

THE SECRET OF HIS PURPOSE .... THE PLAN FOR THE FULLNESS OF THE TIMES  
**TO HEAD UP ALL THINGS IN THE KING,**  
EVERYTHING IN THE HEAVENS AND ON THE EARTH,  
**IN JESUS....**

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#57

***Eternity or Ages?—Eternal or Eonian?***

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Without doubt, most Christians believe salvation and, for that matter, the good news are all about what is called *eternal life* and *eternity*. After all, in the gospels, Jesus is quoted using the term *eternal* or *everlasting life* some 23 times, depending on the translation. But what is *eternal life*? Most would probably say it means an endless or immortal life, after death and generally in heaven, for those who manage to apply their so-called *free will* "to get saved." To this, others might add that it is a quality of life even while occupying bodies of death (i.e., mortal bodies).

What if the Greek word that is most often translated as *eternal* or *everlasting* does not necessarily mean *eternal* as most think of it? What if there is a more appropriate adjective to be applied to the life spoken of by Jesus? What if the Greek word actually signifies something related to an indefinite period of time, such as an age or eon? Or, even more significantly, what if eternal life is a relational term linked to the age(s) to come?

Many scholars have debated and dissected this issue, especially in light of the question of *eternal condemnation* or *punishment* or, as I call it, *eternal torture* in a place called *hell* that is fashioned after pagan mythology. For those with an inquisitive mind or who are like the Bereans, there are plenty of articles and books on the subject. You are encouraged to search them out as I have done. What follows simply highlights the conclusions drawn from such a study. One caution is offered; there are plenty of blogs and apologetic sites out there that would adamantly refute the conclusions of this article, if they were to ever read it. However, most of the dissent would come from those who are hell-bent (literally) on believing that God fully intends to send billions upon billions of people, created to be in His image, into a never-ending hell of literal fire and worms because they refused to exercise their so-called *free will* to believe on His Son. Personally, I find such a view repulsive and a vile mischaracterization of *God is love*, never mind that it is nowhere to be found in scripture but is ripe in the traditions of men.

See *Whose Will Saves—God's or Man's?* — <http://www.kingdomandglory.com/art/art33.pdf>

What follows addresses three issues along the line of these questions:

1. Scripture places much more emphasis on the ages than on eternity. The fact of the matter is that God is working out His purpose through the ages or eons, making the ages a major tenet of scripture. The good news is related to what God is and will be doing through the ages that He made through His Son.
2. The present-day concepts of *eternal life* and *eternal punishment*, which are based on the common understanding of the word *eternal*, are not the best translations of the Greek and lead to erroneous doctrines, such as endless (eternal) punishment. They should be replaced with what are called *eonian life* or *life of the age(s)* and *eonian chastisement*. Some might wonder why the

fuss over this. The answer is simple. If eternal life is about an endless life for believers, then eternal judgment (*aka* hell) for unbelievers is also endless and the lost have no chance of ever being set free. In other words, contrary to scripture, they are toast forever and ever.

3. Eonian life and immortality are different concepts and, yet, are closely aligned, especially for those that are worthy to rule and reign with Christ in this age and the ages to come. Eonian life speaks of a quality of life in the ages. Immortality is simply having life that is no longer subject to death; it is life beyond death in an immortal body—*spirit-animated* body.

Before proceeding to the meat; there are some housekeeping items, so to speak.

First, some definitions...

*Anglicized* means the item in question has been changed to an English pronunciation, idiom, custom, manner, word, etc. Thus, *eon* is the Anglicized word for *aiōn*. Notice how the two words are similar in spelling and pronunciation.

*Concordant method of translation* takes a Greek word, finds all the places it is used in scripture, then determines its usage, and thus its meaning, based on all the text in which it is discovered. Once this is accomplished, every attempt is made to translate the one Greek word wherever it is used into one English word or, at least, the fewest English words as possible.

*Eternal*, an adjective, is defined as: 1. without beginning or end; existing through all time; everlasting; 2. timeless; 3. forever the same; always true or valid; unchangeable: as, eternal principles; 4. always going on or coming back; never stopping; perpetual; 5. seems never to stop; happening very often. *Eternity*, a noun, is defined as: 1. the quality, state, or fact of being eternal; eternal existence or duration: continuous without end; 2. infinite time: time without beginning or end; 3. a long period of time that seems endless, as an eternity of waiting; 4. (a) the endless time after death; hence, (b) future life; immortality. Source: *Webster's New World Dictionary* (1966 edition; World Publishing Company).

Take special note that the concept of time is interwoven in the definitions. However, *eternal* is presented as outside of time, since it exists through all time, timeless; whereas, *eternity* entertains the thought that it is within time, even if it is infinite time. As such, the definitions of the noun and the adjective form are not truly consistent with each other. Interestingly, Christian commentators (preachers, teachers) generally use both words in the sense of outside of time and endless.

*Interpretative bias* refers to translator bias. In translating scripture from the original languages into another language, translators use words based on interpretation and tradition of what they believe to be the meaning or intent behind the words; thus, their interpretative bias gets built into their translations based on the words and phrases they use. The term is not meant to question the integrity or honesty of translators. It seems that a certain amount of interpretative bias is inevitable and found in all translations.

*Septuagint [LXX]* is the Greek translation of Hebrew scripture, that is, the Greek version of the Old Testament Hebrew text. Around 280 BC, 72 Jewish scholars translated their Hebrew scripture into Greek. In so doing, they produced what could be called a Hebrew-to-Greek lexicon, for they translated Hebrew words into Greek words. Consequently, a Greek word was selected that best matched the meaning of a Hebrew word, and this set the meaning of the Greek as used in scripture. Thus, when basing doctrine on the Greek, it is important to know the Hebrew source word and its meaning. By the way, the writers of the new testament often quote the old testament based on the *Septuagint*.

*Transliterated* refers to writing or spelling words, etc. in the characters of another alphabet that represent the same sound or sounds of the original language. For example, *aiōn* is the transliterated word for the Greek word αἰών, pronounced *ahee-ohn*.

Second, what follows does not challenge the concept that God is eternal in the *absolute* sense, since, as far as we know, He is without beginning or end. (Scripture is all that we have to go on, and it seems clear to me that it does not begin to tell us the whole story nor the background to the story. Much is left to interpretation, even theory.) Interestingly, as the Alpha and Omega, Jesus said He is the beginning and the end (Revelation 21:6), which clearly places Him in the dimension of time. The fact of the matter is that the ages (or, time) were created through the Son, through whom He (God) made or constituted the ages or eons (Hebrews 1:2). So, stating that God and His Son are eonian or in time does not take away from the fact that they are also eternal or before time or the age(s) of man, as we know it and attempt to explain it.

Third, in the Greek, the word that most clearly means *eternal* is the transliterated word *aidios*, which means *everlasting* or *eternal*. The fact is Jesus never used this word; if He had used it, then the points of this article would be null and void. However, *aidios* appears in the Greek text only two times, Romans 1:20 and Jude 6. Surprisingly, scripture never associates *aidios*, which is an adjective, with *life*. In the Greek, it never reads *aidios zoe* (life); instead, it always reads *aiōnios zoe*, a phrase used some 41 times in Greek scripture, again, depending on the translation. If *aidios* were joined with *zoe* (life) throughout the Greek text, then we would have no argument and would have to agree with all who hold to eternal life based on the accepted definition of the word *eternal*. The fact that it is not joined with life is a strong indicator that something else is meant, and it behooves us to discover what this is.

Fourth, the Greek adjective most often translated in the mainline translations as *eternal* is *aiōnios* or *aiōnion*, which is derived from the word *aiōn*. Generally, an adjective gets its meaning from a noun, so *aiōnios* (the adjective) should get its meaning from *aiōn* (the noun).

Fifth, in the Greek, the transliterated noun *aiōn* is equivalent to the Anglicized word *eon* or its equivalent word *age*, meaning *an indefinite period of time*. It refers to an age or period of time, often without defining the length of the time. The adjective form of *aiōn* is *aiōnion*; its Anglicized equivalent is *eonian* [or, *aionian*] or its equivalent *age-lasting* or *age-during*, meaning it qualifies something as existing in time or that lasts for a period of time. The challenge is that, with the exception of translations that attempt more literal accuracy, most translations do not concur with this understanding of the word *eonian* and instead choose the word *eternal* or *everlasting* to define the adjective form as if the noun and the adjective are not integrally related.

Please keep in mind that the words *eon* and *age* are interchangeable, as well as the words *eonian* [or, *aionian*] and *age-during* or *age-lasting*. Going forward, all these renderings will be used interchangeably.

Sixth, in the Greek text, the noun *aiōn* is used 128 times (singular [*aiōn*] and plural [*aiōnōn*] forms), and the adjective *aiōnios/aiōnion* is used 71 times. New Testaments written in English translate these words using nearly 40 different words, including: age, ages, ago, age-lasting, age-long, duration, earliest ages, last ages, latest ages, remote age, remotest age, always, ancient, any more, beginning, does, end, eternal, eternity, ever, forever, and ever, for evermore, first, very first, Immortal, life, never, nevermore, never while the world lasts, never to the end of my days, of old, permanently, time again, all time, old time, today, universe, world, yonder world.

These statistics, alone, should be a caution flag to the inquisitive mind. How can nearly 40 English words for two similar Greek words not produce confusion or, worse, downright error?

Just consider five words that are translated from *aiōn* and *aiōnion*—*eternal*, *everlasting*, *forever*, *world*, and *age*. Do you notice something odd about these five words? They have different meanings. *Eternal* or *everlasting* refers to timelessness or that which is outside of time and has no beginning or end. An *age* refers to an indefinite period of time but with an end in view, even if unknown. *World* refers to an orderly arrangement or system.

