

There Is A Problem With The Translations Of Eternity

When we use the words "eternity" and "eternal" we think of something that will never end. However when these words are used in the New Testament they are translations of Greek words ("aion" and "aionios") that do not have that same meaning.

This is the main reason we have misunderstood what the Bible really teaches about hell.

The original, inspired documents of the New Testament were written in Greek, so we need to understand the meaning of the Greek words "aion" and "aionios."

Translating these words as "eternity" and "eternal" is misleading. Our English word eternal means: "having infinite duration; everlasting; without beginning or end; continued without intermission; perpetual; existing at all times." But the Greek word aion, as used in the Bible, refers to limited time, which has a beginning and an end -- not what we think of as "eternity."

Proving this will require us to get a bit technical, and look directly at the Greek text of the Bible. I promise to make it as easy to follow as possible, so you can see it clearly, without asking you to take anyone else's word for what I claim here. This chapter is vital, so please don't skip it! I aim to make one simple point very clear, so that it is beyond dispute: the Greek word aion does not mean eternity.

To prove that aion does not mean eternity, we will need to look at some verses that have nothing to do with hell or punishment. The verses we examine in this chapter are solely to show how the Greek words "aion" and "aionios" were used in the original writings inspired by God. By examining how the Holy Spirit chose to use these Greek words, I will establish beyond question that the meaning in the mind of God when these words were written in the Bible, could not be the same as our English words "eternity" and "eternal."

Our English word eternity, as I mentioned, means something that exists at all times. Therefore, eternity cannot have a beginning, and it cannot have an end. Eternity extends to the infinite past and will continue in the future without limitation. When you understand the meaning of our English word eternity, you realize it would be impossible for there to be more than one "eternity." You also realize it is impossible to speak of time before eternity or time after eternity. Yet I will show that in the Bible God used the Greek word "aion" in all these ways where it is impossible for us to use our modern word "eternity." So this makes it clear that the meaning of "aion" is not the same as the meaning we give to our English word "eternity."

"Aionios," the adjective derived from aion cannot have a greater meaning than aion. Adjectives cannot take on a greater meaning than the noun from which they derive. For example, hourly is an adjective which pertains to an hour, not to a year. So, aionios can refer to no longer of a time period than "pertaining to, belonging to, or lasting through an eon or age" and should never be translated by such words as everlasting or eternal.

Before I begin showing you the actual verses, there are a few other matters I need to address first.

None of what I say here is meant to give the idea that those who believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ will not live with Him forever. The Bible gives us that promise apart from depending on the Greek word *aionios* being mistranslated as eternal.¹

Translators

The question naturally arises, "How did it happen that most of our translations say eternity in error?"

First, it is my firm belief that we can rely on the truth of God's Word, the Bible. I believe you can base your life on it! The Bible is the inspired Word of God, and every word is important. But we must always bear in mind that the English translations are not inspired, but are only the best attempts of humans to convey the meaning from the original Hebrew and Greek languages. And we must realize that, over time, English words do sometimes change their meaning.

In defense of the translators, it is probable that the meaning of our word "eternity" has changed somewhat in the last several centuries. Never forget that translation is not an exact science. It always requires human interpretation based on the translator's best understanding of the differences in two languages.

One very plausible reason most translators translated "*aion*" and "*aionios*" with words meaning forever, is because they wanted to make their translations agree with the teaching of the institutional church. Ever since the seventh century the predominant church view has been that torment in hell was eternal or never-ending. Once the tradition got started, new generations of scholars simply relied on what past generations had written, instead of thinking for themselves, based on what the Greek New Testament actually said.

The King James Version translates the word *aion* by all these different English words: age, world, never, course, ever, evermore, and eternal. It translates the adjective *aionios* by all these English words: everlasting, eternal, the world began, and for ever.²

The translators have caused confusion by using many different English words for *aion* and *aionios*. This is not necessarily always a bad thing to do in translation, as a word can have more than a single meaning, depending on how it is used. But some of the words they used to translate *aion* make no sense. You will be able to see for yourself, from the Scripture examples following, that they sometimes had to twist the meaning of the words "*aion*" and "*aionios*" into words meaning eternal. Otherwise, they would not have been able to maintain a doctrine of eternal torment in hell.

