

TIME AND ETERNITY A BIBLICAL STUDY

BY: G. T. STEVENSON

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INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul, addressing a crowd of Athenian philosophers declared, 'He (God) made also of one, every nation of men to dwell upon the face of the earth, marking out fitting opportunities and the bounds of their dwelling places, that they might be seeking God if after all (Concordant Version, consequently) indeed they might feel after him and find.' (Rotherham) **Acts 17:26**

Thus Paul described the universal human search for meaning in creation and existence. To seek to discover purpose in the universe is in a large measure to search for the God of creation and of humanity. The Bible affirms that there is one God who operates the universe in accord with a supreme divine purpose. and the sacred scriptures profess to reveal that One - his nature, objectives, and activity, the latter particularly in relation to mankind. One major question concerns the ultimate destiny of the great mass of humanity who generation after generation pass into the unseen.

Of these some, having heard and appropriated the Good News concerning Jesus and the Resurrection, have been assured a future life with the Lord; but these form only a small portion of the human race. What of the rest?

Speaking broadly, theologians and Bible students have advanced three conflicting answers, each held by its proponents to be soundly based upon scriptural evidence.

(a) The lost will suffer endless punishment in 'hel'. (The reader is requested to refer to appendix 'Hell').

(b) Only believers have everlasting life; the rest either remain dead or are resurrected for judgment and then annihilated.

Resurrection, judgment, and discipline of the 'lost' are processes leading to ultimate reconciliation with God through his Son and consequent enjoyment of his favor.

Those who hold to doctrine (a) point to passages in the common English versions where 'everlasting' or 'eternal' is applied to the state of the 'lost'; but those who hold (b) or (c) above, interpret such texts quite differently. We may use Matt.25:46 as an example. The A.V. reads 'These shall go away into everlasting punishment'. Now if 'everlasting punishment' be the correct translation of 'aionion kolasin', and 'ceaseless punishing' the meaning, and if the passage refers to individuals, then doctrine (a) is stated in that passage.

Expositors who favour doctrine (b) will say the meaning of 'aionion kolasin' is irreversible punishment by death,, not continuing punishing of individuals kept alive for no other purpose.

Protagonists of doctrine reject both the above interpretations, and point out that 'kolasis' basically meant 'pruning' and in this verse may well be rendered "discipline, chastening or correction", a process, not a finality, and that 'aionios' not always, and most probably never meant 'everlasting' or 'endless'. Further it may be argued that 'these' applies to 'nations' as such and has no direct application to individual persons.

Also there arises the question of whether death seals the sinner's destiny. Expositors holding to the affirmative refer to II Cor.6:2 and quote the Authorized Version, 'Now is THE accepted time; behold now is THE day of salvation', but those who believe that post-resurrection judgment will lead on to reconciliation with God, point out that neither in the Greek of II Cor.6:2 nor the Hebrew of Isa.49:8 is the definite article 'THE' linked with 'time' or with 'day'. The English translation should read, 'Now is an accepted (or acceptable) time; behold now is a day of salvation'. There have been many such days, and it is claimed, there will be many more.

Another moot point is whether forgiveness, grace, and mercy can apply to those who have not believed the gospel message. Some people argue that forgiveness can cover a debt or injury only when the debtor hears of and accepts such grace. It is then said of statements such as **I John 2:2, 'He (our Lord) is the propitiation (mercy seat) for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world,'** that these passages are to be subjected to the conditions of hearing and accepting.

Those who disagree point out that salvation depends ultimately upon the attitude and act of God, no upon human experience; and illustrate their view by analogies such as the following.

Let us assume that 'A' owes 'B' a large debt which 'C' unknown to 'A' graciously settles on 'A's' behalf, or 'B' in kindness simply wipes out. Does the debt remain, whether 'A' hears or even accepts the gracious settlement? It would appear not. 'A' may continue to be burdened by the thought of his obligation which in fact does not exist. His experience may conflict with fact.

Many years after the close of World War II, a lost Japanese soldier was found in the New Guinea jungle. Unaware that Australia and Japan had long been at peace, he thought his rescuers were enemies when in fact they were his reconciled friends. His limited experience had long been at variance with the facts.

The emancipation of American slaves may be even more closely analogous to the relationship of the God of Love to the estranged sinner. The liberating parliamentary enactment covered every slave within American

territory. From that moment all were free; but some in isolated areas did not hear the declaration, some who heard did not (properly could not) believe the good news; others content with their existing lot did not seek (perhaps even feared) the change. So quite a number continued to experience slavery when in fact legally they were free.

When the needy sinner can say with the poet,

‘God will not payment twice demand,
Once at my bleeding Surety’s hand
And then again at mine.’
his experience accords with fact.

Expositors who rely absolutely upon the God of Infinite Grace see no reason to limit His reconciling to the human’s present life, but anticipate a future season when the experience of all humanity will accord with the fact of God’s grace for all.

