

Time And Eternity

Rightly Dividing The Word: Shelf 5 — Volume 48

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OBJECTIVE: It is impossible for the human mind to comprehend existence without end. It is impossible because we are creatures who are confined to time. We say “spend eternity” in heaven. But the statement betrays our inability to say what we need to say. “Spend” is a word of time. It is a word of duration. Eternity is not something we “go through,” “live in,” “pass through,” or “go into.” It is existence that has no time references, no points of reference from which we can clock time. Eternity simply is, not something that will transpire or happen.

We must not miss the point here in interpreting the Bible concerning the existence of eternity. The Holy Spirit knew that we would have difficulty in this area. He knew that He would have to use our dictionary in order to explain something that was beyond the definition of our experiences, and thus beyond the definition of the words of our dictionary. Therefore, it is our contention that neither the Greeks, nor the modern-day scholar, can fully understand the concept of eternity. No words can be found in the Hebrew, Greek, or any dictionary of the world, that can define eternity.

In order for the Bible student might possibly in some way comprehend the concept of eternity, he or she must first come to the conclusion that there are no words of this world that are adequate to define that which is beyond this world.

In our study of “eternity,” our challenge is to at least first understand the meaning of the Greek words that are used in reference to everlasting life. To the best of our ability **we must first understand them as they were originally understood by those who defined them when the Holy Spirit chose them from the Greek dictionary to reveal eternal concepts.**

Second, **we must define these words by the context in which they, and their derivatives, are used in the Bible.** This may seem to be a simple request on our part. However, we must be assured that when objectively considered, the definition of the common Greek word *aionios* (adjective, *aionion*) and *aion* that are used in reference to eternity will challenge some of our traditional understanding of favorite passages, if not, treasured doctrines. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that our quest is not to defend our heritage theologies, **but to determine a biblical explanation of unending time in reference to the soul and spirit of man.**

We must keep in mind as we journey through this adventure of biblical study that **the Bible is our best dictionary and commentary.** We must not twist any passage to fit some preconceived theology that is either traditional or convenient. Neither should we shy away from changing some prized sermon that is based on a past misunderstanding of a handed-down interpretation. And above all, as we journey into this often controversial realm of study, we must never allow our feelings for revenge or retribution against the enemies of righteousness to prejudice our understanding of what the Bible actually says on this matter. As we venture into this study, the reader will understand this. We must simply seek truth and allow such to determine our beliefs.

Chapter 1

◀ Two Views Of Hell ▶

There are two views held by biblical scholars concerning the final punishment of those who do not

have faith in God, and in this era, do not obey the gospel. One view supposes that God will torment in flames the lost without end. The other supposes that the lost will receive just punishment, and then, be terminated from existence.

There has been for centuries a debate between the proponents of these two views in reference to the final punishment of those who do not obey God. It is fair that we present evidence for both views in the material of the next two chapters. This is necessary because of the fact that there is the existence of gehenna (hell) beyond the last judgment. In order that we fully understand the two views, consider the following explanations:

A. The Teaching of Unending Torment

To some, hell is an unending existence of torment for the lost. This is the understanding of hell in the sense that the wicked will be tormented without end regardless of the nature of one's sin. The souls of all the lost will be in conscious agony throughout the existence of the righteous in heaven, which is without end. God will maintain their punishment regardless of the seriousness of their crimes. Morally good people who have not obeyed the gospel will suffer forever and ever. Those who have never had a chance to hear and obey the gospel, but died in ignorance, will also suffer the unending torment of hell. It is affirmed that though one was morally good, but doctrinally wrong, he or she will suffer the same punishment for the same time of existence as the most wicked person who has ever lived.

B. Hell Is A Just Punishment

There are those to teach that **hell will be an existence of torment for the lost according to the measure of their crimes.** In other words, each lost person will suffer punishment for their sins. However, **the length of torment will be determined by the severity of the crimes. After due punishment**

has been meted out, the wicked will then be annihilated from existence. The lost will not exist without end because they will have been separated from the life-giving presence of God. They will thus cease to exist.

Both of the preceding views are defended by good Bible scholars. We believe the latter view has greater and more biblically consistent evidence for its truth. The first view has some serious logical contradictions that must be considered. As we study through the following material, we must investigate all biblical evidence that must be considered that will challenge our reasoning concerning hell and its time of existence.

