

Eternal Conscious Torment vs Annihilation 006

2 Thessalonians 1:9

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Well, let us take our Bibles, if we could, and open them to 2 Thessalonians 1:9. We are continuing our study on Annihilationism versus eternal torment.

In our first introduction to this, we introduced the controversy: There is a view that has been around for a while—it is called Annihilationism—that the unsaved really will not last forever. They will cease to exist at some point. That view is dovetailed with conditional immortality, which is the idea that people are not created immortal, and only the Christian is immortal—given the gift of immortality at the point of faith alone in Christ alone.

If unsaved people are not immortal, then they will go into hell for a season, but eventually they will be annihilated. You say, "Well, that is a weird view. Why are you spending time on this?"

That view has been floating around there as a minority opinion for a long time, but I am very sad to report that now it is becoming mainstream. It is being introduced as just another viable interpretation within evangelical Christianity. I have known of this view for a while, but the conversion of Kirk Cameron to this view has caused it to move into the mainstream.

Kirk Cameron, a famous child actor who became a Christian and has millions and millions of followers on social media, has just announced—December of last year—his conversion to this.

Now he is hosting podcasts and things like that, taking this position and mainstreaming it. That is why I thought, since we finished our study on Calvinism—critiquing Calvinism, that we would look into this for a while.

We moved to Point Number Two, where I gave you the Biblical arguments against annihilation. If you want some of the clearest texts that tell you that not only does hell last forever, but people in hell will be in hell forever, these are my top ten.

I am sorry to make it sound so academic because this is a real reality, and that is part of my concern about this. I will bring it up in Point Number Seven later.

But if this is going to become a mainstream view, it is going to destroy the cause of world missions—just destroy it because you lose the urgency in evangelism and world missions if, after all, people are not going to be in hell forever.

It is just like a bad weekend trip or something, and then they disappear. Theology, unfortunately (or fortunately—depending on your perspective and what you are doing with it), is a seamless garment, like dominoes in a row. If you are playing games with one area of the Bible, it will impact other areas of Scripture and the life and mission of the church.

From there, I gave you what I think are four reasons why hell is forever theologically. These are not textual arguments; these are just reasons why hell and people in hell forever has to be a theological reality.

The last time we were together, we were answering the Annihilationist arguments. Maybe I should have called this annihilating Annihilationist arguments or something like that, because part of being a good theologian is not just rehashing your own talking points.

This is why a lot of conversations in life are like this: one side has their talking points and they rehash them, and the other side has their talking points and they rehash them. Neither side is really interacting with what the other side is saying.

Part of being a good theologian is actually hearing your opponent and understanding what it is they are saying. "What verses do they have?" (They must have some verses or this thing would not have any traction.)

It is not just going to your favorite proof text to support your view. It is interacting with the arguments that they are promoting. That is what we are doing here in Point Number Four.

We dealt with this subject of the second death. To them, 'death' means cessation of existence. We tried to explain that that is a twenty-first century definition of death, but that is not what the Bible means when it uses the expression 'death.'

What the Bible means is separation, not cessation of existence. Here is the Hebrew word for 'death' (mawet [מָוֶת]). I showed you this last time from the 'Theological Word Book of the Old Testament', where 'death' is defined as a separation from God.) Here is the Greek word for 'death': 'thanatos [θάνατος],' which defines death as a separation from God.

Just saying that people go into the common grave, where they die and cease to exist, is using the word 'death' in a way that the Bible never uses the word ever. The Bible never uses 'death' to mean cessation of existence. It always means separation.

What, then, is the second death that is described in the Book of Revelation—Revelation 20 and Revelation 2? What is the second death? Well, the second death is an eternal separation from God. Just as the first death—physical death, if we are not the Rapture

generation—is an absolute reality and does not mean cessation of existence, neither does the second death.

The second death is people, after physically dying, going into the lake of fire to experience eternal conscious torment. That is why we use this expression: "If you are born once, you will die twice. If you are born twice, you will die once." That means if you are born physically but you are never born again spiritually—you have never trusted Christ as your Savior—then not only do you have the prospect of physically dying, but you have the prospect of spending eternity separated from God in the lake of fire.