If English translators had simply used the English forms of the Greek words, "*aion*" and "*aionios*," which are "eon" and "eonian," our English Bible translations would be much less confusing.

¹ See chapter on Assurance Of Living Forever.

² All verses containing *aion* and *aionios* in the King James Version New Testament are listed at www.WrongAboutHell.com.

A few modern English translations do not make the error of translating aion by words meaning eternity. They are not well-known because they never sold great quantities. Among these are Young's Literal Translation, the Concordant Literal Version, and Rotherham's Emphasized Bible.³

How I Will Present The Evidence

Before we proceed to the scriptural evidence, I need to make it clear what I am trying to accomplish in this chapter.

The aim here is not to exhaustively study the meaning of the Greek word aion and its derivatives, but to simply show that the word, as used in the Bible, cannot mean eternal, eternity, or forever.

This chapter will clearly show that the Greek word, aion, as used in the Bible, refers to limited time, which has a beginning and an end. The English form of the word is eon, which also does not mean eternity, but an age. ("Aion" is a Greek spelling and "eon" is the English spelling of the same word.)

The only goal of this chapter is to help you see for yourself that the Greek word aion cannot mean eternity. You can know this by seeing how aion was used four ways in Scripture that are impossible if the meaning of aion is eternity. Those four are: plural eternities, time before eternity, time after eternity, and eternities that end. All four of these uses are impossible with the meaning of our English word "eternity."

On this subject I will not appeal to human "experts" in dictionaries and theological books for evidence, because people can be wrong. Instead I will look to the Holy Spirit, by seeing how He chose to use aion in Scripture. This will enable you to clearly see that the meaning of aion cannot possibly be eternal or eternity.

The spelling of "aion" used in these verses varies somewhat because Greek words can have different endings. The endings are the way the Greek language designates the function of a noun (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, vocative), the gender (masculine, feminine, or neuter), and the number (singular or plural). You don't need to understand all these differences. I am just alerting you to the fact that the spelling of aion will not always be the same in the Greek Bible verses. Although aion will be spelled in all the following ways, it is still the same Greek word, just with different endings: aionas, aionos, aionon, aionoi, aioni, aiona, and aiosin.

Each verse below will be repeated three times. I repeat each verse, changing only the second and third occurrences by the substitution of the words in bold, because I am trying to show what the actual, God-inspired, Greek Bible words are for the benefit of those who cannot read Greek. The words in bold, in all three instances of each verse, correspond to one another. The King James Version (KJV) translation is given as the first verse because it has been widely used and accepted, and study tools are readily available based on its wording.

³ See article on Translations & Tools in Appendix for more information.

The first instance of each verse below gives the exact KJV translation, with the exception being only that the words we are focusing on are in bold type.

The second (middle) instance of each verse is the same KJV with the focus words (in bold) replaced by the Greek Bible text. I don't expect you to understand the Greek words. I merely list the Greek words so you can see that *aion* (however it is spelled) was used in the verse.

The third instance of each verse is the same KJV with a literal translation of those same focus words (in bold), taken from "The Majority Text Greek New Testament Interlinear," which is a conservative, literal translation. As with any translation, this third instance of the focus words in bold cannot claim to be inspired. I just added it to help you see another English translation of the Greek words above it.

This is all done so you can see the inspired Greek words for yourself in the context they were used. By seeing the context in which *aion* was used, you will realize that *aion* cannot mean eternity, simply because of the way it was used in the Bible.

Instead of this approach, I could just tell you that *aion* was used in the Bible as a plural word, for example. I could even give you a list of the verses where it was used in the plural. But you might not believe me. So, instead of that approach, I want you to see the Greek words for yourself. Although I don't recommend it, you could skip all these verses below, for you don't have to understand them to get the point of this chapter, which is very simple. That is, *aion* was used by God in the original Greek Bible in ways that make it impossible for *aion* to mean eternity.