We must keep in mind that we are discussing an existence that is beyond our present experience. Therefore, **the Bible reveals the existence of hell through many metaphors.** When a metaphor is used to explain that which is beyond our experience, there is room for a great amount of wonder, and little room for dogmatism. We must caution ourselves, therefore, not to be too overenthusiastic concerning our view of the duration of hell. We know that it will exist. The lost will be punished. How long they will be punished is debatable. That seems to be God's business. How the wicked will be punished cannot be completely understood. But the fact that they will be punished is without question.

Chapter 2

◀ Word Definitions ▶

Our first task in defining the duration of hell is to study those words that were used by the Holy Spirit to explain the duration of hell. We use the English words “forever” and “eternal” to translate the Greek word *aionios*. Our understanding of this Greek word must be consistent with other fundamental Bible teachings.

If our understanding of the Greek word *aionios* makes the Bible contradict itself in any way, then we can be assured that we are not defining the words proper use in the Scriptures.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon defined ***aionios*** with three statements of definition in reference to its use in the New Testament: (1) “without beginning or end, that which always has been and always will be,” (2) “without beginning,” and (3) “without end, never to cease, everlasting.” Arndt and Gingrich defined the word to refer to “long ages ago,” “without beginning or end,” and “without end” (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

The Greek word ***aion*** often refers to a **specific period of time**. It is used to refer to the end of the Jewish age (See Greek of Mt 13:22-49). It refers to the “cares of this age” (See Mk 4:19; see also Lk 16:8; 20:34; Rm 12:2; 1 Co 1:20). The word thus refers to an era, epic, or specific period of time that has a conclusion. ***Aion* refers specifically to time, whereas, *aionios* emphasizes that which is not necessarily without end.** W. E. Vine wrote of *aionios*, that the word “describes duration, either undefined but not endless, as in Rom. 16:24; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2 ...” (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*).

The context in which *aionios* and *aion* are used, therefore, must determine the meaning of the words. When we bring these words into the New Testament context, our theology on the endless or temporary nature of specific realities will determine how we understand these words. Since there is no real concept of endlessness within human experience, the Bible will have to be our final dictionary on this matter. However, though the Spirit will discuss the existence of that which is in eternity, we will have difficulty comprehending exactly what is revealed.

The next chapters are some things to consider concerning the use of *aionios* in reference to concepts to which it is applied. Much of our belief

concerning the existence of gehenna (hell) and heaven is centered around the use of this word and its adjective *aionion*. Therefore, it is important that we understand its meaning, both in its secular and historical use, as well as in a biblical context.

Chapter 3

◀ Secular Use Of Aionios ▶

There are two definitions of *aionios* that must be explained and applied to those nouns that refer to end-of-time concepts. In our study of both heaven and hell, we must determine if *aionios* means **(1) duration of existence without end**, or **(2) certainty or quality of existence throughout a predetermined and definite period of time**. And possibly, there may be those contexts wherein both definitions are inferred. There are also those contexts where one definition is emphasized to the exclusion of the other.

We must constantly remind ourselves to be consistent in our interpretations and definitions. This is easy to say, but when it comes to applying consistent definitions that bring into question preconceived ideas, it is often very challenging to be objective.

It is not the task of the Bible student to read into the text preconceived ideas. It is our task to allow the Bible to speak for itself. If we allow preconceived theologies to prejudice our study, then we may miss a correct interpretation of a text or miss a newly discovered truth in the Bible.

Some scholars have contended that the first definition of *aionios*—duration of existence without end—is the only meaning that is to be emphasized in the Bible. This is especially assumed in those contexts that refer to the final destiny of the wicked. However, we must challenge this assumption simply because of the definition of the word is used in some contexts where **a predetermined period of time is inferred**. As will be seen, it is difficult to be consistent

in some doctrinal matters if we understand that the definition of time without end is the only definition of *aionios* as it is used in the Bible.

Some have used **Matthew 25:46** to affirm that “eternal” (*aionios*) life and “eternal” (*aionios*) punishment must be the same in defining the time of existence of life and punishment. It is assumed that both are without end simply because Jesus used *aionios* in the same context in reference to the righteous and wicked. Therefore, the word *aionios* must mean “without end” in reference to hell simply because heaven is without end. However, we must remember to first determine the meaning of *aionios* that Jesus was emphasizing. Was He emphasizing the meaning of **certainty of effect** (qualitative) that has resulted from a particular action in time, or the definition of **time without end**?

We would suggest that in order to understand passages as Matthew 25:46 we must first look into the minds of those Jews to whom Jesus made this and other statements in reference to teachings that were “eternal” or “everlasting.” Our understanding must be as the original audience understood Jesus’ statements because Jesus was speaking in the terminology they could understand.

