

MSB239

# MORE Seed and Bread

BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

## THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Founder - David R. Hettema, Director

\*\*\*\*\*

# THE WORDS "NEVER" AND "EVER" IN SCRIPTURE

By M. B. Hammond

It is unfortunate that the translators and expositors of the Bible have not had a better understanding of what the Greek word *aion* and the Hebrew word *olam* really mean. As a result, some uses of the words "ever" and "never" are badly distorted as to the meaning in the mind of the reader. When the modern English-speaking populace sees the word "never," they immediately sense that the event or situation being described is perpetually canceled, or is without previous occurrence. Likewise, when the word "ever" or the combination "forever" appears, the thought transmitted is an event or situation which is unique or lasts eternally, that is, at least an indeterminably long time. Most Christians are very naive, unwilling to question the concepts of "How long is 'forever'?" and "What does it mean to 'never die'?" Yet these words occur frequently in Scripture and are derived from several different Hebrew and Greek words and sub-clauses. We need to examine some of these to see the rich meaning the original language breathes into these seemingly simple terms.

There is a passage in John 8:51-52 that still confuses many men. It says, **Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death. Then said the Jews unto Him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and Thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death.** Does this mean that the man shall never die? You be the judge. The Greek phrase is *ou me eis ton aiona*, which more literally translated says, "not at all in respect to the eon." What Christ is saying here is that the man who keeps His sayings will not be dying

in respect to the eon. These Jews, the Pharisees and scribes or lawyers, misunderstood His statement, lacking a knowledge that "the eon" is another name for the Kingdom of God. Unfortunately most Christians are totally oblivious to the fact that we are living, today, in the time of God's silence, the dispensation of the grace of God. Thus they are also ignorant of the premillennial Kingdom of God, let alone having any awareness 'that this Kingdom is also called "the eon." We know that we will die as a result of Adam's sin, but we have the full assurance of resurrection by believing in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. To say that the man is not dying in respect to the eon, means he will be made alive by, resurrection to partake of life in the Kingdom.

Likewise, in a passage in Joel 2:25-26, Jehovah says to Israel, **And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten** (a prophecy of the long term dispersion of the Jews and their inability to worship God as He required), . . . **And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of Jehovah your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you, and My people shall never be ashamed.** Joel was written within the first hundred years after Israel was split into the northern and southern kingdoms ruled by Jeroboam and Rehoboam respectively. While God is appealing to the Israelites to give up their idolatry and immorality, He is promising even here that He will rescue them. They had much to be ashamed of before God, yet He says, referring to the future eon, they will "never be ashamed." Here we have the Hebrew phrase *lo le-olam* preceding the word "ashamed," which literally translated says, "not for (or with respect to) the eon." In Joel 2:27 God says, **And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am Jehovah your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.** The fact that this is repeated makes it clear that God wishes to emphasize that His Kingdom will be a time in which He is glorified and Israel is His dominant government on earth, dispensing the knowledge of God to all nations.

For a comparison of several ways "ever" is used, let us look at Psalm 52:5-9, which says, **God shall destroy thee** (a mighty man) **for ever\***, **He shall take thee away and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living. Selah. The righteous also shall see, and fear, and laugh at him: Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever\*\*.** I will praise Thee