All the verses below are listed only to show usages of *aion* where the meaning makes no sense if *aion* means eternity. While these verses may not refer to hell, our aim here is only to establish it is wrong to translate *aion* by words meaning eternal. I will examine the verses that refer to hell later. These verses are not given here to establish any point other than *aion* is wrongly translated by words meaning eternity.

Remember, each verse below is from the KJV and is repeated three times. The first time is word for word from the KJV translation. The second time is the same KJV but with the words in bold replaced by the words from the Greek Bible. The third time is also the KJV but with the words in bold replaced by the words from a recently published literal translation (named above).

Don't over-complicate your reading of the following verses. They are given just as examples of how absurd it would be to translate *aion* by words meaning eternity. All you are supposed to get from this is that any reasonable person can see how absurd it is to translate *aion* as eternity. Why? Because of four simple ideas: eternity cannot be plural, there cannot be time before eternity, there cannot be time after eternity, and eternity can never end.

This chapter is not trying to single out the KJV for judgment on how it is translated. I only give you the KJV as a reference to make it easy for you to see where the Greek word *aion* is used in context, and so you will be able, if you desire, to use readily available study tools to check on what is said here by looking it up for yourself.

I am not saying that the KJV did translate *aion* in all of these verses as "eternity," because it does not. I am only pointing out that the word *aion* is used in the Greek Bible in all these verses,

and that these verses are inspired examples of using the word aion in ways that would go against the four things I said are impossible for eternity: plural eternities, time before eternity, time after eternity, and eternity that will end.

By letting the Bible speak for itself, I intend to help you reach certainty that aion should not be translated as eternity, or words with similar meanings.

Plural Eternities

How can there be plural eternities? By definition, there can't be! So eternity cannot be the correct meaning and therefore the correct translation of the word aion. The Greek word for aion is used as both singular and plural in Scripture.

GALATIANS 1:5

To whom be glory for **ever and ever**. Amen.

To whom be glory for **tous aionas ton aionon**. Amen.

To whom be glory for **the ages of the ages**. Amen.

The Greek word for aion is used twice in Galatians 1:5. Both times it is plural. Here is a clear example of what I have been talking about. The word (aion) is used as a plural word twice in this verse. This word aion is what English translations have translated by words meaning eternal (such as for ever and ever), and that has to be wrong – because, by definition, there can be but one “eternity” according to the meaning of the word in our English language.

Aion is also used in the plural in each of the following verses in this section on plural usages.

HEBREWS 1:2

Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made **the worlds**;

Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made **tous aionas**;

Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made **the ages**;

COLOSSIANS 1:26

Even the mystery which hath been hid from **ages** and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

Even the mystery which hath been hid from **ton aionon** and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

Even the mystery which hath been hid from **the ages** and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

We know there must be at least two eons (or ages) in the past because Colossians 1:26 speaks of "the mystery which hath been hid from the ages."

Just as a side note, you can see from the previous verse and the next verse that the KJV translators did sometimes translate aion appropriately, in these cases by the word “ages.”

EPHESIANS 2:7

That in **the ages** to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

That in **tois aiosin** to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

That in **the ages** to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

From Ephesians 2:7 we see there are "ages to come," which means there must be at least two coming ages. So there are past eons (or ages), a present one, and coming eons, totaling at least five different eons that Scripture mentions.

You don't have to be a Greek scholar or a theologian to figure out that it is impossible for there to be five eternities. Therefore, it should be clear that eternity, or any word with a similar meaning, should not be used to translate the Greek word aion.

It matters not if dozens of men compile dictionaries telling you the meaning of aion is "eternity." Anyone who reads the verses written on these pages can see they are wrong.