By contrast, if you are born twice, the worst thing that could happen to you is only dying once. If you are physically born and then reach a point where you become a Christian because you hear the gospel and you are born again spiritually, then what is the worst thing that can happen to you? Physical death.

Even that is a favor when you think about it, because absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. You have no part, the Bible promises you, in that second death, the lake of fire.

This becomes the whole impetus for world evangelization. There is something—you know, we talk about being saved.

"Hey, I am saved."

"When did you get saved?"

Well, part of that is understanding what we are saved from. We are saved from the second death. And the first death, you may not even have to go through either, if we are the Rapture generation—which I cannot guarantee, but I would, if I could, guarantee that to you.

Part of the Annihilationists' argument is not just the second death, but the second argument they use, which is 'to destroy.' We saw that last time through the word 'phtheiro [φθείρω],' and also the prefix added to it: 'diaphtheiro [διαφθείρω].' I tried to show you that that word 'destroy' never means that you do not exist anymore.

Yes, it is a fate for the unsaved, but it never means nonexistence. A verse I did not show you because I was in a hurry last time is 2 Corinthians 7:2.

Paul the apostle says:

"Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged no one, we corrupted—" (2 Corinthians 7:2)

That is 'phtheiro [φθείρω].'

"...we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one" (2 Corinthians 7:2).

When it says of Paul that he did not destroy them, he did not take advantage of them, no one in their right mind would believe that if he had taken advantage of them the people he had taken advantage of would not exist anymore, right?

If someone robbed you, they just took your money, right? But you are still there without any money. You still exist. This is how 'destroyed' is used. It does not mean cessation of existence.

Also, I did not have a chance to show you last time Ephesians 4:22, where Paul says:

"That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted..." (Ephesians 4:22).

That is 'phtheiro [φθείρω].'

"...the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit," (Ephesians 4:22).

I have an old nature that is corrupted, and it is getting more corrupted every day, but does that mean my old nature stopped existing? It is still there, right? That is how 'phtheiro [φθείρω]'—'destroyed'—is used in the Bible.

The Annihilationists do not want you to know this. They want you to just focus on the English word, the English translation. They want 'destroyed' to mean cessation of existence.

From there, let us move into the next argument that they use. We dealt with their second death argument, their 'destroy' argument. Let us move into 2 Thessalonians 1:9, where you find this expression 'everlasting destruction.'

Here the Greek word is 'olethros [ὄλεθρος].' It is used in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Let us take a look at that.

2 Thessalonians 1:9.

It says:

"These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction..." (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

That is 'olethros [ὄλεθρος].'

"...away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power," (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

They will use that to say, "Well, that means people are destroyed. They just cease to exist."

Then you ask them, "Well, what do you do with the word 'forever'?"

Because it does not just say 'destruction.' It says 'destroyed forever'—destroyed eternally.

They will say, "Well, that is the afterthought of a destroyed person."

I actually had someone email me telling me this. "Stalin is not here anymore, but, boy, we sure think about him a lot. What a bad man."

"Hitler is not here anymore, but we sure think about him a lot. What a bad man."

They want that to be the remembrance of the destroyed person. That is how they interpret 'eternal destruction' through the use of this word 'olethros [ὄλεθρος].'

If you look over at Acts 3:23, there the same root is used as a verb. (Nouns and verbs come from the same root.) And here it is 'exolethreuo [ἐξολεθρεύω].'

It is used that way in Acts 3:23.

Acts 3:23 says:

"And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:23).

So, how are they handling 'exolethreuo [ἐξολεθρεύω]'? They are handling it as the people that would not listen to the prophet are just destroyed like the Death Star shooting the laser beam at the planet Alderaan and the planet explodes and ceases to exist.

Obi-Wan Kenobi says something like, "I sense a disturbance in the Force."

It was a bunch of people all crying out, and then they stopped—not that you want to get your theology from Star Wars, but it is the best thing I can think of to describe annihilation.