The biblical and historical text must be used to determine if emphasis is on time without end, or the quality of existence within a determined period of time.

We are of the opinion that **we must not allow the concepts of this world to be read into the Bible.** Words that we use to express things of this world come with worldly baggage when they are used in a biblical context. We must therefore be careful not to emphasize the understanding of words of the world to override the same words as they are used in the context of explaining biblical concepts. The Bible must be the final dictionary of the words the Holy Spirit used to explain spiritual concepts.

With the above in mind, consider some of the uses of the words “eternal” and “everlasting” as they were

used in the context of the Old Testament. Also keep in mind that the New Testament was written with the Old Testament as the background “commentary” of New Testament teachings. This would mean that we should refer to **the Old Testament as our dictionary when we run into difficulty with certain words or concepts in the New Testament.** **Romans 15:4** should express a real meaning and use of the Old Testament as a help to understand words and concepts of the New Testament. Paul wrote, *“For whatever things were written before [in the Old Testament] were written for our learning.”*

In the context of our study of the word *aionios*, we must research the use of this word as it was used to explain concepts in the Old Testament.

As Jesus and the apostles delivered the revelation of truth in the New Testament, we would correctly assume that at least in the Jewish context they would communicate to the Jews in words and concepts that the Jews could understand.

Therefore, in those New Testament epistles that have a predominately Jewish audience, **we must learn through the Old Testament how the Jews first understood the message of Jesus that was spoken specifically to them.**

When the Jews produced the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures in the **third century B.C.**, they used the word *aionios* to translate Hebrew words that referred to eternity. Therefore, when we consider the Old Testament words that are used in reference to eternity that are translated with the word *aionios*, **we are accepting a Jewish understanding or interpretation of eternity in reference to the Jews’ understanding of both Hebrew and Greek words.**

Chapter 4

◀ Biblical Use Of Aionios ▶

The Old Testament therefore becomes a dictionary

on how the Jews understood the meanings of both Hebrew and Greek words. The Bible, therefore, is our dictionary to define, specifically, the use of the word *aionios*. With this in mind, consider the following points:

A. Eternal In The Old Testament

We must first consider the use of the words “eternal” and “everlasting” in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word ***olam*** is the Hebrew word used in the Old Testament in reference to everlasting and eternal. The Old Testament speaks of God who is eternal (*olam*) (See Dt 33:27; Is 57:15). Without question, the meaning of time without end must be considered in Old Testament contexts when *olam* is used in reference to the existence of God. However, **the Old Testament also speaks of physical things of this world to be everlasting.** The mountains are everlasting (*olam*) (See Hk 3:6). But the mountains will not exist without end (See 2 Pt 3:10,11). **One’s conclusion to a definition of *olam* in many Old Testament contexts is that it does not always mean time without end.** We make this point because when the Jews translated the Old Testament, **they used the Greek word *aionios* to translate *olam*.** This would indicate that we should not always interpret the word *aionios* to mean time without end.

Consider also the use of *olam* in reference to **ordinances of the Sinai law and covenant that were established as “everlasting” codes of obedience.** However, the practice of these ordinances, or existence in reference to the covenant, **was to last only throughout God’s intended time of their defined duration.**

▶ For example, God made an **everlasting (*olam*)** covenant with Israel (See Lv 24:8; Jr 32:40; Ez 16:60). However, **this covenant would end with the establishment of the new covenant** (See Jr 31:31-34; Hb 8:8-12; 10:16,17).

▶ God gave Israel the land of Canaan as an **everlasting (*olam*)** possession (See Gn 17:8). However, their possession

of the land would terminate when the fullness of time came and the physical Israel of God would give way to the spiritual Israel of God, the church (See Rm 9:6; Gl 3:26-29).

▶ The Passover was an **everlasting** (*olam*) ordinance of the law (See Ex 12:24). However, Jesus, our Passover Lamb, has annulled the need for the sacrificial Passover lamb, for He has become a sacrifice for sin once and for all. There is now no need for an animal Passover lamb to be offered for our sins (See 1 Co 5:7; Hb 9:23-28; 10:1-4).

▶ The high priesthood of Aaron was an **everlasting** priesthood (See Ex 29:9; 40:15; Lv 3:17). However, Jesus is now our new high priest (See Hb 8:1-6). Aaron's priesthood was terminated.

▶ From Aaron was established an **everlasting** priesthood of the Levite tribe (See Nm 25:13). However, every Christian is now a priest (See 1 Pt 2:5,9). The priesthood of the Levites was terminated.