How can one word and its derivations have such divergent usage and maintain the intent of the Greek? If the Greek word meant "world," then why do the translators not use the word *world* in all places for the word *aiōn*? The answer is that it would not make sense in all cases. Unfortunately, making sense does not always seem to be the criteria used by translators. Consider two verses from the *King James Version* in which *aiōn* is translated as *world*.

So shall it be at *the end of the world* [*aiōn*]. (Matthew 13:49)

Throughout all ages [*genea*], *world* [*aiōn*] *without end*. (Ephesians 3:21)

How could the world have an end and not have an end? To add to the confusion, the word *ages* is translated from the Greek word *genea*, meaning "generations," and not *aiōn*. To be fair, the contradiction could be explained this way: The orderly arrangement of man's systems (*kosmos*) will come to an end as the kingdom of our Lord takes root among the nations, but the earth will not end; the earth will be transformed by God's fiery word (law) in God's age. But, you see, this could all be avoided simply by keeping to the Greek word *aiōn*.

Following a concordant approach to scripture, these verses more appropriately read as follows.

Thus, shall it be in *the conclusion of the eon*.

For all *the generations of the eon of the eons*.

These renderings have no contradiction, even if one has no understanding of the word *eon*. The *eon* in the first verse has a conclusion, but there is no direct reference to an end of the *eon* of the *eons* in the second verse.

Wouldn't it be far better to use the words *eon* (noun) or *eonian* (adjective) every place that the Greek words *aiōn* and *aiōnion* appear in the original language and leave it to the reader to discern the meaning according to the context of the verse? Or better yet, how about committing to what the Greek actually means and using the words *age-during*, *age-lasting*, or *eonian*?

Now, to begin, let us consider some definitions of *eon* and *eonian*. Since the noun sets (at least it should set) the course for the adjective, we need to start with the word *aiōn*, that is, *eon*.

### Meaning of *Aiōn*, *Eon*

*Webster's New World Dictionary* defines *eon* as "an extremely long, indefinite period of time, thousands and thousands of years."

The *New Englishman's Greek-English Concordance & Lexicon* (Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1982) defines *eon* as an age: (a) an indefinitely long period, *eternity* (past or future), John 6:51; 9:32; (b) a certain segment of time, an era, age (present or future), Matthew 12:32; Mark 10:30; (c) material universe as the manifestation of the ages, i.e., the aggregate of things contained in time.

Take note that section (a) defines *age* as an indefinitely long period but qualifies it as eternity past or future. If eternity is outside of time or timeless, how could it ever be past, present, or future? It simply *is*, just like God is *I AM*. If eternity is related to time, meaning endless time, but time nonetheless, wouldn't eternity past or future rightly be called an age or eon, meaning it has either a beginning or an end, even if unknown? The only way this question is resolved is to make *eternal* a qualifier (adjective) of an age, meaning it signifies lasting for an age, even if it is an indefinitely long period of time. Thus, in this case, *eternal* is not truly endless or timeless.

Adlai Loudy, in his book *God's Eonian Purpose* (Concordant Publishing), defines the word *eon* as "a period of time between two great physical and moral cataclysmic judgments of the earth and its inhabitants. Each of these long periods of time has a beginning and is punctuated by an end."

In Appendix 129 of *The Companion Bible*, Dr. E.W. Bullinger states that *aiōn* "may be limited or extended as the context of each occurrence may demand. The root meaning of *aiōn* is expressed by the Hebrew *olam* which denotes indefinite, unknown or concealed duration, just as we speak of "the patriarchal age," or "the golden age." Hence, it has come to denote any given period of time, characterized by a special form of Divine administration or dispensation."

Dr. Bullinger goes on to state: "In the plural we have the Heb. *olamin* and Gr. *aiones* used of ages, or of a succession of age-times, and of an abiding from age to age. From this comes the adjective *aionios* ... used as an unrestricted duration, as distinct from a particular or limited age-time. These

age-times must be distinct or they could not be added to, or multiplied, as in the expression *aions of aions*."

For reference, *aions of aions* is the same expression used in the *Concordant Literal New Testament* [CLV] as *eons of the eons*.

The *Appendix to Rotherham's Emphasized Bible* contains a citation on Age and Age-Abiding. It reads in part: "To trace the Biblical development of the Ages is to gain a point from which many far-reaching observations may be made. The first thing to note is, that the idea of an "age" is one of comparatively slow growth. The Biblical parent of the Greek *aion* is the Hebrew *olam*, and the root conception of *olam* is concealed duration. Concealed duration is naturally unknown and unbounded; and it should be carefully remembered that it is from this radical conception of the nouns *olam* and *aion* that the force of the qualifying terms *l'olam* and *aionios* springs. ... Age-abiding: that is, lasting for an indefinite or perpetual age; or abiding from age to age. The reasons for adopting this rendering of the Greek adjective *aionios* are; (i.) to keep up a close connection with the word "age" as the translation, in this New Testament, of the cognate noun *aion*; and (ii.) to avoid, as too restricted the confinement of the idea of any particular, limited age. It is true that *aion* does not of itself mean absolute eternity, otherwise it would not submit to be multiplied by itself, as in the familiar phrase "*aions of aions*," which would then be equivalent to "eternities of eternities" .... But, with all this, it is most important to remember that "age" is not the primary meaning of *aion*: rather, duration indefinitely extended."

Rotherham recognizes the need to remain close to the word *age*; thus, his use of the expression *age-abiding*. However, he seems to straddle the fence, for he intertwines the concept of eternal or perpetual even into the concept of an age. By his way of thinking, concealed duration is naturally unbounded. This is a contradiction of terms, for duration implies limited time or something that ends. Nevertheless, Rotherham is cited because his translation uses the expressions *age-abiding* and *age-during*, which retain the concept of an age regardless of how one defines it.

These definitions raise two important points regarding the phrase *forever and ever* and the Hebrew word *olam*.

### **Forever and Ever**

The Greek language has a singular form, *aiōn*, and a plural form, *aiōns*, which yields Anglicized phrases, such as *the eons of the eons*, *the eon of the eons*, and *the eon of the eon*. The word *eons* can be replaced with the word *aions*. These phrases could refer to two oncoming or impending eons that follow our present eon or, simply, ages beyond our present one, with the number of ages unknown.

In some cases, translators ignore the plural forms in favor of a singular rendering. For example, Romans 16:27 is most often translated as *forever* [NASB] or *forever and ever* [KJV] but never as *forevers*, for this would make no sense. Concordantly speaking, it is rendered as *the eons of the eons* [CLV] or *ages* [WED; YLT]. The same applies to Galatians 1:5, Philippians 4:20, 1 Timothy 1:17, 2 Timothy 4:18, Hebrews 13:21, and 1 Peter 4:11.

Just for the sake of argument, if, in these cases, the Greek does refer to things *forever*, which is defined as "for eternity; endlessly," then why use the phrase *forever and ever*? Would not the phrase *forever* be sufficient to convey the thought of eternal? It is an unneeded redundancy to add the word *ever*.

Again, the concordant method for translating yields other *eon* expressions, such as *the oncoming eons* (Ephesians 2:7), *from the eons* (Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:26), *for the eons* (Luke 1:33; Romans 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 2 Corinthians 11:31; Hebrews 13:8), *the eons* (Ephesians 3:11; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 1:2; 11:3; Jude 25), *the conclusion of the eons* (Hebrews 9:26), and *the consummation of the eons* (1 Corinthians 10:11; see 1 Corinthians 15:24). If one prefers, the word *eon* can be replaced with the word *age*.

These verses alone should bring some clarity to the concept of an *age*, for they reveal that there is more than one age, there are ages to come, and there is a conclusion or a consummation of the ages. All one needs is an understanding of the meaning of the word *age*, and these verses can be better understood contextually.

### **Hebrew *Olam***

Now, for good reason, both Bullinger and Rotherham refer to the Hebrew word *olam* in defining *aion*. According to some scholars, the Hebrews had no single word to express *endlessness* or *eternal*.

Unfortunately, in translating the Hebrew (old testament) into English, most translators use the words *forever* or *everlasting* to translate *olam* in nearly 400 verses. Without doubt, this fact alone should be cause for concern, for it misleads the reader into thinking that scripture has much to say about eternal matters when it is primarily concerned with temporal or time-age-related matters.

Rev. John Wesley Hanson, in his book *Translated Everlasting – Eternal in the Holy Bible, Shown to Denote Limited Duration* (1875), provides a quote from Professor Knapp, supposedly the author of the best edition of the Greek testament: "The pure idea of eternity is too abstract to have been conceived in the early ages of the world, and accordingly is not found expressed by any word in the ancient languages. But as cultivation advanced and this idea became more distinctly developed, it became necessary in order to express it to invent new words in a new sense, as was done with the words *eternitas*, *perennitas*, etc. The Hebrews were destitute of any single word to express endless duration. To express a past eternity they said before the world was; a future, when the world shall be no more.... The Hebrews and other ancient people have no one word for expressing the precise idea of eternity."

As a side note; it is easy to see how concepts get so muddled, at least for one with a mind for logic. In the above, the professor is quoted using the term "past eternity." What does this mean? It seems that he is using a definition that aligns with Webster's definition of "infinite time; time without beginning or end; a long period of time that seems endless." However, the use of the word *past* implies some sort of timeline, for it must be measured against something in order to be past and the measuring line must be a point in time. This means it is more on the line of an

age, even if it is one that man cannot define or calculate and thus remains obscure. Consequently, the only way eternity makes sense in this context is to define *eternity* as an obscure age, which most modern-day people do not do.