Times Before Eternity

With our currently accepted understanding of eternity, there can be no time before or after eternity, as eternity is all-encompassing. If we try to apply our modern definition of eternity to the Greek words aion and aionios, we are confronted with absurd statements in the Bible, such as times before eternity. This shows that translations using words meaning eternal or eternity for aion are wrong.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:7

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained **before the world** unto our glory:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained **pro ton aionon** unto our glory:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained **before the ages** unto our glory:

2 TIMOTHY 1:9

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus **before the world began,**

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus **pro chronon aionion,**

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus **before time began,**

TITUS 1:2

In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised **before the world began;**

In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised **pro chronon aionion;**

In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised **before time began**;

Remember that these examples are given, only to give examples of usage of aion in ways that are impossible with our meaning of eternity. In this chapter we are not trying to understand, or judge, how any translation got any specific verse right or wrong, but only to give examples where aion was used in the Greek Bible in ways that would be impossible for it to mean eternity.

Scripture reveals God made the different eons or ages (Hebrews 1:2), and the three verses above show that there was a time before the eons (literally, before eonian times). This makes perfect sense. But when we try to give the Greek word aionion the meaning of "eternal," it makes no sense at all, for there can be no time before eternity.

Because these verses refer to time before the eons, eonian times cannot be eternal.

Time After Eternity

Both of the middle verses in this section are taken from the Septuagint, a translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. As such we cannot claim it is divinely inspired, any more than any other translation. However, the Septuagint was the commonly used "Bible" during the days of Jesus and His apostles. Most Old Testament quotations we find in the New Testament are from the Septuagint translation.

So the two verses in this section differ somewhat from those we have been examining. The first occurrence of each verse is the KJV. The words in bold in the second occurrence are from the Septuagint. The words in bold in the third occurrence of each verse are a literal translation.

EXODUS 15:18

The LORD shall reign **for ever and ever**.

The LORD shall reign **ton aiona kai ep aiona kai eti**.

The LORD shall reign **the eon and upon eon and longer**.

Aion, as used here, cannot refer to time without end, for there could be nothing beyond, or longer than, endless time, which is the meaning of eternity.

MICAH 4:5

For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God **for ever and ever**.

For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God **eis ton aiona kai epekeina**.

For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God **for the eon and beyond**.

By definition, there can be nothing that goes beyond eternity. Therefore, it should be clear from the usage of the word aion in these two verses, that aion cannot mean eternity or anything that lasts forever.

Eternities That End

MATTHEW 13:39

The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the **end of the world**; and the reapers are the angels.

The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the **synteleia tou aionos**; and the reapers are the angels.

The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the **completion of the age**; and the reapers are the angels.

Jesus certainly had common sense, so He could not speak of the harvest being at the end of eternity, since our meaning of eternity is unending. Jesus certainly was not speaking of the “end of eternity,” or even the “end of the world,” but of the “end of the age.” So aion cannot mean eternity.

MATTHEW 24:3

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the **end of the world**?

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the **synteleias tou aionos**?

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the **completion of the age**?

Does anyone really believe the disciples asked Jesus when the end of eternity would be? If not, then aion in this verse is not used with the meaning of eternity.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:11

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the **ends of the world** are come.

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the **tele ton aionon** are come.

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the **ends of the ages** are come.

The word for "ends" in 1 Corinthians 10:11 is plural in the Greek Bible. If the translators were right in translating "world" then how many ends can a single world have? By definition, eternity has no ending, thus aion cannot mean eternity, but instead means an age. Every age can end.

If anyone maintains that aion means eternity, ask them to explain 1 Corinthians 10:11 which says “the end of the aions are come,” which if taken to mean eternity would tell us that the end of eternity happened when this was written nearly two thousand years ago!

HEBREWS 9:26

For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the **end of the world** hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the **synteleia ton aionon** hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the **end of the ages** hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

If this verse means the “end of eternity” it makes no sense, for eternity cannot have an end. But every “age” or “eon” does have a beginning and can have an end.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:4

In whom the god of this **world** hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

In whom the god of this **ton aionos** hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

In whom the god of this **age** hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

The devil who blinds people to the Gospel in this age will not be the god of eternity! He is only "god" in this age!