▶ Consider also that Caleb's inheritance was **forever** (See Ja 14:9), Gehazi's leprosy of his descendants was **forever** (2 Kg 5:27), Solomon's temple was a dwelling place of God **forever** (1 Kg 8:12,13), and the period of a slave's bondage was **forever** (Dt 15:17).

All the preceding things and events had an end. Thus, "forever" (*olam*) **does not always mean time without end.**

The word "forever" (*olam*) in the Old Testament carries with it the meaning that something would last for a predetermined length of time, **and then come to an end.** When the Jews translated the above use of *olam* in the Greek Septuagint, **they used the Greek word *aiionios*.** This should immediately alert us to the fact that there should be another meaning of the word *aiionios* that does not refer to time without end. This would be the **qualitative** emphasis of the word.

From the use of the words "everlasting" or "forever" in a biblical context in the Old Testament, we discover that emphasis is not always on time without end. In the previously mentioned contexts where the word *olam* was used in the Old Testament, the emphasis was on **God's determination that some things would exist throughout His appointed time of their duration.** When God brought the "forever"

laws of the covenant and the “forever” covenant itself to a close, they were terminated. They were terminated. **Thus, emphasis was on the certainty or surety (qualitative) of the existence of what God had ordained until such had accomplished or fulfilled its divine purpose.**

For example, the “forever” priesthood of Aaron would not go out of existence until it had fulfilled its purpose. In this sense, it was **everlasting**. God never intended that Aaron’s priesthood exist without end. Aaron was to make atonement for Israel as an **everlasting statute** (See Lv 16:34). However, Jesus has made a final atonement. Atonement for our sins need never be made again.

The everlasting atonement statute given to Aaron was “everlasting” only until Jesus came to make an all-sufficient atonement on the cross for all men. In this context, therefore, everlasting does not mean time without end.

The same was true of the sabbath that was part of “an everlasting covenant” (See Lv 24:8). However, the sabbath is no longer a part of God’s New Testament covenant relationship with His people today. Neither will we keep the sabbath in the new heavens and earth after the passing away of the sun, and the seven-day week, that would determine when a sabbath should occur during the week (See 2 Pt 3:10,11).

In the Old Testament, the use of *olam* (Gr., *aionios*) referred to aspects of the covenant that God had established with Israel. Though the “eternal” aspects of the covenant had a definite end, **the final results of the “eternal” ordinances of the covenant would find their end in the new covenant.** For example, the priesthood of Aaron had a definite end in the establishment of the new covenant. However, high priesthood was carried on through Jesus who is now our high priest. The concept of the Levitical priesthood was carried on in the priesthood of the disciples of Jesus (See 1 Pt 2:5,9). But the Levitical

priesthood of the Jews was terminated when Jesus became our high priest, and priesthood was extended to all those who obeyed the gospel (See Hb 8).

Though the Old Testament priesthood was terminated with the coming of the new covenant, the principle of priesthood was continued. Aaron's priesthood continued on with "time without end" effect in the sense that Jesus continued the high priesthood of Aaron. In the same way, the "everlasting" covenant God made with Israel was terminal, but it had "time without end" effect in the lives of those who kept the new covenant that is built on its principles (See Jr 31:31-34). There were changes, but there were also the continuation of principles.

The preceding is very important to understand when coming to the New Testament. When the words "everlasting" or "forever" are used, termination can be understood, though there is also something that carries on after the termination. The effect of the termination has unending effects.

We must keep in mind also that the word *aiōnios* is used fifty-one times in the New Testament in reference to the final existence of the righteous in a heavenly state. However, we must also keep in mind that **the term is used at least seventy times in contexts that define the word to refer to that which is of a temporary nature.** Our challenge in many contexts, therefore, is to determine if a definition of "time without end" is to be understood, or a "determined existence in time with a definite end."

Now in the context of heaven and hell, it is our challenge is to determine if the word is emphasizing time without end or destruction after due punishment has been metted out. **Only the context in which the word is used can determine the correct meaning.** At the same time, we must be careful not to allow our theology to determine our understanding of the word before we even get to the context in which the word is used.

B. Eternal In The New Testament

We must consider the use of the words “everlasting” and “eternal” as they are used in the Testament. When Jesus came, He came to the Jews who lived under the Sinai law. He came to offer redemption to national Israel and all mankind (See Gl 4:4,5). In His offer, He used the words “everlasting” and “eternal” in reference to teachings concerning heaven and hell that were of the age to come. **It is in this context that we must reflect on the Jewish understanding of these terms in reference to that which was to come.**

We cannot ignore the fact that Jesus, in speaking to His Jewish audience, did at times use the **qualitative** definition of the word *aionios*, that is, the use of the word in reference to **a divinely predetermined time of existence with a definite end**. At least, one would certainly not be objective to completely bypass this understanding of the word in reference to the future of the wicked.

