

# SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER    ISA. 55:10    FOR THE EATER  
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

## THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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## THE PROBLEM OF *AION*

It is my conviction that there is an enormous amount of divine truth encapsulated in the Greek word *aion* (pronounced ahee-own). It is not an easy study, and it may well be one of the most difficult words in the New Testament to understand. The study of it is sure to generate questions that demand answers, problems that require solutions, and difficulties that must be overcome. However, the diligent Bible student already knows that God's truth usually comes to him as a result of finding answers to the questions and solutions for the problems that the study of the Word creates.

The person who never makes a penetrating study of the Bible will not be burdened by any problems or questions concerning it. There are many who for this reason never open the Bible. Thinking is hard work, the hardest work that man undertakes. The mind quickly rebels against it and seeks to be at ease. It must be driven to take up the work. Most people solve all Biblical problems by simply putting them out of their minds.

It must always be remembered when we face any difficulty that if we do not have the right questions we will never get the correct answers. Therefore, in all Bible study we must ever be asking: What is the question, what is the problem, what is the difficulty?

We can simplify the problem of *aion* by using an English transliteration which is much easier to use and pronounce. This is the word *eon*, and throughout this study it will be used as an exact equivalent of the Greek word, except in those instances where for the sake of accuracy the Greek spelling must be used.

Those who labor in the Word of God with the end in view of producing a positive and Biblical theology will have to face up to the fact that there must be a complete and objective study of the Greek word *aion* along with its related adjective *aionios*. The Biblical meaning of this word needs to be fixed in the minds of all truth seekers; otherwise an impossible jungle of false definitions and puerile interpretations will

block the path of all who seek purity in truth. To take a Greek noun and treat it again and again as if it were an adverb is unworthy of anyone who cares about God's truth. And to try to maintain certain erroneous definitions of *eon* and *eonian* in order to protect certain teachings that are stamped by tradition as being "orthodox" is a foolish pastime in which no unashamed workman should indulge.

To state one facet of the problem of *aion*, it can be said that this word is translated "ever" in 71 of its 128 occurrences. And while it hardly makes sense to say it, it seems at times that the Bible has a vast amount to say about this thing that is called "ever." However, both the Hebrew and Greek words usually translated "ever" are nouns; and since a noun is the name of a person, place, or thing, then the question naturally arises, "What is this thing called ever?"

Of course someone will immediately raise the objection that "ever" is an adverb, not a noun, and it cannot be the name of a thing. This is true, and the one who recognizes it has taken the first step toward understanding the problems involved in *aion*. This erroneous translation imposed upon this word by translators has so compounded the problem that the faint-hearted will despair at ever setting matters aright and obtaining the precious truths that are expressed by this word.

The word *aion* expresses truth that I desire to know and to incorporate into my thinking. The word *ever* in many passages is an absurdity. It eliminates the truth that God is declaring. One does not need to be a scholar to realize that when in a translation a noun is treated as if it were an adverb, something is wrong. It shows a rewriting of God's message that is inexcusable and cannot be justified.

Those who proffer simple solutions to complex problems tell us that *aion* means an age, and point to the fact that it is so translated in two occurrences, Eph. 2:7 and Col. 1:26. To me, this is nothing more than substituting one enigmatic word for another. This is of no help, for it simply changes that problem from "What is an eon?" to "What is an age?"

There are many who are sure they have an answer to this. "An age," they confidently assert, "is an indefinite but relatively long period of time." Then by a bit of rough and ready reckoning they are sure they have found the meaning of *aion*; it is simply a long period of time.

The *Concordant Version Lexicon* defines *aion* as being "the longest segment of time known in the Scriptures." The society (*Concordant Publishing Concern*) which is responsible for this volume has made much of the word *aion*, but their efforts have been inadequate and somewhat misleading. Their basic definition is wrong, and they attempt to divide all time into five eons. This is a mistake, for an eon is not a period of

time. This can be easily demonstrated by substituting the idea of "period of time" into the passages where *aion* is found, especially those where the double plural occurs. These certainly do not set forth any such idea as "the long periods of time of the long periods of time."