That is what they think happens to people who will not listen to the prophet in this case. The Annihilationists say this word 'destroyed' is totally incompatible with the view that we represent, which is eternal conscious torment.

Once again, you ask them, "Well, what do you do with 'eternal destruction'?"

Basically, according to them, that is eternal remembrance of a destroyed entity.

How would I answer that? Well, go back to 2 Thessalonians 1:9, and it tells you exactly what is meant by 'destroyed.' It has nothing to do with ceasing to exist.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 says:

"These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction..." (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

Look at this: it tells you what 'eternal destruction' is.

"...away from the presence of the Lord..." (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

Do you see that? That is what 'eternal destruction' is. It is not ceasing to exist, but that you are forever—this is what is meant by 'the second death'—'death' meaning separation. You are forever away from the presence of the Lord.

There is no need to read annihilation into that passage, because it tells you what 'eternal destruction is.'

This word, 'olethros [ὄλεθρος]'—it does not ever mean cessation of existence.

Let me give you some examples of why it does not mean that.

Notice 1 Corinthians 5:5.

It is talking about church discipline on carnal or fleshly Christians. Here is a case where a man is actually involved in an incestuous relationship, and everybody was just acting like, "No big deal; nothing to see here, folks."

Paul says, "You need to kick this guy out of your church so that he can repent; and then once he repents, bring him back into the church."

In the process of describing that, Paul uses this word 'olethros [ὄλεθρος]'—same word.

He says:

"I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:5).

Paul is saying, "What are you guys doing? You leadership in Corinth should have—after confronting him, you should have kicked him out of the church."

That is called church discipline, and if you got kicked out of—by the way, this was the first church at Corinth; there was no Second Church of Corinth to go to. Today, if you get kicked out of First Baptist, you go to Second Baptist. If you get kicked out of Second Baptist, you will go to Seventeenth Baptist because we have churches on every corner.

But we are dealing with the Greco-Roman world here. If you were out of the church, you were out and you were totally in the domain of Satan.

The point is not to destroy a person. It is to shame the person into repentance through the various steps of church discipline. As Paul is explaining this, he uses this word—'the destruction of his flesh': 'olethros [ὄλεθρος].'

Now, anybody reading that would understand that the person kicked out of the church did not stop existing, right? What was happening was that his sin nature was being brought into control.

But the sin nature and the human being were still there. That is how this word 'destroyed' is used; because in the second letter, 2 Corinthians, Paul says, "Let the guy back in. He has repented." (There is an argument to be made that it is the same guy.)

So, either they—it is kind of funny how people are in ministry—either they would not do anything to fix the problem, or when they tried to fix the problem, they were so heavy-handed that they forgot that the goal of church discipline is restoration, not to beat the person so far into the ground that they will never see the light of day again.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:6:

"Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority," (2 Corinthians 2:6).

In other words, you kicked him out for the destruction of his flesh—there is our Greek word 'olethros [ὄλεθρος]'—but obviously the guy did not stop existing because now you are supposed to, when he is repentant, let him back in.

You cannot let a person back in that does not exist anymore. Do you see that?

That is how this word 'destruction' is used.

Notice 1 Thessalonians 5:3. Here is 'olethros [ὄλεθρος]' again. 1 Thessalonians 5:3, which is talking about the Tribulation.

It says:

"While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child..." (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

There is actually a double negative there at the end of verse three translated,

"...they will not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

That means that once the Tribulation period starts, there is no way the inhabitants of the earth are getting out of it. It is the strongest negation you could have in the Greek language.

There is our word again: 'destruction.' Same one used in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Same one used in Acts 3:23. And, obviously, when you read this, it is not talking about the judgments coming upon the earth and the people to the point where they will not exist anymore, because when these judgments hit, we know that the earth will continue.

These judgments will continue for seven years, and then this earth will be renovated, and then that will pave the way for another thousand years. The earth has around 1,007 years left.

So, Paul is not saying that when this destruction happens to the inhabitants of the Earth, there is a cessation of existence.

That is how you can recognize that they are using this word 'destruction' wrongly. Because as it is used elsewhere, it does not mean not to exist anymore.