When we study some events that have already happened, *aionion* defines **an event that has unending results or consequences**. In other words, the New Testament mentions events that have occurred or will occur that will have effects that continue on after the occurrence of the events. Thus, these are “*aionion*” events **that have unending results**.

For this reason we must reconsider some passages in reference to the use of the adjective *aionios* when it is used to modify actions that had a definite end, **but an end with unending results**.

Eternal punishment (Mt 25:46)
Eternal life (Mt 25:46)
Eternal condemnation (Mk 3:29)
Eternal destruction (2 Th 1:9)
Eternal salvation (Hb 5:9)
Eternal judgment (Hb 6:2)
Eternal redemption (Hb 9:12)
Eternal fire (Jd 7)



**UNENDING RESULTS
OR CONSEQUENCES**

The following are examples in the New Testament of actions that occurred in time, but had eternal (*aionios*) consequences or results. In other words, there are certain events that happened in time that are modified with the word eternal (*aionios*). However, **these actions happened only once**. The results of the actions had consequences or results that exist without end. Emphasis, therefore, is not so much on the unending nature of the consequences, but on the effect that such events have in relation to man. Consider the following actions in reference to the word *aionios* that is used in the following scriptures.

1. Matthew 25:46:

Jesus said, “*And these will go away into everlasting [aionion] punishment, but the righteous into eternal [aionion] life.*” When one obeys the gospel (was baptized), he or she enters into eternal life in the Son (See 1 Jn 1:2; 2:25; 5:11,13). This eternal life is sure in the sense that it is based on the sanctifying blood of Jesus and our justification before God according to His grace (See 1 Jn 1:7-9). Because the obedient believer was sanctified by the blood of Jesus, all sins were washed away at the point of baptism (See At 2:38; 22:16). At that time, he or she was justified before God.

The Christian, therefore, came into a realm of eternal life at the point of baptism, and thus, he or she will carry on in this eternal life with certainty throughout eternity because of the blood of Jesus at the cross.

The obedient came into eternal life when he or she went down into and came out of the waters of baptism. In one's life of living the gospel, therefore, it is not a matter of continually receiving life. The life was received by the grace of God when one obeyed the gospel in baptism. Because the Christian has received life, the results of life will continue past the final coming and judgment.

The punishment of the wicked, on the other hand,

begins at the time of physical death, and after the final judgment (See Lk 16:22,23). Because they have not obeyed the gospel, they are the “walking dead” in life, but will eventually be consigned to the second death when they physically die. The wicked reap the consequences of their sin in this life (See Gl 6:8). However, they have a punishment that is yet to come in gehenna (hell) upon their death. It is certain that the wicked will be punished. **The length of the punishment is God’s business.** However, the consequences of the punishment will be without end.

The Christian has life now, and the wicked reap now some punishing consequences for their sin in this life (See Gl 6:7,8). However, **the fullness of the life and the fullness of the punishment will not happen until the final coming of Jesus.** Only then will the reality of both be revealed. The word “eternal” as an adjective that modifies life and punishment in Matthew 25:46 reveals that there is a great quality of both life and punishment that is yet to come. It is a quality that has not yet been realized.

2. Galatians 6:8:

Notice how Paul referred to the punishment of the wicked and everlasting life of the righteous in Galatians 6:8. *“For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”*

We could have much discussion over the present action and effect of one’s living either after the flesh or Spirit. However, one thing is clear from Paul’s statement. Living after the flesh in life will eventually lead to decay (corruption), that is termination.

The use of the word “decay” means that something is coming to an end. Something will eventually stop and never started again.

In contrast to decay that eventually leads to termination, **living after the Spirit affects one in order to continue one’s obtained life into existence beyond life.** The “corruption” of the

wicked has effect both in life, as well as, after life. Also, the “everlasting life” of the righteous has effect in life, as well as, after life.

The corruption of the wicked will eventually bring an end to the wicked. The life-giving behavior after the Spirit will continue the righteous into time without end.