Basically the differing interpretations of scripture statements regarding the destiny of the ‘lost’ may be divided into two main groups:-

(a) those that apply the word ‘eternal’ to either the complete annihilation of unbelievers or to their endless suffering, and (b) those who hold that the judgment of sinners and the subsequent chastening occur within the ages of time.

It appears obvious that a grasp of scriptural concepts of ‘time’ and ‘eternity’ is vital to an understanding of biblical teaching on this and on other important matters. Since the two main terms used in this regard are ‘olam’ in Hebrew and ‘aion’ and its derivatives in Greek, a study of the usage of these words must be basic to any investigation of doctrines respecting the destiny of mankind.

For those who believe that the sacred autographs in their original form, provide an inspired record of the Creator’s dealings with humanity, his present attitude, and future purpose, a study of biblical concepts and doctrines uncluttered by superimposed dogmas and interpretations, must ever provide an edifying exercise, especially as every such enquiry leads inevitably to Christ our Lord, who is himself The Truth. The research in the following pages is offered in the hope that it may contribute a little to the strengthening of faith in the readers as it has done for the writer. Though the original study was based on the use of the Hebrew and Greek texts, foreign words and phrases are in this discussion, transliterated into English spelling.

CHAPTER ONE METHOD AND DEFINITIONS

The past century of biblical studies has been marked by the increasing importance of the historico-critical approach and method. This means that the student seeking revealed truth must endeavor to gain knowledge of the background of circumstances, customs, beliefs and aspirations of the inspired writer and his contemporary readers. In recent years much fresh light has been thrown on the biblical records by archaeological discoveries and scientific research into the languages, cultures, religions and general environments of the Semitic peoples, about whom, among whom, and to whom the O.T. (and much of the N.T.) was written; yet it is still difficult to gain release from the process of reading the scriptures with a predetermined background of inherited Greek philosophy, medieval dogma, and youthful indoctrination. This is particularly true regarding the biblical concept of time. Thus in his valuable book ‘Christian Doctrine of History’ (Edin. 1957) John MacIntyre wrote, ‘What we regard as the Biblical view of time and history can only by anachronism be said to be that of the Biblical writers themselves, yet that is the anachronism of which so many of our contemporaries are guilty’. (p. 5-6).

Further, much modern thought is based upon a tacit acceptance of the idea of some evolutionary process in nature and humanity. Throughout the Bible there is evident an awareness of a developing process in time; but this is seen as involution, a purposeful movement toward a goal - the Kingdom of God - that “far off divine event to which the whole creation moves” the ‘TELOS’ or ‘sunteleia’ or end-purpose of the ages of probation,

discipline, preparation, and 'salvation history,' to which the patriarchal covenants, apocalyptic prophets, N.T. writers, and Jesus himself pointed.

In contrast with the Grecian static view of history, time bound within a constantly repeated cyclic pattern (a concept common to much oriental religious thought) from which mortals might obtain release only by escape into timelessness, Hebraic thought is dynamic, empirical, realistic; that is, secondary causes are short circuited and events attributed directly to God Who is seen as immanent and active in history and therefore in time. This Hebraic linear concept envisages continuous progress toward a future consummation. (I Cor.15:28)

There is also the problem of the relationship between 'time' and 'eternity'. The usual practice in discussing biblical topics is to use these terms as if everyone knew the precise meaning of each, when in fact no one seems able to define either, nor state the relationship in terms universally acceptable. Still our common usage seems to imply that we do have some general ideas which arise from experience in respect to time, and regarding eternity, develop from our envisaging either some infinite extension of temporality or a negation of it.

Some scholars hold that in the Scriptures there is evidence of a concept of endless extension of time both before and after the aeons covered by history and predictive prophecy. Others think of eternity as timelessness, a sort of ever-present NOW.

While the idea of endless extension of time baffles our finite comprehension, as does spatial infinity, that of timelessness seems logically untenable. It appears almost axiomatic that awareness of time arises from sequence of events. It is related to movement and change. If the whole universe stood still, time, or our perception of it, would cease. To try to conceive how time is related to the Deity may be futile, but certainly that God exists in endless stagnant inertia but rather the reverse.

However it is possible that the biblical terms for time periods were not meant to extend beyond the ages covered by history and predictive prophecy, the writers describing events, processes, and purposes within these bounds. Eternity itself may not have been a topic or concept within the scope of their thinking.

Actually there is no scriptural example of eternity and no direct reference to the concept in terms such as 'I shall tell you about eternity' or 'Eternity is like this or that'. This does not mean that the idea of future duration unending is absent; but just as in English it appears to be impossible unequivocally to express the notion of 'eternal' and 'eternity' (Latin terms for which Greek does not seem to have had exact equivalents), except by negatives, not end (Luke 1:33), immortality and incorruption (I Cor.15:53,54), indissoluble (Heb.7:16).