Norman Geisler, on this point, writes this:

"...the Bible uses several main pictures to speak of hell..."¹

What is hell? Well, here are some pictures the Bible uses.

"...(1) darkness, (2) separation..."²

Which is the true meaning of death.

"...(3) Weeping, (4) gnashing of teeth, (5) punishment, (6) fire, (7) death, and (8) destruction. The first five in no sense coalesce with the idea of annihilation; and, when properly understood in context, neither do the last three. As applied to hell, then, 'destruction' clearly does not mean annihilation but connotes the punishment of something still in existence.

¹ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 396.

² Ibid.

'Punishment' is precisely what Paul called the action taken on the excommunicated man..."³

Which we just looked at.

"...(using the same word—cf. 2 Cor. 2:6; 1 Cor. 5:5)."

You cannot eternally punish someone that is not there to punish.

So, that is how to handle this word translated 'destruction.' Let me take you to another one. It is the idea of burning up.

Notice Matthew 3:12, which has the fire imagery associated with hell. Matthew 3:12. This is John the Baptist quoting the Old Testament.

It says:

"His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12).

Actually, an Annihilationist will use Matthew 3:12, because they say that the purpose of the fire is to consume and not to punish us. Since fire consumes, you reach a point—I mean, if your house is on fire, you reach a point where the house is gone, right?

So, if the purpose of fire is to consume, then at some point what the fire is consuming will not be there anymore. But, of course, you see the big problem with that—it says 'unquenchable fire.'

Isaiah 66:24, which is being quoted here in Matthew 3, says:

"Then they will go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die..." (Isaiah 66:24).

Look at that. The worm continues on. So, if the animal continues on, I would think that the human being continues on as well. That is why the fire cannot be put out, because it never finishes consuming.

"...For their worm will not die, And their fire will not be quenched; And they will be an abhorrence to all mankind" (Isaiah 66:24).

Rather than this being a proof text for annihilation, I think the verse teaches the exact opposite. Many times in Scripture, hell is analogized to being in flame.

³ Ibid.

Remember the man that died in unbelief in Luke 16:24? I have told you already why I do not think this is a parable as many try to turn it into.

But it says this in Luke 16:24.

"And he—" (Luke 16:24).

That is the unbeliever.

"...cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame" (Luke 16:24).

So, here is a man in flame, and there is no sense in which he ceases to exist. There is no sense in saying, "Hang on, tough guy, because within ten years, it is all going to be over," right?

You have to completely read that into the passage to make flames sound like something temporal. The flame here is obviously not something temporal at all. It is something that is eternal. The flame is what the Antichrist—who, by the way, is a person; we have talked about that the number of his name, 'the number of a man' according to Revelation 13:18 with the Greek word 'anthropos'—When the Antichrist is finally defeated, he will be put into a fire.

Notice Revelation 19:20, which describes this. Revelation 19:20 describes the fire that the Antichrist will be placed into. (This is right at the end of the seven year Tribulation period.)

It says here:

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

Now, is the fire here something temporary? Obviously not, because a thousand years pass (that is called the Millennial Kingdom).

See, what I am looking at here happened in Revelation 19 right at this point, but when you take prophecy literally, which we do, a thousand years happen. Then, finally, Satan, who God uses as His instrument, because the devil is God's devil, reveals the rebellion happening at the end of the Millennial Kingdom by the descendants of those who, in their mortal bodies as believers, repopulated the earth and still received us in nature.

We have talked a little bit about that. When that whole era is finished, God at that point takes Satan and throws him into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown in, a thousand years earlier.

In the process of describing that, it says this:

*"And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire..."
(Revelation 20:10).*

It is still fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet—what's the next word?

"...are..." (Revelation 20:10).

They are still in there. Therefore, you cannot define fire as some temporary thing that is just designed to consume someone, or else it would have gone out a long time ago. This is a thousand years later.

If all of that were not clear enough, it says:

"...where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

Does that sound like a temporary consumption and then they cease to exist? How do you harmonize 'forever and ever' with that idea? And yet, this is what the Kirk Camerons of the world are trying to convince Evangelicalism of today.