To express the concept of time or ages, the Hebrews used the word *olam*, which means "to hide, keep secret, obscure." The *Gesenius' Lexicon* defines *olam* as "what is hidden; specially hidden time, long; the beginning or end of which is either uncertain or else not defined." A footnote in *The Companion Bible* states: "Heb. *olam* = the ages; or the world (in relation to time). Here, put by Fig. Metonymy (of Subject) for that which is inscrutable by man, viz, obscurity as to the past and the future ages, resulting in man's incapacity for finding out, or comprehending the whole of what God doeth."

The website *Bible Pages* makes the following comment in its article, "On the meaning of the old Hebrew word *olam*." See — [www.biblepages.net/gg09.htm](http://www.biblepages.net/gg09.htm).

Linguistics: It is thought that *olam* was related to the verb *alam* which apparently meant something like "to hide from sight". The idiomatic meaning of *olam* perhaps was "of long duration, so that the beginning or end of the matter cannot be seen" (on the relatively short and narrow human point of view). In some cases, "long-lasting" can be a fitting English translation for *olam*. Not "ever-lasting", but simply long-lasting.

In other words, *olam* implies that the length of time in question is unknown or even hidden from man. Thus, it could mean an age, or it could mean a period of time with no end, at least as far as man can see. The context must determine which it is. However, it seems that translators have struggled over how to translate the word *olam*, resulting in the use of the words *eternity*, *everlasting*, or *forever*.

### **Ecclesiastes 3:11**

For example, people often quote the portion of Ecclesiastes 3:11 about eternity in one's heart. Consider how the *New American Standard Bible* [NASB] words this verse: *He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity [olam] in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.* Notice that, although the word *eternity* is used, the subject of the verse is actually time and the beginning to the end. Other translations use the words *knowledge*, *understanding*, *world*, or *obscurity*, the latter lining up the most with the meaning of *olam*. Consider these translations.

He has made everything right in its time; but he has made their hearts without knowledge [*olam*], so that man is unable to see the works of God, from the first to the last. (Ecclesiastes 3:11 BBE)

God makes everything happen at the right time. Yet none of us can ever fully understand [*olam*] all he has done, and he puts questions in our minds about the past and the future. (Ecclesiastes 3:11 CEV)

He hath made everything beautiful in its time; also, he hath set the world [*olam*] in their heart, so that man findeth not out from the beginning to the end the work that God doeth. (Ecclesiastes 3:11 DNT)

The whole He hath made beautiful in its season; also, that knowledge [*olam*] He hath put in their heart without which man findeth not out the work that God hath done from the beginning even unto the end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11 YLT)

*Rotherham's Emphasized Bible* uses the word *intelligence* to read: *Also, intelligence [*olam*] hath he put in their heart without which men could not find out the work which God hath wrought.* Obviously, this gives a different meaning to this verse; note how the subject is placed in the positive, not the negative. Intelligence was given to man so that he could figure out what God was doing, not to keep it hidden from him. This is a rather appealing interpretation; however, it must be left to the reader to discern if it is the proper interpretation based on the generally accepted meaning of the word *olam*. However, it seems that one translation actually gets it right; at least as far as *olam* being defined as "obscurity" is concerned.

He has made everything fitting in its season; however, He has put obscurity [*olam*] in their heart so that the man not find out His work, that which the One, Elohim, does from the beginning to the terminus. (Ecclesiastes 3:11 CLV)

This actually makes more sense in light of the context of the verse, which, by the way, is time or seasons, beginning to end. Simply, Solomon, who had great wisdom and knowledge from God, also knew that some things relative to what God has done and is doing in time from beginning to end are obscure to man. Can anyone truly say that they understand all that God has done since He began to make the ages through His Son?

Given all this, perhaps, *He has also set the ages [*olam*] in their heart* is an appropriate way to translate this, especially in light of the context. Simply, God set the ages in man's heart so that he could not figure out everything that God has done or will do before and beyond the ages, as well as in the ages. This should remind us of something Paul quoted from Isaiah 64:4.

According as it has been written, "Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard," nor has it risen up into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those that love Him. (1 Corinthians 2:9 LITV)

Take special note of Paul's emphasis on the ages leading up to this quote.

But we speak wisdom among the perfect, but not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age [*aiōn*], those being brought to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, having been hidden, which God predetermined before the ages [*aiōn*] for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age [*aiōn*] has known. For if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.... (1 Corinthians 2:6-8 LITV)

What Solomon saw as obscure, Paul saw as a mystery. The difference between the two men is that the mystery of the ages was revealed to Paul.

**Psalm 45:6**

Another example of the meaning of *olam* is discovered in Psalm 45:6: *Your throne, O God, is forever [olam] and ever [va ad]*. Surely, God's throne is forever; but, notice how the psalmist had to add *va ad* to *olam* to indicate something beyond or in addition to a long period of time. In other words, the psalmist had to add *va ad* to *olam* to bring in the concept of forever or, perhaps, additional eons.

Some of the more literal renderings of this verse seem to best capture the meaning of *olam*.

Your throne, O God is to times age-abiding [*olam*] and beyond [*va ad*].... (Psalm 45:6 REB)

Your throne, O Elohim, is for the eon [*olam*] and further [*ad*].... (Psalm 45:6 CLV)

Thy throne, O God, is age-during [*olam*], and for ever [*ad*] .... (Psalm 45:6 YLT)

**Olam = Aiōn**

As noted earlier, the *Septuagint* often sets the meaning of Greek words, at least as far as scripture is concerned. When the Hebrew scholars translated their Hebrew text into Greek text, they had to choose Greek words that best matched the meaning of their Hebrew words. As a result, a Hebrew word generally set the meaning of a Greek word and not the other way around. This is vital to our understanding, for there was a mighty powerful influence in that day from pagan mythology that obviously was expressed through Greek words. Thus, a Greek word steeped in paganism might have meant one thing to a Greek and another thing to a Hebrew who based its meaning on the Hebrew language, not on the pagan Greek.

Again, the website *Bible Pages* in its article, "On the meaning of the old Hebrew word *olam*," states:

In the ancient Greek text of the Septuagint (LXX), the Hebrew *olam* is mostly translated as *aiōn* or (sometimes) *aiōnios*. *Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott shows that the old Greek word *aion* meant "period of existence", such as "life-time", "life", "an age", "generation", "posterity" (*ho mellōn aiōn*), "a long space of time", "of old", "for ages" (*ap' aiōnos*), "a definite space of time", "an era", "epoch", "age", "period", and so on.

Given this understanding, one proof that the Hebrew *olam* is equivalent to the Greek *aiōn* is discovered in the way that Psalm 45:6 is quoted in Hebrews 1:8. Most mainline translations ignore the meaning of the words *olam* and *aion* and use phrases like *forever [aiōn]* and *ever [aiōn]*, but there are some translations that attempt to remain true to the original intent. In the following, note that *olam* of Psalm 45:6 is translated into *aiōn* as quoted in Hebrews 1:8.

Thy throne, O God, is unto times [*aiōn*] age-abiding [*aiōn*]. (Hebrews 1:8 REB)

"Thy throne, O God, is for the age [*aiōn*]...." (Hebrews 1:8 WED)

'Thy throne, O God, is to the age of the age [*aiōn*]....' (Hebrews 1:8 YLT)

Interestingly, in the above, there is no attempt to come up with another word to replace the Hebrew *va ad*; the Greek simply uses *aiōn*. For this reason, some of the more literal translations obviously stick with the concept of time or ages. Some might argue that this cannot be because God's throne is eternal. Perhaps; but this does not exclude the possibility that His throne is eonian or related to the ages as well. After all, He is working out His purpose in and through the ages. Besides, from man's perspective, God's throne is more eonian than eternal. The point is that, given the context, translating *olam* into the word *forever* or *everlasting* is not always accurate, if ever. Consider these examples.

Jonah was in the bowels of the fish for three days, but he cried out that he was there forever.

I went down to the bases of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me *forever* [*olam*]. But You brought up my life from the pit, O Jehovah my God. (Jonah 2:6 LITV)

To the cuttings of mountains I have come down, the earth, her bars are behind me to *the age* [*olam*]. And Thou bringest up from the pit my life, O Jehovah my God. (Jonah 2:6 YLT)

Most translations record that the prophet cried out that the earth with its bars was around him *forever*. How could Jonah be in the belly of the fish for three days and nights, and forever (everlasting) at the same time? The answer becomes apparent when we see that the word *forever* is translated from *olam*. The more literal translations use the words *eon* or *age* [CLV; REB; YLT] rather than the word *forever*. However, it simply means that Jonah had no idea how long his ordeal lasted. It must have seemed as if it would never end, but it did end; proving that *olam* does not necessarily mean "everlasting."

Or, consider the fact that God made an *everlasting covenant* with the sons of Israel as they stood at the foot of Mount Sinai in Arabia. This covenant is called the *old covenant*. What does the book of Hebrews have to say about this covenant?

For finding fault, He said to them, "Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, and I will make an end on the house of Israel and on the house of Judah; a new covenant shall be, not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day of My taking hold of their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I did not regard them, says the Lord. ... In the saying, New, He has made the first old. And the thing being made old and growing aged is near disappearing. (Hebrews 8:8-9, 13 LITV)

Consequently, the old was replaced with the new. How could the first covenant be everlasting or eternal if it was replaced with a second one, which, by the way, is based on better promises?

Or, consider one more example in which Phinehas was given an everlasting priesthood.

