

2 THESSALONIANS 1:9—Will the wicked be annihilated or suffer conscious punishment forever?

PROBLEM: In some passages of Scripture, like this one, it speaks of the wicked being “destroyed” by God, suffering “the second death” ([Rev. 20:14](#)), or going to “perdition” ([2 Peter 3:7](#)). Yet in other places, it speaks of them suffering conscious torment (e.g., [Luke 16:22–28](#)). Will unsaved persons be annihilated, or will they consciously suffer forever?

SOLUTION: “Destruction” does not mean annihilation here, otherwise it would not be “everlasting” destruction. Annihilation only takes an instant, and it is over. If someone undergoes everlasting destruction, then they have to have everlasting existence.

Furthermore, “death” does not mean annihilation, but separation. Adam and Eve died spiritually the moment they sinned, yet they still existed and could hear God’s voice ([Gen. 2:17](#); cf. [3:10](#)). Likewise, before one is saved, he is “dead in trespasses and sins” ([Eph. 2:1](#)), and yet he is still in God’s image ([Gen. 1:27](#); cf. [9:6](#); [James 3:9](#)) and is called on to believe ([Acts 16:31](#)) and to repent ([Acts 17:30](#)) and be saved.

Likewise, when the wicked are said to go into “perdition” ([2 Peter 3:7](#)), and Judas is called the “son of perdition” ([John 17:12](#)), it does not mean they will be annihilated. The word “perdition” (*apoleia*) simply means to perish or to come to ruin. But junk cars have perished in the sense of having been ruined. But they are still cars, ruined as they may be, and they are still in the junk yard. In this connection, Jesus spoke of hell as a junk yard or dump where the fire would not cease and where a person’s resurrected body would not be consumed (see comments on [Mark 9:48](#)).

Finally, there are several lines of evidence that support the everlasting consciousness of the lost. First, the rich man who died and went to hell was in conscious torment ([Luke 16:22–28](#)), and there is absolutely no indication in the text that it was ever going to cease.

Second, Jesus spoke repeatedly of the people in hell as “weeping and gnashing of teeth” ([Matt. 8:12](#); [22:13](#); [24:51](#); [25:30](#)), which indicates they were conscious.

Third, hell is said to be of the same duration as heaven, namely, “everlasting” ([Matt. 25:41](#)).

Fourth, the fact that their punishment is everlasting indicates that they too must be everlasting. One cannot suffer punishment, unless a person exists to be punished ([2 Thes. 1:9](#)).

Fifth, the beast and the false prophet were thrown “alive” into the lake of fire at the beginning of the 1,000 years ([Rev. 19:20](#)), and they were still there, conscious and alive, after the 1,000 years ([Rev. 20:10](#)).

Sixth, the Scriptures affirm that the devil, the beast, and the false prophet “will be tormented day and night forever and ever” ([Rev. 20:10](#)). But there is no way to experience torment forever and ever without being conscious for ever and ever.

Seventh, Jesus repeatedly referred to hell as a place where “the fire is not quenched” ([Mark 9:48](#)), where the very bodies of the wicked will never die (cf. [Luke 12:4–5](#)). But it would make no sense to have everlasting flames and bodies without any souls in them to experience the torment.

Eighth, the same word used to describe the wicked perishing in the OT (*abad*) is used to describe the righteous perishing (see [Isa. 57:1](#); [Micah 7:2](#)). The same word is used to describe things that are merely lost, but then later found ([Deut. 22:3](#)), which proves that “lost” does not here mean go out of existence. So, if perish means to annihilate, then the saved would have to be annihilated too. But we know they are not.

Ninth, it would be contrary to the created nature of human beings to annihilate them, since they are made in God’s image and likeness, which is everlasting ([Gen. 1:27](#)). For God to annihilate His image in man would be to attack the reflection of Himself.

Tenth, annihilation would be demeaning both to the love of God and to the nature of human beings as free moral creatures. It would be as if God said to them, *“I will allow you to be free only if you do what I say! If you don’t, then I will snuff out your very freedom and existence!”* This would be like a father telling his son he wanted him to be a doctor, and, when he chose instead to be a park ranger, the father shot him! Eternal suffering is an eternal testimony to the freedom and dignity of humans, even unrepentant humans.