

Chapter 2

Ages, Not Eternity

It is safe to say that God's love is universal, absolute, and unfailing. God is the ultimate essence of love, meaning He defines it and He is the full expression of it. At the heart of the good news is that God revealed the true nature of His love when His beloved Son was crucified for the sin of the world. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us!

Now, it is within this glorious backdrop and overarching theme that God's ultimate purpose comes into view, that is, that God the Father may be all in all. The word *ultimate* is not found in scripture; however, I believe it is appropriate to qualify God's purpose. I have never written this before, but *ultimate* is used in light of the ages, not eternity as so many Christians emphasize. We are not given a view of what new creation will look like or will be engaged in after the consummation of the ages. We don't even know if it will be rightfully called *eternity*. What we do know is that it will be beyond all forms of death, with sin totally absent in God's creation as all come into God's perfect will. This is the perfected and fully developed Kingdom of God. In my heart, I know it will be beyond our imagination.

Given this, from the perspective of scripture and my writings, God's ultimate purpose is ***the purpose of the ages***. In other words, it is about His purpose and plan being worked out and brought to its consummation through the ages or, if you prefer, in time. Whether there is the concept of time after the consummation is unknown and, frankly, irrelevant. What matters most is to be with Jesus wherever He is, whatever He is doing, and whatever concept of measurement is in play.

Some might wonder why the matter of ages is so important, especially in light of salvation. Some might say: When I was saved, I received eternal life, so ages really do not matter. After all, when I die, I'll go to heaven where there is no time. First, we don't receive eternal life (at least as most see it); we receive eonian life or life in God's age, looking forward to the day of the redemption of our body, when we receive spirit-activated bodies in the image of God's Son, our Lord Jesus. In that day, we will be immortal, that is, beyond sin and death throughout the ages and beyond to whatever God has in store for His new creation. At the heart of the good news is immortality. Second, the good news is not about dying and going to heaven as a disembodied spirit. Third, who cares if there is time or not; in the long run, the concept is irrelevant.

Without contradicting the last sentence; here is the reason why the ages are so important: because everything God is doing to bring about His ultimate purpose has a time stamp on it until we arrive at ***the consummation of the ages***. For the most part, we have not been told what lies beyond the ages (could be a whole new set of ages). The point I am driving home is that we need to see scripture in light of the ages, which means there are limits. This is especially important to the matter of judgment, which, like everything else, has a time stamp on it, meaning God's actions, based on His determinations (judgments), are worked out in the ages and do not go on

forever. Simply, when God's love has achieved its goal of winning each and every heart to Himself, judgment of the entire human race ends.

The challenge is that the concept of *eternity (eternal)* is so in-grained in Christian doctrine and preaching that believers are unwilling to entertain any other concepts. Many believers, if not the majority of them, place great emphasis on the word *eternal* or *eternity*, and the concept of *endlessness*, as if this is the emphasis of scripture. But is this truly the emphasis of scripture? Perhaps not. Some Hebrew and Greek language scholars claim 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 endlessness. In my writings, I have adopted this viewpoint.

If one agrees with this claim, then it presents a challenge, for practically all mainline 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, as I claim, 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* (CLV) or

age-abiding (REB, YLT) rather than the word *forever*. This symbolic language simply meant a period of time that must have seemed like a long time to Jonah. He lost all sense of time.

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** (CLV), **the age and beyond** (REB), and **age-during and forever** (YLT).

Now, turning to 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, 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. Obviously, these words and phrases present a wide range of meanings that should be a red flag to any with an inquisitive mind.

However, the word *aiōn* (translations get this one right in a reasonable number of cases) is not nearly the challenge as is the word *aiōnion*. *Aiōn* is often, but not always, translated as *age*; however, *aiōnion* is most often translated as *forever*, *everlasting*, or *eternal*, which in most minds (and: teachings) cancels out time or the ages altogether.

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 (i.e., concordantly) translated using the words *age* or *eon*. Some of the more literal translations attempt to do this (you'll find many of them quoted in my writings). One translation I prefer is the Concordant Literal Version, which uses the word *eon*.

Thus shall it be in the conclusion of the eon. (Matthew 13:49 CLV)

For all the generations of the eon of the eons. (Ephesians 3:21 CLV)

Thy throne, O God, is for the eon of the eon. (Hebrews 1:8 CLV)

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. To reach a conclusion, all one needs to understand is 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. 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).

Perhaps, 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*). There is a whole lot more to be said along these lines, but to keep this chapter to a reasonable number of pages, I refer you to articles I have written along these lines where I dig in a bit deeper. [Eternal or Ages?](#)

To have the right perspective on God's ultimate purpose and how it relates to ALL, it is essential that we see that everything is being worked out **according to the purpose of the ages, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Ephesians 3:11 DNT).

[The Ultimate Purpose of God \(complete book\)](#)