And it shall be to him, and to his seed after him, the covenant of *an everlasting* [*olam*] priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and atoned for the sons of Israel. (Numbers 25:13 LITV)

'Therefore say, Lo, I am giving to him My covenant of peace, and it hath been to him and to his seed after him a covenant of a priesthood *age-during* [*olam*], because that he hath been zealous for his God, and doth make atonement for the sons of Israel.' (Numbers 25:12-13 YLT)

His priesthood was not everlasting, for it was replaced by Zadok during the reign of Solomon 300 years later. Simply, when Phinehas was given his priesthood, it was *olam*, meaning for an unknown period of time. He did not know how long it would last, and God did not tell him.

It must be added that the Hebrew word *olam* is also translated into other words such as the word *old*. This alone adds to the points already made that *olam* speaks of finite time.

"Remember the days of old [*olam*], consider the years of all generations. Ask your father, and he will inform you, your elders, and they will tell you." (Deuteronomy 32:7 NASB)

Take note that the word *old* comes from the Hebrew word *olam*. Similar verses are found in Genesis 6:4, Joshua 24:2, 1 Samuel 27:8, Job 22:15, and Isaiah 42:14. Thus, *olam* not only signifies future periods of time such as ages but also past times such as times of old.

Now, before moving on to the concept of *eonian*, there are two essential facts that need to be highlighted about...

### The Ages

First, we might debate when ages begin and end and how long they last, or if they even have an end, but this does not negate the fact that scripture clearly refers to eons or ages of time.

Consider these few verses.

Afterwards He was on the Mount of Olives and was seated there when the disciples came to Him, apart from the others, and said, "Tell us when this will be; and what will be the sign of your Coming and of the Close of the Age [*aiōn*]?" (Matthew 24:3 WNT)

Teaching them to observe all, whatever I did command you,) and lo, I am with you all the days—till the full end of the age [*aiōn*]. (Matthew 28:20 YLT)

As a side note, most take this to mean to the end of our present so-called *church age* that started at Pentecost, but another view sees the end of the age in 70 AD when Jerusalem was totally destroyed and Judaism, the first order or old covenant, was made obsolete or cast aside for Christianity, the second order or new covenant (Hebrews 8:13; 10:9). Consequently, the age of Moses came to a complete end. Let the reader decide.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, so that He might deliver us out of the present evil age [*aiōn*], according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory to the ages [*aiōn*] of the ages [*aiōn*] [eons of the eons]. Amen. (Galatians 1:3-5 LITV [CLV])

When He displayed it in Christ by raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His own right hand in the heavenly realms, high above all other government and authority and power and dominion, and every title of sovereignty used either in this Age [*aiōn*] or in the Age [*aiōn*] to come. (Ephesians 1:20-21 WNT)

Now to Him Who is able to guard you from tripping, and to stand you flawless in sight of His glory, in exultation, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might and authority before *the entire eon* [*aiōn*], now, as well as for *all the eons* [*aiōn*]. Amen! (Jude 24-25 CLV)

And did taste the good saying of God, the powers also of the coming age [*aiōn*].... (Hebrews 6:5 YLT)

Clearly, in these few verses, we are told that the disciples saw themselves in an age, even a wicked age; Jesus was with them until the end of the age; there is an age that is coming; and there are ages upon ages or ages to follow the age to come. Again, we are not given specifics as to the length of time attached to these ages or eons or even the full character of these ages. However, there is one place in scripture in which we are given a specific time and a glimpse of its character; it is found in John's Patmos vision.

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them. And judgment was given to them, and the souls of the ones having been beheaded because of the witness of Jesus, and because of the Word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast nor its image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand. And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one having part in the first resurrection. The second death has no authority over these, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4-6 LITV)

There are differing schools of thought on the 1,000 years; some see it as literal and others as figurative; some see it as yet future and others see it as a now (i.e., present reality). You choose!

For many years, I have held one of these schools of thought, but lately I have put it on hold or, better yet, in neutral, as I continue to seek the Lord for clarity. What I do know is that sometime in the first century an age ended; we are in an age today; there is an age to come; there are ages beyond that until the consummation of the ages.

### **The Son Makes the Ages**

Second, scripture makes it clear that the ages and the Son of God are inseparable. We must never lose sight of God's Son in our understanding of the eons or, for that matter, in our understanding

of all scripture. It is essential that we understand that through His Son, God makes the eons, and that *the eons begin and end in His Son*. It is *in Him* that we see the purpose of the eons.

God, speaking to the fathers in the prophets, in the last of these days speaks to us in a Son, Whom He appoints enjoyer of the allotment of all, through Whom He also *makes the eons* [ages] [aiōn].... (Hebrews 1:1-2 CLV [REB])

Reading most translations, one would miss the connection of the Son to the eons, for most inject their interpretative bias into this verse by rendering it as "through whom He made *the world* [aiōn]." Again, the Greek word is *aiōn* (eon), not *kosmos* (world). Truly, the Son created the world, but He also created time or the age along with the world. We could say that He created the time-space continuum in which we live today. After all, *in Him all things were created* (Colossians 1:16).

He [the Son] brightly reflects God's glory and is the exact representation of His being, and upholds the universe by His all-powerful word (Hebrews 1:3 WNT).

Remove the Son from the universe and there is no universe. It is like removing the sun from our solar system. Remove the sun that shines upon our earth, and human life on earth will cease to exist. Likewise, remove the Son from God's purpose and plan, and there is no purpose and plan of God. All creation is held by the powerful word of the Son of God, who is the word of God. The ages are nothing apart from the Son of God. He is the *origin* and the *consummation* of the ages.

Let this one truth be indelibly engraved on our hearts and in our minds: God established His purpose in His Son before He even brought forth the eons, and His purpose for the eons has been, is being, and will continue to be worked out in His Son until the glorious consummation of the eons when God is truly *All* in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Now, let us consider the adjective *aiōnios*. *Aiōn* is often, but not always, translated as *age*; however, *aiōnios* is most often translated as *forever*, *everlasting*, or *eternal*. Obviously, these are two different meanings. Let's see if this can be resolved.

## Eonian

As noted already, *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines *eon* as "an extremely long, indefinite period of time; thousands of thousands of years," but then defines *eonian* as "lasting forever; eternal." Doesn't this seem contradictory considering the same dictionary defines *eternal* as "without beginning or end; existing through all time; timeless"? How can the noun form be a long period of time and the adjective form be eternal or timeless, when the adjective derives its meaning from the noun? Some would say, and do say, that the adjective cannot properly go beyond the meaning of the noun.

In the *Appendix to the Emphatic Diaglott* [WED], Benjamin Wilson explains the word *age* as follows: "AGE, *aioon*, an indefinite period of time, past, present or future. This is the proper translation of *aioon*, which in the common version is often improperly rendered *world*, *always*, and *forever*. The word occurs about 100 times, in its singular and plural forms. The adjective form of the same word, *aioonios*, is found about 75 times; and is applied to *zoe*, life,

about 45 times; to *fire*, 3 times; to *glory*, 3 times, etc. *Eternal*, or *everlasting*, as generally understood, is an improper translation of *aioonios*; in fact, we have no proper equivalent in the English language. Being an adjective and derived from the noun, *aion*, age, it cannot properly go beyond its meaning."

[*Aioon* is the same as *aion*, and *aioonios* is the same as *aiōnion* or *aiōnios*.]

If we accept that *eonian* must be derived from its root word *eon*, then its meaning must also be related to its root word. If *aiōn*, the noun, speaks of an age or eon, then *aiōnion*, the adjective, should also speak of an age or eon as a qualifier of whatever subject [noun] is attached to it. This is vital because, contrary to logic, many who see *aiōn* as an *age* see *aiōnion* as *everlasting*, *forever*, or *eternal*, meaning endless or, even, outside of time altogether.

As if to make matters worse, even confusing, due to interpretative bias, some versions have translated the Greek word *aiōn* into the word *eternal* and the word *aiōnion* into the word *age*.

### **Eternal Purpose**

As an example, many mainline translations use the phrase *eternal purpose* in Paul's circular letter titled *Ephesians*, not based on the adjective *anionos* but on the noun *aiōn*. Strictly speaking, this should be translated *age purpose* or *eon purpose*, but this would not read very well.

This was in accordance with the *eternal* [*aiōn*] purpose [*prosthesis*] which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.... (Ephesians 3:11 NASB [similar wording in KJV; LITV])

This type of translating not only adds to the potential for confusion and makes it more difficult to explain the subject at hand; but, more significantly, it also leads to error and, frankly, bad doctrine. Based on this translation, one is led to believe that God has an eternal or endless or timeless purpose, but the fact of the matter is the Greek word translated *eternal* is the noun *aiōn* in its plural form, meaning *eons* or *ages*. Thus, the more accurate rendering of this phrase is *the purpose of the ages*, which brings God's purpose into time, not outside of it. Or, we could say that God's purpose is explained in or through the ages, as well as worked out in the ages. This makes more sense and is supported by several translations compiled together.

In accord with [according to] the purpose of the eons [ages] [*aiōn*], which He makes [made, purposed] in Christ [Anointed; Messiah] Jesus, our Lord.... (Ephesians 3:11 CLV; DNT; HCSB; REB; WED; YLT)

A paraphrased translation captures the same thought by relating the eons or ages to history.

This was God's plan for all of history which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ephesians 3:11 GW)

Another example is discovered in Paul's first epistle to his child of faith, Timothy. Two of the most popular translations, the *New American Standard Bible* [NASB] and the *King James Version* [KJV], both reveal their interpretative bias in the way they translate the Greek words *aiōnios* and *aiōn*,

using the English words *eternal* or *everlasting* and *forever and ever*. One thing for sure, at least they are consistent in their bias. Life, the King, and His honor and glory are presented as eternal.

Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal [*aiōnios*] life. Now to the King eternal [*aiōn*], immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever [*aiōn*] and ever [*aiōn*]. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:16-17 NASB)

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting [*aiōnios*]. Now unto the King eternal [*aiōn*], immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever [*aiōn*] and ever [*aiōn*]. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:16-17 KJV)

Other translations, such as the *Darby New Testament* [DNT] and the *English Standard Version* [ESV], mix it up a bit by referring to eternal life but then declaring that the King is of the ages and His honor and glory are either related to the ages or forever (i.e. eternal). Clearly, based on the Greek, these translators knew that the King is of the ages. However, if so, why make life eternal; why not of the ages as well? It is like mixing apples with oranges. Doesn't it make more sense that the life of which Paul speaks is related to the same ages of the King, and His honor and glory are also in those ages?

...for a delineation of those about to believe on him to life eternal. Now to the King of the ages, the incorruptible, invisible, only God, honour and glory to the ages of ages. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:16-17 DNT)

...might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:16-17 ESV)

By the way, these are not the only translations that do this. Search it out!

Fortunately, there are a few translations, such as *Young's Literal Translation* [YLT], *Weymouth's New Testament* [WNT], *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott* [WED], *Concordant Literal New Testament* [CLV], and *Mitchell's The New Testament, Expanded, Amplified, and Multiple Renderings* [JM-NT], that try to remain true to the Greek and consistently stick with the concept of ages, just as the Greek words do. Take note how there is no mixture of eternal and age; everything is presented in light of the ages, including the fact that God is the King of the ages and His honor and glory are in these ages.

... for a pattern of those about to believe on him to life age-during: and to the King of the ages, the incorruptible, invisible, only wise God, is honour and glory—to the ages of the ages! Amen. (1 Timothy 1:16-17 YLT)

... as an example to encourage those who would afterwards be resting their faith on Him with a view to the Life of the Ages. Now to the immortal and invisible King of the Ages, who alone is God, be honour and glory to the Ages of the Ages! Amen. (1 Timothy 1:16-17 WNT)

... for an example of those being about to believe on him in order to aionian [eonian] Life. Now to the King of the Ages [eons], the Incorruptible, the Invisible, the Only God, be Honor and Glory for the Ages [eons] of the Ages [eons]. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:16-17 WED [CLV])

By adding definitions and alternate wordings of the same text, *Mitchell's The New Testament* [JM-NT] best captures Paul's thought. There should be little doubt that the life of which Paul speaks is related to the ages.

Into the midst of eonian life (into Life which pertains to and has the qualities and characteristics of the Age [of Messiah]; into life of, and which lasts through, the ages.) (17) So, to [the] King of the Ages (or: eons, indefinite time periods), to [the] incorruptible (undecayable; unspoilable), invisible (unseen; not-able to be seen) One, to [the] only God [some MSS add: wise; so: only wisest God], [be] honor (value; worth) and glory (reputation which calls forth praise), on into the ages (or: indefinite time periods) of the ages It is so (Amen)! (or: Now in and by the king to Whom belongs the ages – in and by the imperishable, invisible [and] only One – in and by God [is] honor and glory, [leading] into the [most important] eon of the eons. So be it!) (1 Timothy 1:16-17 JM-NT)

Perhaps, it might seem that I am making too much of this verse, but I must add another translation. Recently, I discovered a new translation (2011) by N.T. Wright, *The Kingdom New Testament*, which I find quite refreshing—highly recommended. Per Wright, this is not a paraphrase of scripture; it is actually a translation of the Greek put into English for us today. At any rate, here is his translation of the Timothy passage.

But this was why I received mercy: so that in me, precisely as the worst, King Jesus could demonstrate the full scale of his patience, and make me a pattern for those who were going to believe in him so to attain *the life of the age to come*. To *the king of the ages*, the one and only God, immortal and invisible, be honor and glory to *the ages of ages*. Amen! (1 Timothy 1:16-17 Kingdom NT [italics added]).

Wright does not consistently stick with the concept of age, as he sometimes uses the word *eternal* for aionian but, by my reckoning, he gets it right in this verse. Notice how he defines the age as the one to come.

Now, there is another example of the confusion that comes from poor translations of the Greek. This one is not as flagrant as the one just discussed; nevertheless, it is worth mentioning. It deals with the expression...

### **Eternal Times** (best translated as *Before Times Eonian*)

For the following verse, some versions translate the word *aiōnios* as *eternal*. The Greek word *chronos*, which refers to the space of time, is translated as *time*.

In hope of eternal life [*aiōnios zoe*], which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal [*chronos aiōnios*]. (Titus 1:2 ASV)

On hope of eternal life which the God who does not lie promised before the eternal times....  
(Titus 1:2 LITV)

What does the expression *eternal times* mean? It is mixing two concepts that do not go together. Does it mean that there are two periods of time; one that deals with mankind and one that existed before man? As such, one would have to conclude that there is no such thing as eternal (endless) or outside of time and everything is based on the concept of time or *chronos*. Even so, if there was a time period before mankind, then this period of time ended at the start of the time of mankind; thus, it cannot rightly be called *eternal* without defining *eternal* in relation to the ages.

Other translations seem to recognize the absurdity of *eternal times* so they incorporate the concept of time. They only get it half right, for *aiōnios zoe* is still translated as *eternal life* even as they acknowledge that *chronos aiōnios* is before time or before the ages.

In hope of eternal life [*aiōnios zoe*] which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began [*chronos aiōnios*].... (Titus 1:2 NKJV)

In the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the ages of time....  
(Titus 1:2 DNT)

A point of interest; the *New American Standard Bible* [NASB] is based on a different Greek manuscript than the one used by the *King James Version* [KJV] and the word *aiōnios* is not used in this particular manuscript; only the word *chronos* is used. Regardless, take note that the NASB incorporates the concept of *ages* while retaining the concept of *eternal life*.

In the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago.... (Titus 1:2 NASB)

The *1833 Webster Bible* [WEB] resolves the apparent conflict by ignoring time altogether.

In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began....  
(Titus 1:2 WEB)

However, all conflict is resolved by a few translations that have endeavored to remove interpretative bias, at least on this occasion.

Upon hope of life age-during, which God, who doth not lie, did promise before times of ages.... (Titus 1:2 YLT)

In hope of the Life of the Ages which God, who is never false to His word, promised before the commencement of the Ages. (Titus 1:2 WNT)

In expectation of life eonian [life age-abiding], which God, Who does not lie, promises before times eonian [age-during times].... (Titus 1:1-2 CLV [REB])

In Hope of aionian Life, which God, who is never false, announced before aionian Times....  
(Titus 1:2 WED)

N.T. Wright gets it right (sounds like a pun) in this verse as well.

... in hope of the life of the coming age. God, who never lies, promised this before the ages began. (Titus 1:2 Kingdom NT)

Clear as crystal! (Going forward, quotes from N.T. Wright are included along with others and referred to as *Kingdom NT*.)

Now, we are dealing with only apples, so to speak, and we are not left with any conflict, for the entire sentence deals with time or the ages. Again, we might not know the length or character of the ages in question; but, at least, we know that we are dealing with one concept. Life has to do with the ages and this life was promised by God before He made the ages or eons through His Son. It is called *eonian (aionian) life*.

Clearly, God's purpose and promises in Christ were set before times eonian, meaning God set these things in motion before time itself, even before creation. Another way of stating this is that they were set before the eons or ages were made by the Son. In fact, the eons were/are made (past, present, and future) to accomplish God's purpose through Christ. Paul makes this point elsewhere.

Who saves us and calls us with a holy calling, not in accord with our acts, but in accord with His own purpose and the grace which is given to us in Christ Jesus before times eonian [aionian times].... (2 Timothy 1:9 CLV [WED])

Yet wisdom are we speaking among the mature, yet a wisdom not of this eon [age], neither of the chief men of this eon [age], who are being discarded, but we are speaking God's wisdom in a secret [mystery], wisdom which has been concealed, which God designates before—before the eons [ages] for our glory, which not one of the chief men of *this* eon [age] knows, for if they know, they would not crucify the Lord of glory. (1 Corinthians 2:6-8 CLV [WED])

God had a secret or mystery hidden in His heart that was set before the ages came into being, to be revealed some time during the ages. God was pleased to reveal this mystery to Paul. Unfortunately, this mystery is still hidden in some measure to believers due to poor translations and teaching based on translations that support a systematic theology centered on the eternal.

Now, this leads to the question of God and His gospel. Are God and His gospel eonian or eternal?

### **Eonian God & Eonian Gospel**

Many translations could be cited to make the point; but it should be well-established by now that there are "eternal" translations and there are "eonian" translations, so there is no need to reference all of them. Some translations use the word *everlasting* instead of *eternal*. The more

literal translations use the terms *aionian God*, *eonian God*, *age-abiding God*, and *age-during God*, which more accurately translate the Greek *aiōnios*.

But now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal [*aiōnios*] God.... (Romans 16:26 NASB)

But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God.... (Romans 16:26 KJV)

But has now been brought fully to light, and by the command of the God of the Ages.... (Romans 16:26 WNT)

And now having been made manifest, also, through prophetic writings, according to a command of the age-during God [*Aionian God*] .... (Romans 16:26 YLT [WED])

Obviously, the most common argument against these phrases linking God to the ages is they imply that God is not eternal or outside of time, as if it is an insult to God to place Him in the ages. How absurd! A book came out years ago in which the writer was adamant in trying to prove that God is so outside of time that He has absolutely nothing to do with time. How could the Creator of all things divorce Himself from His creation that is in time that He created? This really is not worth debating. We need to stop trying to defend God and simply let scripture stand.