GALATIANS 1:4

Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil **world**, according to the will of God and our Father:

Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil **aionos**, according to the will of God and our Father:

Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil **age**, according to the will of God and our Father:

All "eternity" will not be evil, so aion cannot be everlasting. The present evil age will end.

COLOSSIANS 1:26

Even the mystery which hath been hid from **ages** and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

Even the mystery which hath been hid from **ton aionon** and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

Even the mystery which hath been hid from **the ages** and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

This verse says the mystery has now been made manifest, so it's not still hidden. It was not hidden from “eternity,” but only for a long time.

Again, just as a side note, I applaud the KJV translators for using “ages” in Colossians 1:26, instead of a word that means eternal. If they had just been consistent doing this, we would not have the confusion that exists today concerning hell being a place of everlasting and unending torment.

JUDE 1:7

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of **eternal** fire.

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of **aioniou** fire.

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of **eternal** fire.

You may notice that the bold word in the third instance of this verse, taken from the Interlinear Translation, uses “eternal” to translate aionios (spelled aioniou) in this verse. This is an example of how strong the pressure is for translators to express the adjective for “aion” in this manner, to support the traditional teaching of hell. As you have seen from the examples given in this chapter, words meaning eternal or eternity are not reasonable translations of “aion” and its adjective “aionios.”

While some will admit that “aion” does not mean eternity, they will nevertheless try to tell us that its adjective “aionios” does mean eternal. But I remind you that no adjective can have a greater meaning than the noun it is taken from. For example, yearly is an adjective which pertains to a year, not to a century. So if aion does not mean eternity, then aionios cannot mean eternal.

Experts tell us the location of Sodom and Gomorrha was probably in the area of the Dead Sea. Certainly, the fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrha is not still burning there today, let alone for eternity. So if these cities are an example of "aionion fire" then "eternal" is not a word that could be used accurately.

Notice also Ezekiel 16:53-55 where God promises He will restore Sodom and her daughters. So whatever happened to Sodom, according to this passage in Ezekiel, will not last forever. God said Sodom will be restored, so its judgment cannot be for "eternity."⁴

Summary

We took a lot of time in this chapter to accomplish one goal: giving you examples to prove, based on how aion was used in the Bible, that the Greek word aion cannot mean eternity, and its adjective form aionios cannot mean eternal.

This was necessary to give you a foundation for understanding that the Bible, rightly translated, does not teach that hell or punishment is eternal. This statement may be shocking to you, as it was to me when I finally realized it was true. But the idea that hell is a place of never-ending, eternal torment is totally dependent on the Greek word aion meaning eternal or eternity. If aion, or its adjective aionios, do not mean eternal (which this chapter proves), then it cannot make hell (no matter what it is) to be eternal, either.

So a correct understanding of the meaning of aion is absolutely necessary for a correct understanding of what the Bible actually says about hell and future punishment.

⁴ See Appendix on Sodom Is An Example to read the whole passage.

According to its usage in the Bible, aion means a limited time period, what we would call an “age.” In the Bible aion refers to different periods of time, or ages. The time period is generally unknown, like the length of a person’s life, or the time between the first and second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to earth.

Because our English word “eternity” means something without beginning or ending, but always existing, everyone should see clearly from the examples given in this chapter, that “aion” was used in Scriptures where it cannot possibly have that meaning. This proves aion should not be translated in our English Bibles by words meaning eternity.

The New Testament references at least five different aions. By definition, our English word “eternity” cannot be plural, so this is further proof aion cannot mean eternity.

So anyone, no matter who they are, claiming that “aion” means eternity (or any word having a similar meaning), is simply wrong. I say this, based solely on the way the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Bible to use the word “aion.”

This chapter proves, beyond any doubt, that the Greek word aion does not, and cannot, mean eternity!