

All 3 of these views have a further problem with the following phrase “from the presence of the Lord”. Being destroyed “from the presence of the Lord” does not make sense. The NIV recognises this and changes it to: “they will be punished with everlasting destruction *and shut out* from the presence of the Lord”. But that is self-contradictory, as well as not being what the Greek says!

Let us turn then to the Greek for help! The Greek word translated *destruction* is ολεθρος (olethros), and it occurs in only 3 other places in the New Testament ([1 Cor 5:5](#), [1 Thes 5:3](#) and [1 Tim 6:9](#)). This is not enough to establish its meaning without further evidence from elsewhere. Ολεθρος comes from a verb root ολλυμι (ollumi). This root is not used in the NT, but its compound form απολλυμι has 2 basic meanings. 1: to destroy (kill or perish), 2: to be lost. In Luke 15 απολλυμι is used to describe both the lost sheep and the lost (prodigal) son. In John 3: 16 it is normally translated *perish*.

If ολλυμι can mean *to be lost* then it's highly probable that ολεθρος can mean *lostness*. What happens if we translate it this way in 2 Thes 1: 9? We have “everlasting (or aeonian) *lostness from the presence of the Lord*”. Immediately our two difficulties disappear! Firstly, unlike being destroyed, you can be lost for any length of time, short, long or infinite! Secondly, unlike “*destruction from the presence of the Lord*”, “*lostness from the presence of the Lord*” makes perfect sense.

This also harmonises with the words of Jesus, “*the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost*”. Even the much loved words of John 3: 16 might be better translated: “*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not be lost but have aeonian life.*”

I have invented the word *lostness*, which is not in the dictionary. The word *perdition* originally had that sense, but is now obsolete.

Eternal lostness makes better sense for traditionalists; *aeonian lostness* makes perfect sense for Universalists. I have debated which of these two views is right in other writings.

Ολεθρος

Destruction

or

Lostness?

Ολεθρος

Destruction or Lostness?

They will be punished with everlasting (aeonian) destruction (lostness) from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thes 1: 9).

What is the meaning of the phrase *everlasting destruction*, which occurs just this once in the Bible? Does it make sense? Does it agree with other scriptures? And is it correctly translated from the Greek?

Theologians have three main views regarding the fate of unbelievers, but all of these views have serious problems with this verse.

The traditional majority view: unbelievers, after they die, will go into everlasting torment. This clearly clashes with everlasting destruction. Both cannot be true at the same time. You cannot go on being tormented if you have been destroyed!

The annihilation view: unbelievers will cease to exist after they die. They are destroyed for ever. This view is the best fit for this verse, but it clashes with other verses which speak of eternal torment, eternal judgement etc. Again if you have ceased to exist you cannot go on being tormented! This view is officially held by Seventh Day Adventists, JW's, and many others, especially those who cannot accept the teaching of eternal torment.

The Universalist view: unbelievers will, after a period of corrective punishment, all be reconciled to God. Universalists translate this phrase as *aeonian* or *age-lasting destruction*. But either of these is a complete contradiction in terms. Destruction does not last for a period of time. When something is destroyed it is destroyed for ever. Even the phrase *everlasting destruction* is unnatural because destruction is by definition everlasting, but *age-lasting destruction* is plain nonsense.

Bible quotations are taken from the NIV or retranslated