The same thing is discovered in reference to an *eonian gospel*.

And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an *eternal* [*aiōnios*] [*times eonian/age-abiding/aionian*] gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people.... (Revelation 14:6 NASB [WED; CLV; REB])

Is the gospel truly eternal, as most are taught? Perhaps it is not, for at the consummation of the ages, all will be made new and God will be All in all. It seems that once all is made new, the good news changes as well. It is proposed that the eonian gospel announced by the angel is the good news of either the age or the ages *to come* when the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness (Isaiah 26:9) and all things are made new.

And I saw another angel flying across the sky, carrying the Good News of the Ages to tell to every nation, tribe, language and people, among those who live on the earth. (Revelation 14:6 WNT)

At this point, some might still be wondering why all the fuss about the word *eternal*. After all, as the common thinking goes, eternal life and, we must add, eternal torture are foundational tenets of the Christian faith. Isn't this what the church has believed since the early, embryonic days? So, why challenge church doctrine that is so commonly accepted? Because of the...

### **Tradition of Men and Systematizing of the Deception**

Both Jesus and Paul warned against the tradition of men.

"Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." (Mark 7:8 NASB)

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8 NASB)

Jesus identified these traditions as the leavened teaching (doctrine) of the Jewish elite leaders of His day (Matthew 16:11-12) that would keep others from entering the kingdom. Paul offered a similar warning about leavened doctrine that would become a systematic teaching and lead people astray. He saw this coming through deceitful or scheming men.

According to Paul, the body of Christ is to mature until...

We attain to the unity of the faith and of the realization of the son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the complement of the Christ, that we may by no means still be minors, surging hither and thither and being carried about by every wind of teaching, by human caprice, by craftiness with a view to the systematizing of the deception. (Ephesians 4:13-14 CLV)

To the end that no longer (or: no more) would or should we exist being infants (immature folks; not-yet-speaking ones), continuously being tossed by (= being caused to fluctuate from) [successive] waves and repeatedly being carried hither and thither (or: around in circles) by every wind of the teaching (or: from what is taught) within the caprice (the throw of the dice; versatile artifice; games of chance; the trickery) of mankind, in readiness to do anything (amoral craftiness; working everything; or: = while stopping at nothing) with a view toward and leading to the methodical treatment (or: the systematizing or technical procedure) of the Wandering (the straying; the deception). (Ephesians 4:14 JM-NT)

Other translations use phrases like *systematized error* [DNT], *clever strategies that would lead us astray* [ISV], and *plot to seduce in their subtlety* [JM-NT]. Paul's warning is more than simply a warning to be on guard against a false idea floating around among truth. A systematized error or deception is more like a system of thought that comes out of error, especially based on a spirit to deceive. Once planted, this deceptive seed becomes a system of thought that permeates how one views other things. Unfortunately, what starts out as deceit can be picked up by well-meaning people and, as time passes, become accepted as truth, long after the perpetrators have passed off the scene. However, when such deception becomes incorporated into mainline preaching, it becomes not only a tradition of men but also the basis for the development of what is called *systematic theology*.

Let us be clear; *systematizing* is not merely accepting something false; it is building an entire framework based on a deception, so that other things (teachings, doctrines, truths) are seen or explained based on this deception. The systematizing of the deception is not only taking what is false but taking it and packaging it into a systematic framework and then passing it off as the truth. Many of God's people have been hooked into various frameworks of deception.

We need to be reminded that Paul warned that *the time would come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths* (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Surely, this happened early on in church history, but are we so naïve to think that this cannot happen or has not already happened in our day?

Is the concept of eternal, at best, a tradition of men or, at worst, a systematizing of the deception, or something in between?

As stated at the beginning, for those with a Berean temperament, on this subject alone, there are many commentaries for one to search out. Obviously, there are many ways or angles by which one could approach this question. However, there is one angle that seems to be quite important in establishing the source for the traditional and systematic use of the word *eternal*.

### Augustine

It is important to understand that the early church was split by language, the Greek-speaking in the east (Constantinople) and the Latin-speaking in the west (Rome). The Greeks understood that *kolasin aionian* referred to *eonian* or *age-during judgment*; thus, they did not hold to endless punishment. [*Kolasin* is explained in the next section on *Eonian Chastisement*.] However, this was not universally understood, especially in the western Latin church where the concept of eternal or endless judgment took hold. We could say that the controversy centered on the meaning of the word *aiōnion*.

In the early fifth century, Jerome translated Greek scripture into what is known as the *Latin Vulgate*. There were two Latin words that he could have used for the Greek word *aiōnion* – *aeternum* and *speculum*, from which come our English words *eternal* and *secular* (or, worldly), respectively. However, *aeternum* also has a double meaning, either *unending time* or an *age* or *eon*, as in a limited period of time. In a sense, both meanings incorporate the concept of time. Jerome chose *aeternum* and herein is the challenge, for this left its meaning open to interpretative bias.

Unfortunately, Augustine, a contemporary of Jerome, was virtually ignorant of Greek, as noted in the book *Augustine of Hippo* (page 36) by historian Peter Brown.

"Augustine's failure to learn Greek was a momentous casualty of the late Roman educational system; he will become the only Latin philosopher in antiquity to be virtually ignorant of Greek."

Consequently, when Augustine read the *Vulgate*, he took the word *aeternum* to mean "eternal" or "endless," rather than an "age" or "a period of indefinite time." However, Augustine knew the argument of eternal verses eonian judgment as evidenced by what he wrote in *City of God, Book XX1*:

"For Christ said in the very same place, including both in one and the same sentence: 'So these will go into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.' If both are

eternal, then surely both must be understood as 'long,' but having an end, or else as 'everlasting' without an end. For they are matched with each other. In one clause eternal punishment, in the other eternal life. (To say) 'eternal life shall be without end, (but) eternal punishment will have an end' is utterly absurd. Hence, since eternal life of the saints will be without end, eternal punishment also will surely have no end, for those whose lot it is."

Based on common logic, his argument is sound. If life is eternal, then judgment must be so also. If life is eonian then judgment must be so also. However, this does not change the fact that the argument rests entirely on the Greek meaning of *aiōnion*, not on the Latin meaning. In other words, the Latin interpretation of the Greek word does not necessarily make it the correct meaning, especially if it is contrary to the Greek.

In fact, the early fathers of the Greek-speaking church believed that judgment was aionian not endless. Many believed that God is going to save all mankind through judgment—as so do I! Interestingly, both Augustine and Jerome knew this. Augustine wrote that "very many who, though not denying the Holy Spirit, do not believe in endless torments." Jerome wrote: "I know that most persons understand by the story of Nineveh and its king, the ultimate forgiveness of the adversary and all rational creatures" (From Dr. Stephen Jones, *God's Kingdom Ministries, The Argument of Augustine*).

Stop for a moment and meditate over what Jerome said. He said many understood that, ultimately, even the adversary is going to be forgiven. Whether he meant the adversary is the devil or carnal, rebellious man is unclear. But, for God to be All in all, it only makes sense that even the adversary would be forgiven and restored by the consummation of the ages. However, the significance of their words is discovered in the use of the words *many* and *most*, meaning that the concept of aionian or age-during was the primary understanding of the Greek-speaking church. This should go a long way to defuse those of our day who argue against aionian life and aionian judgment; as if it is a new heretical teaching conjured up by new age, liberal theologians.

Unfortunately, the common thinking of the Greeks and Augustine's lack of understanding of the Greek concept of ages did not stop him from his erroneous interpretation. Consequently, due to Augustine's great influence in the Latin church, the word *eternal* or *endless* came to be the equivalent of the word *aionian* or *eonian*. It appears that he was later shown the error of his interpretation, but due to his influence, the concept of unending, eternal, or everlasting took root in the mind of many and has continued mostly unabated to our day.

Dr. F. W. Farrar, in his book *Mercy and Judgment* (London, MacMillan and Co. 1904 [1<sup>st</sup> edition 1881], page 178), states: "Since *aion* means 'age,' *anionos* means, properly, 'belonging to an age,' or 'age-long,' and anyone who asserts that it must mean 'endless' defends a position which even Augustine practically abandoned twelve centuries ago."

Simply, his error was in not seeing that *aiōn* means an "age" or an "eon." Consequently, *aiōnion* also serves as a qualifier of an age or eon; that is, it pertains to an age or eon. This one error has had profound influence on Christian doctrine down through the centuries to our present day.

It appears that *aiōn* and *aiōnion* have fallen victim to "the systematizing of the deception." This does not mean that Jerome or Augustine were dishonest or deceptive men; quite the contrary. However, it does mean they introduced something that became part of the systematic theology of the church and also became a tradition of men passed down from one generation to the next and was incorporated as interpretative bias in many modern-day translations. One such tradition is the eternal (forever, unending) punishment of the lost. Down through the centuries, the concept of eternal (eternity) or everlasting or forever has been so systematically cemented into Christian doctrine or thinking that it has obscured what scripture has to say about the ages, especially in light of God's purpose of the ages to become all in all new.

This should raise a very important question: Is there a Greek word for *eternal* and, if so, is it used in scripture? Yes!

### **Aidios [Perpetual]**

Earlier, reference was made to the Greek word *aidios*, which means "eternal" or "perpetual," and is used in only two verses.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal [*aidios*] power and divine nature, have been clearly seen.... (Romans 1:20 NASB)

Since God is eternal, it is safe to state that His power is also eternal. This is the one verse in scripture that plainly connects God to that which is eternal or perpetual or everlasting. However, it could be argued, as has already been done, that God also has eonian power or power in the ages. Nevertheless, in the Greek, this refers to God's eternal nature.

