

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.**
(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)*

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Eon (Age), Not Eternal or World

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Today, many believers place great emphasis on the words *eternal* and *eternity*, and the concept of endlessness, as if this is the emphasis of Scripture. But is this truly what Scripture emphasizes? Some Hebrew and Greek language scholars claim that the concept of *eternity* (*eternal*) is not a fundamental concept in the original languages of the sacred writings, for the Hebrews looked out to the future and saw it as something concealed or obscured, and the Greeks thought in terms of long periods of time with beginnings and ends and did not think in terms of endless.

If one agrees with this claim, then it presents a challenge, for practically all English translations use the word *eternal* as if it were a fundamental and essential tenet of Scripture. Is it possible that many translators have placed these words and their meaning into the modern-day English Bibles based on tradition and what could be called *interpretative bias*, which means that in translating Scripture from the original languages into another language, the translators used words based on tradition and interpretation of what they believed to be the meaning behind the words. This is not meant to question the integrity or honesty of any translators. It seems that a certain amount of interpretation is inevitable. However, what if the fundamental tenet of Scripture is actually the concept of *ages* or *eons* and not the concept of *eternal* or *eternity*? Wouldn't this change the way we view Scripture, or at least add some dimension to our view that would otherwise be missed? I think so.

Interpretative bias comes into sharp focus when we realize that in most English Bibles, the words *age*, *eternal*, *everlasting*, *eternity*, *forever*, and *world* are often translated from the same Greek word. How could this be accurate when these English words have different meanings? *Age* refers to a period of time that has a beginning and an end. *Eternal* refers to endlessness or that which has no beginning and no end. *World* refers to an orderly arrangement or system. Something is amuck!

In the Hebrew language, the words *everlasting*, *eternal*, and *forever* are usually derived from the transliterated Hebrew word *olam*, which means "to hide, keep secret, obscure." *Olam* relates to an age whose end is unknown and thus whose end is obscure, but not necessarily endless. In other words, it refers to an indefinite period of time, and not to the concept of eternal or eternity, that is, endlessness. Two examples from the Bible help to prove the point.

First, Jonah was in the bowels of a large fish for three days, but it is recorded in most translations that the prophet cried out that the earth with its bars was around him *forever* (*olam*) (Jonah 2:6 KJV, NASB). How could Jonah be in the belly of the fish for three days and nights and, at the same time, forever? The more literal and accurate translations use the words *eon* (CV) or *age-abiding* (REB, YLT) rather than the word *forever*.

Second, Psalm 45:6 states: **Thy throne, O God is for ever [olam] and ever** (KJV, NASB). In the Hebrew, it reads *olam va ad*, which means "the age and beyond," and proves beyond any doubt that the Psalmist had to add *va ad* to *olam* to bring in the concept of something beyond an age. The more literal and accurate renderings of this verse read **"the eon and further"** (CV), **"the age and beyond"** (REB), and **"age-during and forever"** (YLT).

Now, turning to the Greek text of the New Testament, the comparable word for *olam* (Hebrew) is the transliterated Greek word *aiōn*, which means an indefinite, long segment or period of time that has a beginning and an end. The adjective form is *aiōnion*. The English equivalent or Anglicized word for *aiōn* is *eon* and for *aiōnion* is *eonian*. *Eon* is more commonly referred to as *age*.

In the Greek text, the word *aiōn* is used 128 times (singular [*aiōn*] and plural [*aiōnōn*] forms), and the word *aiōnion* is used 71 times, which are translated in many English New Testaments nearly forty different ways, including: age, ages, ago, age-lasting, age-long, duration, earliest ages, last ages, latest ages, remote age, remotest age, always, ancient, any more, beginning, end, eternal, eternity, ever, for ever, 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. Obviously, these words and phrases present a wide range of meanings that should be a red flag to any with an inquisitive mind.

To add to the confusion, consider two verses from the King James.

So shall it be at the end of the world [aiōn]. (Matthew 13:49 KJV)
...throughout all ages [generations], world [aiōn] without end. (Ephesians 3:21 KJV [NASB])

How can the world have an end and also have no end? In other words, the King James clearly states that the world both has an end and is endless. It just cannot be! The problem starts with the fact that the word *world* has no place in these verses, for the Greek word is *aiōn*, not the word *kosmos* (*world*).

How are we to resolve such disparities? The answer lies with the Hebrew text. It is generally acknowledged that when a verse from the Hebrew text is quoted in the Greek text, the meaning of the Hebrew establishes the meaning of the Greek. Case in point is Psalm 45:6, which is quoted in Hebrews 1:8: **“Thy throne, O God, is for ever [aiōn] and ever [aiōn].”** The writer, under the inspiration of the spirit of God, is conveying the exact same thought as *olam va ad*, which means “the age and beyond.”

Thus, we must conclude that *olam* and *aiōn* have the same meaning, which means that *aiōn* refers to an indefinite period of time such as an age or an eon. All confusion would be cleared up if interpretative bias was thrown overboard, so to speak, and the word *aiōn* uniformly translated using the words *age* or *eon*. Some of the more literal translations attempt to do this. I prefer the Concordant Version, which uses the word *eon*.

Thus shall it be in the conclusion of the eon. (Matthew 13:49 CV)
For all the generations of the eon of the eons. (Ephesians 3:21 CV)
Thy throne, O God, is for the eon of the eon. (Hebrews 1:8 CV)

Note that the concordant rendering of these verses has 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. We need to see that the focus of these verses is on a period of time, an *eon*, and not on the world. The world must either end or go on endlessly, but *eons* have a beginning and an end. In considering verses dealing with *eons*, we need to understand which *eon* is in view, and when we do, there is no contradiction of Scripture.

I realize that such a translation might create some additional questions in one's mind. After all, what does *the eon of the eons* mean? This is a valid question, but at least one is presented with all apples (i.e., all eons) and not apples (eons) and oranges (world, eternal, forever, etc.) mixed together. All one needs to come to a proper conclusion is to understand the meaning of *eon* as an indefinite period of time with a beginning and an end, and what this means in the context of the expressions that contain the word to come to a proper conclusion. Another way to state this is that one needs to know what eon is in view to understand the meaning of the expressions. For example, Paul refers to this eon (age) and the one to come (Ephesians 1:21), to eons (ages) to come (Ephesians 2:7), and to the eons (ages) in which the mystery of Christ has been hidden, which refers to previous eons (Ephesians 3:9).

For those who have an interest in a further understanding of the word *eon*, along with such expressions as *the eon of the eons* or *the eons of the eons*, please see my book titled *The Purpose and Plan of the Eons*, Volume 1, Chapter 1, *The Eons*.