**for ever\*\*\*, because Thou hast done it: and I will wait on Thy name; for it is good before the saints.** The first word "ever\*" in Hebrew is *la-netsach*, meaning the wicked man is to be destroyed in perpetuity. The second "ever\*\*" is a double form of the Hebrew *olam* and means the writer, David, will trust in God for the eons of the eons, throughout His entire duration of service. An "eon" is not just an age, but a flow of life, service and enlightenment out of God, and David sees that he is to flow out as part of the flows out of God in times to come. The third "ever\*\*\*" is the Hebrew *ad*, which has the concept of continuity, so David is saying "I will praise God continually." Any Bible student with a **Young's Concordance**, can take the words "never" and "ever" and run through the concordance showing the different terms used. For example, the first occurrence of *a/am* in the concordance is given in Judges 2:1, which says, **An angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you go up out of Egypt, and have brought you into the land which I swear unto your fathers; and I said I will never break my covenant with you.** This is another expression based on the Hebrew phrase, *lo le-a/am*, reflecting the fact that God will keep His covenant with Israel and not break His covenant with respect to the eon, in spite of their incomplete dedication back then to Him. Indeed all of the writings of the prophets, dealing with Judah and Ephraim Israel, contain words of assurance that God will restore the people to the land and complete the promises to Abraham and his successors. Similarly, in the Gospel of John, Christ says, . . . **I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die** (John 11:25-26). That term "never" is the Greek phrase *ou me eis tau aiona* and specifically means that he who believes in Christ will not be dying with respect to the eon. It is clear that even if he were dead, he will be raised to life again to live in the Kingdom of God.

Many people will quote John 3: 16 from memory, but when asked what "everlasting life" is, they usually say it means to live forever or, on and on without end. That passage ends with the words, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The Greek adjective used here is *aionios* which, when Anglicized, means "eonian." Many translators use the concept of "age-abiding" to translate the term, but if we note that "the Kingdom" is a special period of blessing and enlightenment for mankind, then the adjective makes "eonian life" to be life in the Eon, serving the flow out of God teaching righteousness and God's law. Similarly, the Hebrew word *olam* can be used as an adjective, as in Psalm 90 where it says,

**Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place** (place of refuge) **in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God** (Psa. 90: 1-2). This is a Hebrew idiom referring to One who has no beginning or ending, and hence it means "eternally Thou art *God*." Isaiah says something similar to this, **For from the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by ear, neither hath eye seen, O God, beside Thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him** (Isa. 64:4). The phrase "the beginning of the world" is a translation of the Hebrew word, *olam*, and has the idea of an eternal, ever living God. He is our God who has neither beginning nor end; He is called the great "I am" which means He exists in perpetuity; the timeless One, Whose love is ever flowing.

The translators of the **King James Version** (KJV) used the word "world" to translate the Greek word *aion*. The **New American Standard Version** (NAS) has corrected this using the English term "age." In Matthew 24:3, Christ's disciples asked Him about His return, saying to Him, **Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?** There are many places where the word "world" is used to express *aion* and, because of this, many people have fears of a real "end of the world." The whole phrase here is *sunteleia Iou aionos*, which is not the end (*telos*), but rather "the consummation of the eon." Here, the concept of the end of the world (*kosmos*) is fictitious, but the real idea is that when the eon has been brought to its fullness, then Christ would return in His second coming (*parousia*). The reader can now see that taking these words from the KJV at face value without knowing the root used, either in the original Hebrew or Greek, is dangerous, and causes many men to err in their understanding of Scripture.

Speaking of the resurrection, Daniel says, **And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever** (Dan. 12:2-3). Here the term "everlasting life" uses the adjective form of *olam*, like *aionion*, and it refers to life ever flowing out of God. It is also notable that the "forever and ever" in this reference says, "for the eons (*olam*) and continually (*ad*)." In its figurative form "stars" is the term often used for angelic beings, who are God's messengers. So it appears that righteous men will be part of God's

"mighty ones" for God's ongoing program to populate the universe with His people. Now, we understand Paul's words in Corinthians which says, **But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery** (the secret wisdom of God), **even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world** (*aion*) **unto our glory, which none of the princes of this world** (*aion*) **knew** (I Cor. 2:7-8).

We, as Bible students who are dispensationalists, understand that God's dispensations are, in fact, His eons, and we recognize that He can choose to work with men and nations separately, or with all these in a common manner. The dispensation of grace is God's present eon, in which He is silent, while the dispensation of the Kingdom will be God's future eon. All the eons of God tell us of His desire to preserve mankind and ultimately lead them to righteousness.

**END**

**ISSUE NO. MSB239**  
**Published Jan. 15, 2000**