Consider two translations of the second use of the word.

Messengers also, those who did not keep their own principality, but did leave their proper dwelling, to a judgment of a great day, in bonds everlasting [*aidios*], under darkness He hath kept, as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them, in like manner to these, having given themselves to whoredom, and gone after other flesh, have been set before—an example, of fire age-during [*aiōnios*], justice suffering. (Jude 1:6-7 YLT)

And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal [*aidios*] bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal [*aiōnios*] fire. (Jude 1:6-7 NASB)

In these two verses from Jude, we discover there are eternal or *aidios* bonds and an *aiōnios* [eonian/age-during] punishment of fire. So, here we have the two concepts of eternal and age-during or eonian presented back-to-back. How are these verses to be interpreted?

To answer this question, again, consider the commentary of Rev. John Wesley Hanson from his previously cited work:

1. The construction of the language shows that the latter word limits the former. The *aidios* chains are even as the *aiōnion* fire. As if one should say "I have infinitely troubled, I have been vexed for an hour," or "He is an endless talker, he can talk for five hours on a stretch." Now while "infinitely" and "endless" convey the same sense of unlimited, they are both limited by what follows, as *aidios*, eternal, is limited by *aiōnios*, indefinitely long.

2. That this is the correct exegesis is evident from still another limitation of the word. "The angels .... He hath reserved in everlasting chains UNTO judgment of the great day." Had Jude said that the angels are held in *aidios* chains, and stopped there, not limiting the word, we should not dare deny that he taught their eternal imprisonment. But when he limits the duration by *aiōnion* and then expressly states that it is only unto a certain date, we understand that the imprisonment will terminate, even though we find applied to it a word that intrinsically signifies eternal duration, and that was used by the Greeks to convey the idea of eternity, and was attached to punishment by the Greek Jews of our Savior's times, to describe endless punishment, in which they were believers.

Although some of the Jews during Jesus' earthly walk believed in the pagan concept of eternal or unending punishment (i.e., torture), it is highly significant that Jesus and His disciples never used the word *aidios* in referring to punishment or life, for that matter. *Aidios* is never used with *zoë* or life. It is never *aidios zoe*; it is always *aiōnion zoe*. As for punishment, Jesus spoke of *eonian* (*aiōnion*) chastening or correction, not eternal punishment.

This leads to the concept of...

### **Eonian Chastisement**

Down through the centuries, it has been debated whether God's judgment or, as many prefer, God's punishment of the unbeliever is eternal or for an age or ages. Is it unending, or is it limited in duration? It is a safe assumption that, for the most part, eternal punishment has won out and become a tradition among most Christians. This tradition of men declares, almost with a sense of pride, that billions upon billions of people, created to be in the image of God, are going to be (or, already are) in a place of literal fire and worms called *hell*, where they are tortured without end, that is, forever and ever and ever [emphasis added to make the point].

More on this can be found in the following article.

See — *Judgment of All* — <http://www.kingdomandglory.com/art/art58.pdf>

Let us consider one verse on the matter. A typical translation reads as follows.

"Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal [*aiōnios*] fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.... 'These will go away into eternal [*aiōnios*] punishment, but the righteous into eternal [*aiōnios*] life.'" (Matthew 25:41, 46 NASB)

Now, let us consider a compilation of the more literal translations.

Then shall he say also to those on the left hand, Go ye from me, the cursed, to the fire, the age-during [*aiōnios*] [age-abiding, fire eonian; Fire of the Ages; aionian fire], that hath been prepared for the Devil and his messengers; ... 'And these shall go away to punishment age-during [*aiōnios*] [age-abiding correction; eonian chastening], but the righteous to life age-during [*aiōnios*] [*Life of the Ages*; aionian Life]' (Matthew 25:41, 46 YLT [REB; CLV; WNT; WED])

Given all that has been presented about the word *eonian* [*aiōnion*], it should be apparent that the judgment of God is eonian or age-during, meaning it is limited in duration, not eternal or endless. Although the lake of fire and judgment is not the subject of this writing, this is a vital key to understanding both the lake of fire and God's judgment emanating out of His fiery lake.

### **Kolasis—Chastisement**

The Greek word translated *punishment* or *chastisement* is *kolasis*, which comes from a root verb meaning "to curtail; thus, to prune; figuratively, to chastise, restrain." The *Concordant Literal New Testament* [CLV] best captures the meaning with *chastening eonian*. In other words, the punishment is actually a chastening or a correcting of behavior rather than a penal punishment in which there is no concern for the outcome to the individual, other than continual punishment. The chastening has an end in view, and that is restoration and restitution, not, as some say, "Throw one in jail (i.e., a torture chamber called *hell*), lock it up, and throw away the key forever."

**It is eonian because only God knows how long it will last, for the punishment must fit the crime, so to speak.**

But be assured, it will come to an end when the demand of God's law is fulfilled or, as Dr. Stephen Jones calls it, at *Creation's Grand Jubilee* when all debt is cancelled. God will set all things right! Simply, there is a limit to the chastening; it is not eternal. God is love, and His love will not fail to reach the heart of all mankind to restore and redeem all back to Him. Besides, God's judgment has purpose, *for when the earth experiences Your judgments the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness* (Isaiah 26:9). It is to teach, not to destroy.

The final judgment of mankind is designed to restore harmony, to reconcile the entire creation to God, and to bring all things back to God's lawful order. To this end, all judgment is designed to correct and to deal with all unsettled injustices. God's judgments are remedial and aimed at correcting and turning all of His children (all humanity) back to Himself. Even His wrath is designed to remove the dross from sinners, restoring and refining them by fire, which is His fiery law (word, commands). God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29); saved, yet so as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:15).

To quote Dr. Stephen Jones (God's Kingdom Ministries): "The judgments of God come from His nature. God is love. His love does not prevent Him from judgment, but the wisdom of God knows how to judge in such a way that He loses nothing. God is able to save to the uttermost. He has

the Power to do so, He has the motive of Love, and He has the wisdom to know HOW to do it while being true to Himself and His character." Amen.

Thus, eonian chastisement is God's plan; eternal torment and torture are not!

This leads to the heart of the matter, and that is *eonian life*, which is generally translated as *eternal life* in all but a handful of translations.

### **Eonian Life**

Without doubt, many would quote Jesus as their proof that the promise to believers who exercised their so-called *free will* is eternal life. After all, this is what all the mainline translations tell us.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal [*aiōnios*] life. (John 3:16 NASB)

Once again, the literal translations use the expression *eonian* or *aionian life*, based on the word *aiōnios*. A compilation of these translations reads as follows.

For God did so love the world, that His Son—the only begotten—He gave, that everyone who is believing in him may not perish, but may have life age-during [*aiōnios*] [life eonian; life age-abiding; aionian Life]. (John 3:16 YLT [CLV; REB; WED])

This, you see, is how much God loved the world: enough to give his only, special son, so that everyone who believes in him should share in the life of God's age. (John 3:16 Kingdom NT)

Believing in Jesus brings us into a life in God's age. You could read this to mean that, when we believe, we enter a new age. There seems to be a lot of truth in this, but I must leave it for another writing, Lord willing.

Another traditional rendering is found in Mark. Note how the *King James Version* chose to translate *aiōn* as *world*. Unfortunately, the use of the word *eternal* or *everlasting* masks the true nature of what is called the age to come.

But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. (Mark 10:30 KJV)

But that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. (Mark 10:30 NASB)

Now, consider the more literal rendering.

And Jesus answering said, 'Verily I say to you, there is no one who left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or fields, for my sake, and for the good news', who may not receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and fields, with persecutions, and in the age that is coming, life age-during [*aiōnios*] [aionian Life]....' (Mark 10:29-30 YLT [WED])

Better yet, consider the *Kingdom NT*.

"I'll tell you the truth," replied Jesus. "No one who has left a house, or brothers or sisters, or mother or father, or children, or lands because of me and the gospel will fail to receive back a hundred times more in the present age: ... —and finally the life of the age to come. (Mark 10:29-30 Kingdom NT).

Taking these verses at face value and not reading the concept of eternity into Jesus' words, it becomes apparent that He promised His disciples life in the age to come, and He called this life *aionian* life, not eternal or *aidios* life. By contrast, the perishing of John 3:16 signifies not having this life in an age. Clearly, Jesus made no mention of life outside of time. He promised His disciples life in the age or eon that was coming.

Consider Luke's companion verse to Mark 10:30. Notice that the CLV has chosen to use the expression *life eonian*, which is the same as *eonian life*. For comparison, the traditional rendering from the NASB has been bracketed.

Who may not by all means be getting back many fold in this era, and in the coming eon, life eonian [*aiōnios*] [aionian Life]; {eternal life}. (Luke 18:30 CLV [WED]; {NASB})

Again, consider the *Kingdom NT*.

"... will receive far more in return in the present time—and in the age to come they will receive life that belongs to that age." (Luke 18:30 Kingdom NT)

Notice how clear and concise this is rendered.

All of these verses deal with ages and not endlessness, and it is not about dying and going to heaven and entering eternity. Jesus never made this promise. The main take-away from all of this is that eonian life is dependent on the ages, for it speaks of life in time.

It is amazing how easy it is to miss simple truths. Unfortunately, the concept of *eternal* has become so ingrained in Christian thinking that it is like hardened cement that will not break. But Jesus clearly defines for us the true meaning of eonian life, not eternal life. Once again, multiple translations are presented in order to make the point.