Whether the adjective 'aionios', derived from 'aion' an age or period of time, may ever rightly be rendered 'eternal' will be discussed in relation to its usage and contexts. A century ago, in the study of words, great importance was attached to etymology, that is to accounts of their origins. It seems obvious that, while this may be a useful starting point, it is not at all decisive for determining meaning in later contexts, and in fact one may gain a thoroughly sound grasp of the significance of a word without any knowledge at all of its origin or history, provided it is examined in enough meaningful occurrences and contexts, hence the emphasis on concordance and context in these studies.

Using the concordance of all the 448 occurrences of the Hebrew words OLAM (sing) and OLAMIM (plur.) and paying careful attention to the context in each case, the writer classified these examples into three groups:-

- (a) cases where by context the period indicated by olam was limited at both its beginning and its end.
- (b) passages where the periods have a known beginning but obscure end.

Those examples where olam, its repetition (from olam and to olam), or the plural olamim, have been regarded by some writers as indicating duration without beginning or ending and hence thought to mean 'eternal.'

An example of the method of classification by context is with regard to Gen.9:16 where the rainbow is designated the token of berith olam, an olam covenant (A.V. everlasting covenant). Since the inception of this covenant is stated as being at the recession of the flood, it had a beginning in time.

Hence it is not an eternal covenant. Further, since the rainbow results from meteorological factors - sunshine, rain cloud etc., its continuance depends on the recurrence of these terrestrial phenomena. For how long? No one knows. Maybe while the earth remains. But the conclusion of this terrestrially oriented covenant is hidden in obscurity, hence the appropriateness of olam, which in its verb form, 'alam' means 'to hide.'

Some attention must now be given to the matter of terminology and precise definitions. Much confusion has arisen from the common practice of treating 'eternal' and 'everlasting' as synonyms, no indication being given as to whether everlasting is meant to cover duration without beginning or end, or a period having a beginning in time but no ending, or one whose ending, if any, is so remote as to be lost in obscurity. When people speak of a believer in Christ having everlasting life, do they mean life without beginning or end, or having a beginning but no ending, or a quality or mode of life to which beginning and ending or even time itself have no application?

When we read in Ephesians 3:11 regarding God's 'eternal purpose' (A.V.), should we conclude that this objective will never be realized or should we translate the Greek 'prothesin ton aionion' literally 'purpose of the ages' and hence to be accomplished in time?

So that there may be exactitude and consistency throughout the following pages 'eternal' will connote duration without beginning or ending.

It is here maintained that in the study of the Bible we should regard this concept of infinite duration as axiomatically applicable to the Deity alone, not needing to be stated and certainly incapable of proof; in the beginning or to begin with, God (Gen.1:1). God is eternal. All else is out of Him.

'Everlasting' will be used for entities that have a beginning, but are stated to have no ending. For those known to have had a beginning but whose ending or time of ending, is obscure, we shall use the word 'permanent'. A permanent building does not last endlessly, but the length of time of its existence is obscure. For periods of short duration, e.g. Jonah's incarceration, olam, 'temporary' will suffice. Jonah 2:6.

The reader is requested to keep these definitions clearly in mind.

(a) God is eternal.

(b) The life received through faith is everlasting.

© The open eared slave (Deut.15:17 was a permanent possession.

(d) Jonah's olam was temporary.

CHAPTER TWO DERIVATION OF OLAM

In academic circles a century ago a popular exercise consisted of research into the origins of important words. It was thought that this would shed much light upon the meaning attached to such terms by writers who later used them. It is now realized that such research, though useful, is of minor importance since words take on new meanings, and old connotations are modified so that ancient origins cease to have much significance respecting usage and meaning. This semantic process is well known. The term 'hell' provide a good example. In Chaucer's day 'hele' meant 'to hide or cover over' and 'hell' formed a fitting rendering for 'sheol' and 'hades', the unseen realm into which the soul entered at death. But under the dogmatic theology of the Middle Ages, it came to be used for other more sinister concepts, till in 1611 A.V. it was applied not only to 'sheol' and 'hades' but also to 'Gehenna' and 'Tartarus'; and then came to imply the doctrine of unending torment. In modern times the most common usage surely must be in a rather vulgar phrase, 'hell of a mess', of extremely versatile application far removed from Chaucer's usage.

However a few remarks respecting the derivation of the Hebrew word 'olam' are included here. This noun is derived from the verb 'alam,' universally accepted as meaning 'to hide,' 'keep secret,' or 'obscure.' Included in each occurrence of the verb is the idea of hidden-ness of inability or unwillingness to perceive or disclose something. This underlying idea is probably best expressed in English by the term 'obscurity.'