Those who are **now** living after the flesh are **now** reaping corruption. Those who are **now** living after the Spirit are **now** reaping everlasting life. Though the earthly living on this earth will come to an end, the effect of the earthly behavior of both the wicked and righteous will have afterlife consequences. The consequences of the wicked person’s behavior will eventually cause him or her to decay away. However, the present righteous behavior of those who live after the Spirit will preserve the righteous into time without end. His present everlasting life will have an unending affect on his existence

3. Mark 3:29:

Jesus said that those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit are “*subject to eternal [aionios] condemnation.*” Some translations render this “eternal sin.” Either translation makes the point. In the context, **the Jews were assigning the work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus to the devil** (See Lk 11:14-16). They were committing an act of denial, denying that Jesus’ power was from God. This was blaspheme. They were denying the revelation of the gospel through Jesus. **Those who do such are subject to certain condemnation**; they commit an eternal sin because they have not recognized the gospel work of God through Jesus. Therefore, they will not listen to or obey the gospel of Jesus in order to be saved.

They have committed an action of denial. The result of this action is condemnation. They could, of course, repent by believing in Jesus. However, as long as they assign the gospel work of the Spirit through Jesus to be of Satan, they would remain in

a state of condemnation. **Their condemnation is certain and without end.** In other words, the action of assigning the gospel of Jesus to the devil will have unending consequences. There will be “eternal” consequences of this belief and behavior.

When Jesus comes, those who have committed this “eternal” sin will know for certain that Jesus is the Son of God. They will not continue denying Him throughout unending existence. They committed the denial in life, **but their denial will result in their termination for eternity.** In this sense, therefore, the “eternal” sin they committed in life by denying Jesus will result in their end.

Their disobedience of the gospel in life will lead them into eternal destruction, and thus termination. The word “eternal” in this sense does not mean that they would continue without end to deny Jesus. It refers to the certainty of their condemnation that results from their present denial of Jesus in life. The denying is not without end. **It is the consequence of the denial that is without end.**

4. 2 Thessalonians 1:9:

Paul wrote that those who do not know God or obey the gospel *“will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.”* We must keep in mind that what is stated to take place here **takes place in the last day when Jesus is revealed from heaven** (See 2 Th 1:7,8). The occurrence of punishment will happen at that time. Emphasis is not on duration or beginning, but on the fact that those who do not know the love God that was revealed through the gospel, and do not subsequently obey the gospel, will be punished at the time of Jesus’ coming. The punishment at that time will be destruction with eternal consequences. Both the destruction and the consequences are certain to happen when Jesus comes again.

This is one of those texts where one’s theology can determine which way the text should be translated. Consider the following two possibilities that can be

understood from the Greek text, and thus, translated one of two ways:

1. The process of destruction goes on without end. Some would suggest that the action of “destroying” goes on without end. The “destruction” of the wicked never comes to an end. Thus, the translation “everlasting destruction” would mean an unending process of destruction.

The problem with this understanding is that **destruction always has an end. Destruction infers termination.**

Translators differ on what the destruction is. Some feel that the “everlasting destruction” comes forth from the Lord and is unleashed on the wicked. Others believe that the exclusion of the wicked from the presence of the Lord is the destruction, or will result in destruction. Different translations emphasize one or the other of these two understandings. Such leads us to conclude that because this verse could be translated in one of two ways, our understanding of the verse cannot be final or determined from the verse itself.

Our general understanding of the destiny of the wicked must be brought to this verse in order to understand exactly what Paul was saying. We would therefore suggest that we keep our minds open. Since the context does not fully explain what the meaning is, consider a second interpretation of the verse in reference to our understanding of the word *aionios*.

2. The destruction is certain and final, but with unending consequences. Jesus is coming with certain judgment on the wicked. This judgment will result in their certain destruction. The duration of the punishment is not known, other than the fact that God issues punishment according to the crime. Nevertheless, **the process of destruction has an end.**

Herein is the “eternal” judgment that is mentioned

in **Hebrews 6:2**. (More on this verse later.) The judgment is certain. The results of the destruction of judgment, however, **have unending consequences**. The results of the destruction will not be reversed. The destruction will be an irreversible action taken upon the wicked.

There may be in Paul's mind an element of both understandings that are listed above. The destruction would be an action that proceeded from the Lord upon the wicked. However, there would be an unending qualifying time of destruction. In other words, **the punishment would last throughout God's appointed time of duration**. However, the result of the destruction would last without end. It would not be reversed. In other words, when those who have not obeyed the gospel have received their just punishment, **they are destroyed from existence**. The result of the destruction is without end. The wicked will never come back into existence. In this sense, therefore, **it is certain destruction with unending consequences**.

The preaching of the life-giving gospel to the world is for the purpose of offering those who believe the gospel an opportunity to exist forever in an eternal heaven.

