes the point that the torment will go on for a long time and second, it elicits emotions such as horror, or perhaps satisfaction, that accompany the retribution that has come upon the wicked. There are other examples of hyperbole that are associated with the Devil, the last days, or the Judgment. For example, by hyperbole the Devil is said to be accusing Christians before God “day and night.” Of course, this is not literal,

because there are times when the Devil is on earth and leaves God's presence (Job 1:12; 2:7; 1 Pet. 5:8). Also, Jesus used hyperbole to good effect when he taught about avoiding Gehenna. He said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away" (Matt. 5:29). Jesus did not expect anyone to literally obey him, but the hyperbole communicates well that, although we should not gouge out our eye, we should not be complacent about the sin in our lives, but should take drastic action to cleanse ourselves of sin. Perhaps another reason for God's use of hyperbole in this verse was the inability of the Greek language to express a very large number. The Roman numerals used in biblical times had a "C" for 100, a "D" for 500, and an "M" for 1000, but nothing larger than that. Thus numbers in the billions could not be expressed in writing or very easily in any oral communication. If the Devil only burned one year for every life he has ruined, the number would be in the billions, too much to express in Roman numerals and put in the Bible. Thus, the use of hyperbole here is very fitting.

What is clear in the Scripture is that people will receive punishment for what they have done, and that the punishment will be in proportion to the sin they have committed. Romans 2:5 says of stubborn people, "you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath." Just as godly people by their good works store up treasure for the life to come, wicked people store up wrath for themselves (for more about this, see the commentary on Romans 2:5). The clear message of Scripture is that unless people get forgiveness for their sins they will receive punishment for the evil they have done (Ps. 62:12; Ecc. 11:9; Jer. 17:10; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 2:23). Beings such as the Devil and his demons have stored up much wrath for themselves, and will be punished for a very long time before they are destroyed. If they only were tormented one year for each life they ruined on earth they would be tormented for billions of years, which clearly justifies the hyperbole, "for ever and ever."

In conclusion, the verses above are very descriptive of the final end of the wicked, which is total annihilation. No one should use the very few unclear verses that can seem to say that evil people will suffer forever to overturn the dozens of different verses and illustrations that tell us the wicked will be totally destroyed. The overwhelming biblical evidence in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is that wicked people are not tormented forever but are destroyed in the lake of fire, which is the second death

21:16 "stadia" A Roman stadia is about 600 feet. The distance is about 1,400 miles, or 2,200 kilometers. The city is probably a huge pyramid, with the throne of God and Jesus at the top. Thus it would be similar to the Holy Jerusalem in the Millennial Kingdom, with the Temple at the top of the mountain of the Lord (see *The Christian's Hope*, chapter 4).

21:18 "The city was pure gold, like pure glass." This does not mean the gold is transparent, but rather that glass in the time of the apostle John could be made very pure and visibly so, and so he is saying that the gold will be pure also, not amalgamated or diluted.

22:15. "likes." The Greek verb we translate as "likes" is *phileo* (#5368 φιλέω). If we say, "love," as most versions do, we lose the meaning of *phileo* here, and confuse it with *agape* love. *Phileo* love has a deep attachment, like the attachment of true friends, while *agape* love does not necessarily have any feeling of attachment at all, which is why we can "love" (*agape*) our enemies. The people in this verse do not "love" falsehood in the sense that they feel it is the right thing to do even though they do not enjoy it (that would be to

confuse *phileo* with *agape*), rather, the people being referred to in this verse have a deep connection to, and friendship with, falsehood. For a more complete understanding of *phileo*, see the note on John 21:15.