The word *aion* has long troubled translators and expositors. The *King James Version* shows this by giving thirteen different translations of this word ranging from "ever" to the circumlocution "while the world standeth." Weymouth (the original) translated *aion* consistently by "age" and the adjective *aionios* by "of the ages." Rotherham used "age" and "age-abiding," but these renderings, while consistent, provide no help in a search for the truth.

I do not believe that there is any word in the English language that will express the truth contained in the word *aion* so that it can be used to translate it. When we come upon a situation such as this, the proper course to follow is to transliterate (carry them over) these words anglicizing them as a rule into more easily handled forms. This has already been done, and the words *eon* and *eonian* will be found in the dictionary. Then when we find the true idea that *aion* represents, by the use made of it in the Word of God, we can use the simple term *eon* to express it. Many expositors have done this. R.C.H. Lenski, the Lutheran commentator, has so rendered these words consistently throughout his commentary and accompanying translation. *The Concordant Version* has done this, even though it errs in its definition of what this word means.

There are those who think that since an eon is spoken of in Scripture as having a beginning and an end, it has to be a period of time. In my opinion this is shallow thinking. It is based upon the following syllogism: All things that have a beginning and an end are periods of time. An eon has a beginning and an end. Therefore, an eon is a period of time.

The major premise here is indefensible. A man has a beginning and an end. Is a man then a period of time? Certainly not! The minor premise is wrong, as there are divine eons that will never end. Thus the conclusion is also wrong.

Since everything in existence except the Deity is linked up with and subject to time, it is quite simple to relate anything to time if one wishes to do so. Man has an inherent mental inability to think of anything apart from time, so to say that a thing has nothing to do with time can be easily disputed if someone wants to make an issue of it. But in spite of this, it is my opinion that the word *eon* has nothing to do with time, either long, short, or endless. An eon may exist, be active, or take place in a period of time, even as a war takes place in a time period, but a war has nothing to do with time as such.

Nevertheless, it must be recognized that a period of time can be designated as an eon, but when this is done it is because of the eon that is taking place and characterizes that period, But even when a period of time is called an eon, it still leaves us with the puzzling question: "What is an eon?"

To fully appreciate the problem the student must know certain facts. The word *aion* is used in the New Testament in the following ways: SINGULAR, as in Matt. 13:39 which should read "the harvest is the consummation of the eon"; PLURAL, as in Eph. 2:7 which should read "that among the eons to come"; DOUBLE SINGULAR, as in Heb. 1:8 which should read, "Thy throne O God, is for the eon of the eon"; SINGULAR with PLURAL, as in Eph. 3:21 which should read "to Whom be glory for all the generations of the eon of the eons"; DOUBLE PLURAL, as in Gal. 1:5 which should read, "to whom be glory for the eons of the eons."

The examples cited above set forth distinctive uses of the word *aion* in the New Testament. In order to understand passages such as these we need to find the true significance of this word, and this will have to be one that will fit into all these occurrences. Such a meaning will have to come from the Bible itself based upon the usage of this word by the Holy Spirit.

When we read of "King of kings" in the Bible it gives us no trouble. We have knowledge of the idea that is symbolized by the word *king* and we can build upon this. This is also true of "Lord of lords," and "holy of holies." In meeting up with these terms we have ideas that can be immediately summoned to help in understanding them. However, when we come upon the phrase "eon of the eons," we are in difficulty. We cannot understand this phrase unless we know what an eon is. The difficulty is still greater when we come upon "the eons of the eons." We know these terms are in the Greek. We believe they were inspired by God with the purpose in mind of communicating truth to us. We must know what they mean.

In the study of the word *eon* great treasure of information is opened up to us when we recognize that *aion* is the Greek word that the Holy Spirit selected to represent the Hebrew word *olam*. This word is found 430 times in the Old Testament. In five passages in the New Testament the God inspired writers have used *aion* as the exact equivalent of *olam*, a fact that establishes complete identity between these two words. The complex and wonderful truth set forth in the one is the same as set forth in the other. If we can come to a proper understanding of the idea that is set forth in these two words we will clarify hundreds of passages in the Word of God.

This study has set forth the problem. In other studies I may be able to point out clues and suggestions that could lead to the solution.

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