Let me take you to a fifth argument that they use, and they want to focus on Revelation 14:11, which talks about eternal—in their minds—eternal results. They say this is talking about an eternal result and not a process.

It is what they are doing with the Stalin example. Stalin was annihilated, but we never forgot him because he was such a terrible man. They are saying that the results of annihilation continue, but the process of punishment stops when the person stops existing.

Believe it or not, they use Revelation 14:11 to try to get this across to people.

It says:

"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name" (Revelation 14:11).

Now, to me, that is a very strong text favoring eternal conscious torment. But the Annihilationist actually uses that verse, because they say, "Look, it is just the smoke that goes up forever and ever."

Do you see that? In other words, the person stopped existing, and that penalty was so severe that God perpetually calls attention to it through smoke going up forever. Not the person—they say it is the smoke, not the person that goes up forever and ever.

I actually heard Clark Pinnock, who is a very well-known evangelical, say that.

"It is not the person, it is the smoke."

Well, as the old saying goes, if there is smoke, then there is fire; and if there is smoke going up forever and ever, that means the fire keeps going on forever, forever, forever and ever—which means the fire must never stop consuming the person.

But this actually becomes one of the arguments that they try to use. "I think the whole thing is demolished when it says 'forever and ever.'"

Where there is smoke, there is fire.

And the punishment—Do you see that? Now we are not talking about fire anymore—whatever you believe about fire, fine, but the torment (that is, the punishment) never stops. They want your attention to be focused on the lack of fire, not the punishment that goes on forever and ever.

The passage is not just dealing with the smoke going up forever and ever. It is dealing with the punishment going on forever and ever and ever.

You see the same thing in Revelation 20:10.

Let me take you to a sixth argument that they use. That is the word 'perdition,' which also is translated 'destruction.' It is a slightly different Greek word than the ones we have talked about so far. This particular one is 'apoleia [ἀπώλεια].'

You will notice that this word is applied to the unsaved over and over again. A few verses on this that they like to use: Matthew 7:13.

Matthew 7:13. It says:

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction..." (Matthew 7:13).

That is 'apoleia [ἀπώλεια].' And the Annihilationists, of course, define 'destruction' as ceasing to exist.

Notice Romans 9:22. Romans 9:22.

By the way, do you ever wonder why a Jehovah's Witness can come to your typical Evangelical's door and tie them in a theological pretzel in about twenty-two seconds? Because the Jehovah's Witnesses do at Kingdom Hall what I am doing with you here, where I am training you and teaching you. Your average Evangelical church is not doing this kind of thing.

They are not training and teaching. They are not teaching their people how to interact with the other side. So, when the Jehovah's Witnesses come to the door, we are obviously caught flat-footed because we do not know what the other side even thinks.

As much as people come to this church and they say, "This is really a weird church."

Do you stand up there for an hour and teach the Bible like that every single week? Well, actually, I do not do it for an hour—I do it for a little more than an hour, and I actually do it twice on Sunday and once on Wednesday.

The Jehovah's Witnesses do this all the time. What we do here is normal for the Jehovah's Witnesses. It was the famous saying from the late Walter Martin. He said, "Are you willing to do for the truth what the cults will do for a lie?"

We have the truth, and yet they have the lie, and they are training their people and on our side we do not train people. We do not prepare people for combat: theological and spiritual warfare.

This is not weird what I am doing. It may be weird with American Evangelicalism, but it is what churches are supposed to do. The kingdom of the cults—they do this stuff all the time with their people.

Notice Romans 9:22. This is a good one that is a segue into the sermon today about Pharaoh.

"What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" (Romans 9:22).

The Annihilationists say 'destruction' means ceasing to exist.

That is your Greek word, 'apoleia [ἀπώλεια].'

Notice 2 Peter 2:1. 2 Peter 2:1. This is dealing with unsaved false teachers.

Peter says:

"But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them..." (2 Peter 2:1).

Look at this.

"...bringing swift destruction upon themselves" (2 Peter 2:1).