5. Hebrews 5:9:

The Hebrew writer wrote of Jesus, *“And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”* When one obeys the gospel, he or she is saved because of the cleansing blood of Jesus (See Mk 16:16; At 22:16). **This salvation is a once and for all time event in the life of the individual**. The event happens when one obeys the gospel by being baptized for remission of sins (See At 2:38; 22:16).

This obedience to the gospel does not mean that one cannot fall away so as to be lost. It does mean, however, that if one remains faithful to his or her calling by the gospel, **the certainty of one's salvation will continue and be realized in its**

fullness at the final coming of Jesus.

Once one is saved, he or she is saved. Salvation in one's life does not keep happening over and over again. This does not mean that one cannot lose his/her salvational relationship with God, for one must continually walk in the light of God's word in response to the grace of God (See 1 Jn 1:7). Nevertheless, once the redemptive work of God takes place in one's obedience to the gospel, it is full and complete forever. We will not realize this in reality until Jesus comes again.

Through the call of the gospel, Jesus is now saving people. However, this saving process through the call of the gospel will eventually end. After the final coming, there will be no more opportunities to respond to the gospel

So what is meant by one receiving “**eternal salvation**” in this time when the saving process itself will have an end at the final coming of Jesus? **The meaning is that when one is saved, there are unending consequences that result from that salvation.** Though the saving process, or calling through the gospel, will have an end when Jesus comes again, the consequences of salvation for those who have obeyed the gospel will go on without end.

6. Hebrews 6:2:

The Hebrew writer spoke of the elementary principles of Christ, one of which was “**eternal (aionios) judgment.**” This eternal judgment is listed in the context of Hebrews 6:2 in reference to the resurrection to come. The eternal judgment, therefore, refers to the **final** judgment that is yet to come and will happen in the last day. This judgment will not go on without end. **There will be an end of the judgment.** It will stop after it has occurred on the last day.

The Hebrew writer used the adjective “eternal” (*aionios*) in reference to this **one-time action** of final judgment. He did so in order to establish the fact

that certain judgment will take place on the last day. However, **the results of the “eternal” judgment will last without end.**

The consequences of judgment will have no end, though the actual event of judgment will have an end. In this sense, therefore, the word “eternal” emphasizes the certainty of God’s final action of judgment that will have unending consequences.

7. Hebrews 9:12:

The Hebrew writer stated that through His own blood, Jesus *“entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal [aionios] redemption.”* **The fact of Jesus’ work of redemption has eternal consequences.** Jesus came to offer Himself as a sacrifice that would be the redemption of all who obey Him (See Hb 9:25-28). *“In Him we have redemption through His blood”* (See Ep 1:7). This act of redemption on Jesus’ part happened **only one time** in history. It happened at the cross. It will never take place again.

Jesus’ offering of redemption on the cross was a one-time event that has unending consequences.

By using the word “eternal,” the Hebrew writer was emphasizing the **consequences** of the redemptive act of Jesus, not the act itself. Jesus was offered once on the cross. That act of redemption was a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of all who are obedient to the gospel. When one is obedient, his or her personal redemption by the blood of Jesus carries on without end. Jesus completed the act of redemption. The result of this act will carry on without end in the lives of those who have obeyed the gospel. When one obeys the gospel, he or she is redeemed in a moment by the blood of Jesus. Though the actual obedience to the gospel (baptism) is a one-time action, the result of the action carries on into time without end.

8. Jude 7:

Jude spoke of Sodom and Gomorrah “*suffering the vengeance of eternal [aionios] fire.*” In view of the previously mentioned examples of the **adjective** use of *aionios* in reference to action, we would conclude that the fire about which Jude wrote was a consuming fire. In conjunction with the previous interpretations, **the emphasis is on the result of the consuming fire.** In order to be consistent with the previous uses of the word “eternal” (*aionios*) as an adjective to modify a noun, we must conclude that the action of the fire took place at a point of time, but the consequences of the fire are without end. In other words, emphasis is not on an unending fire, **but on the unending result of the fire.**

The “fire” was a time-oriented happening as the destruction of 2 Thessalonians 1:9 will be a onetime event. The fire or destruction takes place over a period of time. Sodom and Gomorrah were at one time in history consumed with fire from heaven. But there was an end to the consuming fire. The destroying action of the fire terminated. However, the consequences of the fire and destruction are without end. The results are irreversible. **That which was destroyed by the fire will never come back into existence.** The results of the “eternal fire” will carry on after the fire has ceased.