### **Eonian Life is a Progressive, Knowing, Relational Life**

When Jesus had thus spoken, He raised his eyes towards Heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Thy Son that the Son may glorify Thee; even as Thou hast given Him

authority over all mankind, so that on all whom Thou hast given Him He may bestow the Life of the Ages [*aiōnios*]. And in this consists the Life of the Ages [*aiōnios*—in knowing Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. (John 17:1-3 WNT)

Jesus spoke these things; and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee, as Thou didst give Him authority over all flesh, so that everything which thou hast given to him, he may give to them, even aionian [*aiōnios*] Life. And this is the aionian [*aiōnios*] Life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, Jesus Christ. (John 17:1-3 WED)

"Correspondingly as You give (or: gave) to Him right, privilege and authority pertaining to, and over, all flesh, to the end that everything (or: all folks, male or female) which You have given to Him, to them He will give eonian life (life having its origin in, and the characteristics and qualities of the Age [of Messiah]; or age-enduring life; life of and for the ages). "Now THIS is (or: exists being) eonian life (living existence of and for the ages; life pertaining to the Age [of Messiah]: namely, that they may progressively come to intimately and experientially know You, the only true and real (genuine God)—and Jesus Christ, Whom You send forth as an Emissary (or: as well as Jesus [as the] Anointed One, who You sent off as a Representative)." (John 17:2-3 JM-NT)

Do this in the same way as you did when you gave him authority over all flesh, so that he could give the life of God's coming age to everyone you gave him. And by 'the life of God's coming age' I mean this: that they should know you, the only true God, and Jesus the Messiah, the one you sent." (John 17:2-3 Kingdom NT)

Carefully consider how Jesus defines this life! He challenges every concept held by the tradition of men. Eonian life is not about an endless life (in eternity or in heaven, for that matter); rather, it is all about relationship, knowing God the Father and knowing His Son whom He sent to earth to reveal the Father. This is how Jesus defines eonian life. Nowhere are we told that eonian life is about dying and going to heaven for eternity or even immortality, for that matter. It is all relational: to KNOW GOD AND HIS SON. This knowing is not only for our present age but also (and, especially) for the ages to come. As Mitchell's [JM-NT] translation states, it is a progressive knowing, a knowing that grows. This is truly the good news of the eonian life.

Again, it is a relational life, a life of knowing God and His Son, throughout the ages. Will this life progress into eternity, if there is even such a thing? Of course, it will; but this is not the heart of the life that Jesus has given us. Whether we are in time, the ages, or in some other dimensional state that we have no understanding of today, it matters not. What matters is that we have a life that will progressively come to know GOD!! This is eonian life! This is life in God's age, both now and future!

Just think about it. Generally, eternal life is preached as if it is a thing unto itself. Living forever is presented as if it is the good news. But, living forever doing what? Drinking heavenly mint juleps, strolling down the golden streets, dusting furniture in huge heavenly mansions, meeting long-ago relatives; is this what it is all about? No! It is about knowing God and being one with Him in heart, to be in love with *God is love*. We have been given a foretaste of this in our present age,

but it will get even better in the next age and the ages to follow. It is progressive. It will continually grow. This is eonian life!

### **Immortal Life [Immortality]**

How do immortality and eonian life relate to each other? To sum up the answer—**eonian life is life in this age and the ages to come, and immortality is life beyond death, regardless of the age.**

Immortal life is not dependent on the eons, or time and space. However, one who is immortal truly has eonian life, but eonian life does not automatically mean that one has immortality. Most of us who believe in this age might agree that we have eonian life, since we are progressively coming to know God and His Son (at least, we should be). But we presently are not immortal, for we all must face a physical death until the Lord comes and we are given immortality through resurrection and transformation (transfiguration). The state of physical death has not been removed from mankind, even though Jesus has overcome death. A day is coming when death will be abolished (1 Corinthians 15:26).

Actually, Paul links immortality or incorruptibility with eonian life, as if the two are one and the same. In a sense they are, for when we are immortal, we also have eonian life. The question is whether we can have eonian life without immortal life. It would appear that, based on Jesus' definition of eonian life, the answer is yes. If the answer were no, we would have to conclude that we also cannot know God and His Son until we are immortal, meaning no believer in our day truly knows God and His Son. Of course, the other conclusion is that all believers are immortal today, which is a false conclusion since we all continue to die.

To those, indeed, who in continuance of a good work, do seek glory, and honour, and incorruptibility [immortality]—life age-during [aionian life; eonian life; life age-abiding; life in the age to come; eternal life].... (Romans 2:7 YLT [WED; CLV; REB; Kingdom NT; NASB])

Since Paul leads off with incorruption or immortality as something to seek and since Jesus has defined *eonian life*, could we not conclude that immortality is when we will know the Father and the Son in a way that we have never known them before, even in fullness?

The Greek word *aphtharsia* is translated as *immortal*, which means "deathlessness" or "beyond death." Paul uses this word in 1 Corinthians 15:53-54 and 1 Timothy 6:16. Immortality is life beyond death, never again to be subjected to the possibility of death. This is the hope and expectation of all believers.

In this age, immortal life is the promise for all believers. No one possesses it today. The issue is timing, that is, when one enters into immortal life in the true and full sense. The greatest expectation of a believer is to attain immortality at the end of our present eon, for this ensures the life of the ages or eonian life for all the ages that lead up to the consummation of the ages at *creation's grand jubilee* and beyond.

Contrary to the tradition of men, immortality does not come about when one dies, that is, through death of the mortal body. Immortality is about the body; not the spirit. It comes about with the redemption of the body that occurs with resurrection and transformation; a future event for which Christians should be waiting eagerly (Romans 8:23). Death does not redeem our body, only resurrection does. No one has immortality at this point in time, for the King alone possesses immortality [*athanasia*] (1 Timothy 6:16). "*No one [man] has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man*" (John 3:13). Thus, no one of mankind has immortality today and no one except the Son who is in heaven today, at least as far as these verses tell us.

The redemption of the body comes with the placing or adoption as sons (Romans 8:23) when this mortal puts on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53). It is when we put on our dwelling from heaven so that what is mortal is swallowed up by life (2 Corinthians 5:1-5). It is when we are glorified into the image of the Son of God. This does not take place in death; it takes place with resurrection and transfiguration at His appearing. As John wrote: *We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope...* (1 John 3:2).

### **Indestructible Life**

Another reference to immortal life is found in the epistle to the Hebrews. In the Greek, the word *akatalutos* is properly used to express *immortality*, and it is used to contrast the Levitical priesthood with the Melchizedek priesthood. The Levites were placed as priests based on a law of physical requirement, that is, based on their genealogy or bloodline that was traced to Levi. These priests died and had to be replaced with other mortals of the same genetic line. But God's Son is a high priest of an entirely different order based on the law of life.

And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible [*akatalutos*] life. (Hebrews 7:15-16 NASB)

Some translations use the word *endless* in place of *indestructible*, but the meaning is the same, for it means that death has no power over such a life. Death is what destroys (brings destruction to) life, but the power of the indestructible life ensures that death has no more power over such a life. This is our expectation!

Thus, eonian life is a matter of timing and quality of life. It speaks of progressively knowing God the Father and His Son today and in the ages to come. Immortality is a life beyond all forms of death, which includes the first and the second death. The issue for us individually is whether we will be counted worthy to attain to the age to come to rule and reign with Christ when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14). We are being made conquerors to enjoy eonian life and immortal life in the age to come. Let us conquer through the Conqueror!

### **Conclusion**

Why make such a big deal over eternal verses eonian?

First, they speak to the fate of billions upon billions of men and women just like us. Are most destined for eternal punishment and a remnant for eternal life, or are most destined for eonian chastisement with all eventually reaching eonian life? You choose; but it is *God our Saviour, Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth* (1 Timothy 2:3-4 KJV). Second, God has a purpose and a multifaceted plan to accomplish His purpose. It is the purpose of (reason for) the ages, and it is summed up by Paul: *But when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who has subjected all things to Him, that God may be all things in all* (1 Corinthians 15:28 LITV).

Third, God's plan is executed through His Son who will subject, head up, gather up, or sum up all things in Christ (Anointed One), things in the heavens and things on the earth (Ephesians 1:10). *Weymouth's New Testament* captures the comprehensiveness of God's purpose and the plan.

And this is in harmony with God's merciful purpose for the government of the world when the times are ripe for it—the purpose which He has cherished in His own mind of restoring the whole creation to find its one Head in Christ; yes, things in Heaven and things on earth, to find their one Head in Him. (Ephesians 1:9-10 WNT)

Fourth, God's people who have eonian life in this age (or, the promise of having it in the ages) and who will be transfigured into immortal life for the next age are the ones through whom the Lord Jesus will sum up all things, for they will be His true complement, having been fully conformed to His image, the image of the heavenly (1 Corinthians 15:49). They will be the complement of the one completing the all in all (Ephesians 1:23 CLV).

Finally, why are the ages so important to those who have eonian life and are His complement? They are important because the ages are part of God's plan of becoming all in all, and He is raising up many sons of glory in the image of His Son that will be instrumental in implementing His plan for the ages. In other words, His conquerors won't be lounging on the clouds; they will be administering God's kingdom on earth and in heaven. Think about it!

It is time to start reading scripture with a view to the *eons* or *ages* and to that which is *eonian* or *age-during* (*lasting, abiding*), for *God's purpose of the ages* is to redeem all mankind and all creation through His Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus?

For a short article titled *Eternity Explained*, check out the following link found on the *Tentmaker* website. — <http://www.tentmaker.org/articles/EternityExplained.html>

The good news is that eonian life knows God and His Son in this age and the ages to come. The life of the ages will lead to immortal life as well; a life beyond death, never to die again and forever and progressively knowing God and His Son; a life that through God's Son sums up and heads up all things in the heavens and on the earth.

This is life in the ultimate!