There is 'apoleia [ἀπώλεια]' and the Annihilationists—whether it is a Seventh-Day Adventist or a Jehovah's Witness, or now a Clark Pinnock or a Kirk Cameron—we will just say that that means ceasing to exist.

They think the idea of destruction is not consistent with the eternal conscious torment perspective on the afterlife for the unsaved.

Notice Philippians 3:19. Here is another use of that word 'apoleia [ἀπώλεια],' translated 'destruction.'

Philippians 3:19, of false teachers it says:

"whose end is destruction..." (Philippians 3:19).

This one hurts a little bit:

"...whose god is their appetite..." (Philippians 3:19).

I went out to dinner last night, that is why it hurts a little bit.

"...and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things" (Philippians 3:19).

When it says 'whose end is destruction,' the Annihilationists say, "Come on, do not talk about an eternal hell. It just means ceasing to exist. Everybody knows that is what 'destruction' means."

2 Peter 3:7 says:

"But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:7).

'Ungodly men.' They do not go into an eternal hell. They are just destroyed. They are annihilated—is this a legitimate use of the word 'apoleia [ἀπώλεια]'?

That is not how that word is ever used—ever—in the Bible. What it means is 'ruin,' not ceasing to exist.

Let me give you this example: Let us say you want to get rid of your car, and you take it to the junkyard to do what they will, and they smash the windows out. They use those giant compactors that they have. They make it a great big square of metal, which is totally useless.

You cannot do anything with it: it is in an irredeemable state, but the metal never went out of existence. It is in a ruined, destroyed state.

That is what hell is. It is an existent state, which is irredeemable, which is useless. You cannot do anything with it, but it is still there. That is what 'destruction' means. It never, ever means ceasing to exist, as much as emotionally I would love it to mean that.

I was seduced by some of these arguments when I was a new Christian. Emotionally, that is where I am. But that is not what the word means.

Let me show you what it actually means.

Notice Matthew 26:8. Look at it. This is 'apoleia [ἀπώλεια].'

Matthew 26:8 has to do with Jesus being worshiped. They are pouring expensive ointment on Him, and Judas does not like it.

"But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, 'Why this waste?'" (Matthew 26:8).

"You are pouring ointment on Jesus—What a waste! Don't you know we could have taken that and sold it and made a lot of money?"

When you see this word 'waste,' you could easily put in there the word 'destroyed.' Although in English it carries a different meaning, it is the same Greek word.

Nobody is going to say that the ointment that was poured out on Jesus stopped existing. It is just in the minds of the carnal that it was a waste of time or resources, I should say.

Look at Mark 14:4. This word 'apoleia [ἀπώλεια]' means a wasted state, not cessation of existence.

Mark 14:4. Same account as Matthew 26.

It says:

"But some were indignantly remarking to one another, 'Why has this perfume been wasted?'" (Mark 14:4).

The perfume did not stop existing. They just felt that it could have gone to a better cause, very sadly.

This word is also used of the Antichrist. 'Apoleia [ἀπώλεια].'

Look at Revelation 17:8. Revelation 17:8 is describing the Antichrist.

"The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction..." (Revelation 17:8).

The Antichrist is going to destruction.

Look at Revelation 17:11.

"The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction" (Revelation 17:11).

There is 'apoleia [ἀπώλεια]' again—same word. We know enough in our doctrine and understanding of the Antichrist that the Antichrist does not cease to exist ever. The Antichrist—Revelation 19—is thrown into the lake of fire, and when it comes time, a thousand years later, to throw the devil into the same lake of fire, it says:

"...where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

Obviously, if 'apoleia [ἀπώλεια]' means ceasing to exist, the word cannot mean that because the Antichrist is destroyed, but he continues to exist.

Well, then, what does this word 'destroyed' mean? It means he is in a destroyed state. It is similar to taking your house, and since you want to get rid of it—or someone like a developer, for example, wants to build there—they take existing structures and collapse them.

That is what the Bible means by 'destruction.' The building is collapsed. You cannot use it for anything, but the parts of the building that used to form something useful are still in existence. See that? That is hell.

Hell is continuing to exist, but you are in a state that is useless. You are in a ruined state. You are in an irredeemable state, but there is no such thing as nonexistence.