One of the challenging thoughts one must consider in reference to the definition of *aionios* as it is used in the New Testament, is its use as a Greek

OLD TESTAMENT <i>olam</i>	NEW TESTAMENT <i>aionios</i>
(Septuagint translation: <i>aionios</i>)	(from <i>aion</i>)
Unending existence? or Predetermined time?	Unending existence? or Predetermined time?
Gn 17:8: “Eternal (<i>olam/aionios</i>) possession” Lv 24:8: “Eternal (<i>olam/aionios</i>) covenant” Dt 15:17: “Eternal (<i>olam/aionios</i>) slavery” Ex 12:24: “Eternal (<i>olam/aionios</i>) passover” Ex 31:16: “Eternal (<i>olam/aionios</i>) sabbath” Ex 40:15: “Eternal (<i>olam/aionios</i>) priesthood” 2 Kg 5:27: “Eternal (<i>olam/aionios</i>) leprosy” Hk 3:6: “Eternal (<i>olam/aionios</i>) mountains”	Mt 25:46: “Eternal (<i>aionios</i>) punishment” Mk 3:29: “Eternal (<i>aionios</i>) condemnation” 2 Th 1:9: “Eternal (<i>aionios</i>) destruction” Hb 5:9: “Eternal (<i>aionios</i>) salvation” Hb 6:2: “Eternal (<i>aionios</i>) judgment” Hb 9:12: “Eternal (<i>aionios</i>) redemption” Jd 7: “Eternal (<i>aionios</i>) fire”

word to translate the Hebrew word *olam*. Since the Jews used the word *aionios* as a word to translate *olam*, then consider the implications of such in the preceding chart.

The chart presents a challenge in reference to being consistent in understanding either Old Testament or New Testament concepts that use the words *olam* and *aionios*. We have two options in reference to interpretation: **(1)** Should we use the Old Testament usage of *olam* that is translated with the Greek word *aionios* in order to understand the New Testament usage of *aionios* in reference to New Testament teachings? Or, **(2)** should we use the New Testament usage of *aionios* with a definition of unending time to interpret its use as a word to translate the Hebrew word *olam*?

If we choose to do the latter, then we will have to deal with the sabbath, priesthood of Aaron, and even the mountains as having unending qualities. The point is that we must be consistent in our interpretation.

We must always maintain a consistent conclusion to the points of this chapter. In reference to the righteous, Jesus has once and for all time carried out the sacrificial offering for our redemption. The results of that onetime sacrifice on the cross has unending consequences. Those who obey the gospel are immediately saved at the time of their obedience of the gospel. The result of the saving act of obedience of the gospel will go on without end. The acts of “redeeming” and “saving,” therefore, will not continue throughout eternity. Redemption and salvation are accomplished in a moment of time. Jesus has already accomplished redemption on the cross. The redeemed have already been saved by the redeeming blood of the gospel. However, the results of both actions will continue throughout eternity. The saved will remain saved without end because of a one-time redemption and obedient action in the past.

Now consider the situation of the wicked. Those

who refuse to recognize that Jesus' work is from God, have committed an act of denial of the gospel; they have committed the eternal sin. The result of this action will have unending consequences because they will eventually be condemned at the final judgment. When Jesus comes again, the wicked will be punished with destructive termination. The result of the destruction will have no end. In this sense, therefore, they will be punished, and the consequences will be their termination from existence. The result of their judgment is without end. Though the judging process does not go on without end, **the results of the judgment do.** Therefore, the punishment, judgment, condemnation and destruction of the wicked will be a one-time event, as the redemption, salvation and eternal life of the righteous are one-time actions. The consequences of all these actions will have no end. In this sense, they are "eternal." **The consequences are without end, though the actions are onetime occurrences.**

The preceding view of the punishment of hell does not affect any fundamental teachings of Scripture. It does solve many inconsistencies in our interpretation of those teachings we maintain concerning the justice and character of God. At least one thing is certain.

God will work according to how He has planned concerning the punishment of the wicked. Our feeble efforts to understand that which is beyond our experience will not affect or change His mind. The wicked will be punished for their wickedness.

No one will go unpunished for rejecting the gospel or the persecution of the saints. God is a just God and will render unto all according to their deeds (See Lk 12:47,48; 2 Co 5:10).

The preceding view also places great responsibility on the disciple of Jesus in reference to evangelism. If the wicked will be terminated for eternity, then the righteous must now make every effort to give the wicked an opportunity for eternity. Only a selfish disciple would not feel compelled to offer the

prospects of eternal life to the lost. He would be selfish because he or she does not feel that others should have the opportunity of eternal life as the obedient Christian. **Our spirit of evangelism is generated by our desire to encourage others to have the salvation we have in Christ.**



ABREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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