Another argument that they use is what Jesus said of Judas: that it would be better for him if he had never been born.

Notice Mark 14:21. This is a favorite of the Annihilationists.

Mark 14:21:

"For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man—" (Mark 14:21).

Speaking of Judas.

"...by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born" (Mark 14:21).

The Annihilationists define 'never been born' as 'never existed.' So, according to them, since Jesus says that it would be better for a man if he had never existed, when Judas did his thing and betrayed Christ, he went to hell as an unsaved person and he went back to a state of nonexistence.

According to the words of Christ, because Jesus Himself said it would be better for him if he had never been born.

Notice that verse does not say it would be better for him if he had never been conceived. You see the difference. Life starts, Biblically speaking, from what? Conception.

It does not start from birth. It is like people saying, "Gosh, Billy Graham died at the age of 99. I just wish he had made it to the age of 100."

And I say, "He did make it to 100. You do not chart his beginning from his birth. Tack on nine months to that, he made it to 100. Yay!"

As Christians, we believe life begins at conception. I realize the whole pro-abortion stance denies that, but it is what the Bible says: life begins at conception.

If Jesus was trying to say that nonexistence is better than existence, He would not have used the word 'born.' He would have used the word 'conceived,' which He does not use here.

The only thing Jesus is doing with Judas is that He is making a comparison between in the womb and out of the womb. That is all He is doing. It is not nonexistence versus existence. It is in the womb versus out of the womb.

In the womb. Judas was a lot better off than out of the womb because when he was out of the womb he betrayed Christ. He died in unbelief, according to John 6. It would have been better for him if he was still in the womb.

See, there is nothing here about nonexistence.

Norman Geisler refutes this use of annihilation as follows:

"First of all, even if taken literally, Jesus' declaration is not a comparison of Judas's perdition to his nonexistence before conception; it is a comparison to his existence in the womb before he was born. Jesus did not say it would have been better if Judas had never been conceived but if he'd never been born."⁴

I realized some of this sounds like I am micromanaging words. But as the saying goes, the devil's in the details.

This is literal, is it not? What Jesus is doing here is—He is not making an argument that Judas stopped existing—He is using a hyperbole. Judas's fate is so bad that it would have been better for him if he was still in the womb. That is what Jesus is saying.

That is called hyperbole. It is an exaggeration to make a point. "Judas is not well off right now," is what Jesus is communicating here.

We certainly interpret the Bible literally whenever possible. We want to argue for a plain literal interpretation of the Bible. You take words and phrases at face value, but there are obvious times when the Bible is speaking figuratively.

Plain literal speech is called denotative speech. Figurative speech is called connotative speech. We do this all the time in normal communication.

My wife says, "How did you sleep last night?"

I say, "Great, I slept till 8 AM and I slept like a log."

When I say I slept till 8 AM, that is denotative speech, right? She does not take that as a symbol of something. When I say I slept like a log, the word 'like' thrown into the sentence tells me that we are dealing with a simile.

My wife does not say, "Did you really turn into a piece of wood last night? I know your name is Woods."

That is—since language functions that way—that is how you approach the Bible. You try to—whenever possible—interpret literally. (And if you did not have these rules to agree on, we could not even communicate with each other. It would become difficult when someone wants to be understood figuratively and you interpret them literally, or someone wants to be understood literally and you interpret them figuratively; that is where it can get a little dicey.).

⁴ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 399.

There is a figure of speech right there. I leave my coffee cup in the microwave with coffee in it, it is heating up, and I forgot to hit the timer. So, it just heats up indefinitely, and it starts to bubble over the sides.

My wife says to me as I am in the other room, having forgotten about my coffee cup in the microwave. She says, "Honey, your cup is overflowing."

And I said to her, "Praise the Lord, my cup is overflowing. I am just blessed in this life and, man, God has been so faithful and so good. My cup—"

"No! Your cup is overflowing."

She wanted to be understood literally, and I interpreted her figuratively. That is where communication starts to break down.

You have the same battle in ordinary language; you have the same battle in Scripture. You take words at ordinary value unless the text tells you otherwise.

E.W. Bullinger wrote a classic book on this called 'Figures of Speech Used in the Bible.'

It was written more than a hundred years ago. It is a thousand pages long. Now, if somebody writes a book that people still use as the key book on a topic a hundred years later, you have done a good job.

He covers every figure of speech you would ever encounter in Scripture. Figures of speech you have not even heard of. Apostrophe, simile, metaphor—on and on, page after page, of these figures of speech.

One of them is hyperbole, which is when you are exaggerating to make a point.

"I am so hungry I could eat a horse."

Well, you are just saying you want something to eat. I do not think you are going to try to eat a horse. I mean, I have tried, but it did not work out very well.

So, the Bible uses hyperboles. Not all the time, but sometimes. For example, John made this statement at the end of his gospel after giving us the seven signs that Jesus performed.

He said in John 21:25:

"And there are also many other signs which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

What he is saying there is: "Jesus did a lot of other stuff that I am not even telling you about. And to communicate that point, I am going to use a hyperbole: 'The books themselves could not be contained by the world.'"

If you look at Psalm 6:6, you will see a hyperbole there. Now, you do not willy-nilly convert things to hyperbole unless it is obvious in the Bible.

Psalm 6:6. The psalmist writes:

"I am weary with my sighing; Every night I make my bed swim, I dissolve my couch with my tears" (Psalm 6:6).

He is saying, "I am so upset and I am crying so much that—you know what?—I think my couch is going to float away."

Well, obviously that is hyperbole, because there is not enough water in the tear ducts to cause your couch to dissolve. What he is saying is, "I am just really upset." That is what he is saying.

He is using a hyperbole to get his point across. So, that is what you have here in Mark 4:21. Jesus basically says, "If you compare Judas, when he was in the womb versus out of the womb, it would actually be better for that guy if he was still in the womb."

That, we are able to say, is hyperbolic arguably, because that guy's fate is really bad.

There is zero here about nonexistence, and the Annihilationist wants to turn that into a passage about nonexistence.

How about 'perishing'?

Somebody sent me Kirk Cameron's video, and I can only watch it for about 15 seconds or I am going to tear my hair out. Now, there is a hyperbole for you. This stuff so frustrates me that I just want to start screaming at the computer, which is not really productive.

But I watched it for about 15 seconds and sure enough, he goes to Psalm 37:20 about the wicked perishing, just like clockwork.

Psalm 37:20:

"But the wicked will perish; And the enemies of the Lord will be like the glory of the pastures, They vanish—like smoke they vanish away" (Psalm 37:20).

"There it is in the Bible. The wicked stop existing. They are annihilated."

Along these lines they will use Psalm 68:2.

Psalm 68:2 says:

"As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; As wax melts before the fire, So let the wicked perish before God" (Psalm 68:2).

"They are just going to perish," says the Annihilationist. "They are just going to disappear. They are going to vanish. No eternal conscious torment here."

Notice Psalm 112:10:

"The wicked will see it and be vexed, He will gnash his teeth and melt away; The desire of the wicked will perish" (Psalm 112:10).

"The wicked are just going to melt away and that is it."

What would I say to that? Well, that is the Hebrew word 'abad [אָבַד].' Did you also know it is used of the righteous vanishing?

It is used of the righteous vanishing in Isaiah 57:1—something the Annihilationist says cannot happen.

See, they have the righteous living forever, and the wicked disappearing using this Hebrew word 'abad [אָבַד].' But the same Hebrew word 'abad [אָבַד]' is used of the righteous perishing and not existing.

So, what I am seeing here is an inconsistent use of the word, which shows me something's wrong with their grid. It shows me that they are running all these things through—when people are approaching the Bible in such a desperate manner, it is revelation that there is a problem.

Isaiah 57:1 says:

"The righteous man perishes, and no man takes it to heart; And devout men are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from evil" (Isaiah 57:1).

That is 'abad [אָבַד]' also; and they do not think that the righteous just disappear.

You can jot down Micah 7:2. You will see 'abad [אָבַד]' there as a reference to the righteous disappearing.