In keeping with this basic concept there occurs in Hebrew the noun 'almah,' (derived from alam) a young woman or virgin (Gen.24:43, Ex:2:8, Psa.68:25, Pro.30:19, Song.1:3, 6:8, Isa. 7:14) for whom Jewish modesty enjoined concealment of her feminine charms.

Bearing these facts in mind, we may readily anticipate that when olam is applied to time, some element of concealment, obscurity, or indefiniteness will be present. One need read only a few of the four hundred plus occurrences to realize that this is so.

The first time we meet the term is in **Genesis 3:22** 'Lest they take of thee the tree of life and live le-olam.'

Commonly, uncritical thinking employs the English phrase 'for ever', but this cannot mean 'eternal life', since (a) it had (or would have had) a beginning in time, either at the creation, or hypothetically at the eating of the fruit (whatever we may take that to mean); and (b) its duration is unspecified. The most one can assuredly draw from the text is that the life would last for some indefinite period, no specific end being stated. Both its nature and duration are hidden in obscurity, hence 'olam' seems as appropriate word to use in such a context.

Jonah's case is important. In Jonah 2:6 olam is used to denote the time of his sojourn in the interior of the great fish. Shut away in complete darkness, he would have no means of judging the passing of time, which along with most other percepts, would be quite 'obscure.' In his case olam represents but three days, but the idea of obscurity is obvious.

Or, taking another case at random, in I Kings 1:31, Bathsheba is reported to have greeted David upon his death-bed thus, 'Let my Lord the King live le-olam.' Neither she nor David could have expected this period to be more than a few days, but its indefiniteness, its obscurity, correspond with the basic meaning of olam, so the term was fitting.

Quite often the sense of indefiniteness may be expressed in English by 'again' or 'anymore,' e.g. Exodus 14:13. 'Ye shall see these Egyptians... no more olam,' where one might translate 'no more at all,' or 'not any more,' or 'not again' without any thought of eternity.

The foregoing discussion suggests that we may examine references to olam and olamim without any preconceived notions about the duration of time indicated by these words.

Usage, context, and common sense must determine any conclusions that may emerge.

CHAPTER THREE OLAM LIMITED IN TIME

We shall now look at some passages where 'olam' is obviously used of periods limited by context respecting beginning or ending, or both. The total number is too great to permit comment on every case so a typical sample is taken from each book of the O.T. in which 'olam' occurs.

Gen.6:4 serves as a useful starting point.

'The Nephilim were in the earth in those (pre-flood) days... mighty men which were of old,' literally 'from olam.' Hence 'olam' must mean ancient times and one might well translate 'from obscure or remote time'. These Nephilim had had their day and ceased to be so long ago, the writer of Genesis could refer to their time as olam, obscure.

In **Gen.13:15** is recorded the promise to Abraham, 'All the land which thou seest, to thee will I give and to thy seed to olam.' The implementation of the promise was then seen as future. Possession would begin in time and the terrestrial nature of the covenant items raises doubts about any proposal that the writer or editor of Genesis had either unending time or timeless eternity in mind. There is no clear indication respecting the period envisaged. The intermittent occupation of the Land of Promise, the subsequent history of the nation and the present (1977) Middle Eastern situation do not clarify the matter - 'olam' remains obscure.

In Genesis 49:26 we have Jacob's blessing upon Joseph, 'Unto the utmost bounds of the olam hills,' but we find in **Isa.54:10** 'The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed.' All these are poetic expressions, not being quoted here with any object of showing contradictions in the Bible, since contradictions appears only if we translate olam here as either 'eternal' or 'everlasting'.

By mankind in general, the terrestrial hills are regarded as symbolic of long lasting stability, but Isaiah uses them but as foils for the concept of the permanency of the future 'glory of the Lord' when 'all flesh shall see it together.' The hills are old (but not eternal); they appear immutable, but their longevity falls far short of Yahweh's glory and grace.

How long will the hills endure? No one knows; but not for ever. the period is obscure, so olam is the fitting term for use here.

In Exodus 21:6 (and Deut.15:17) the 'open-eared' slave is bound to his master le-olam. His servitude lasted till he died; its termination is certain, but the date is obscure.

A somewhat similar case occurs in Leviticus 25:46, where the Israelites were enjoined to purchase as bond slaves, the children of strangers, le-olam. For how long? Obviously while the opportunity existed. The period may have been long; it came to a close; and the situation was reversed, the Hebrews themselves becoming servants to strangers in Assyria and Babylon.

In Numbers 10:8, the trumpets signals for the march are described as olam. Surely no one then or since would suppose that these would continue when the need had passed, much less 'for ever'; but the time when the circumstances for which the signals catered would conclude was an obscure matter (olam).

THE ARRANGEMENT WAS TEMPORARY.

Deuteronomy 32:7 commands, 'Remember the days of olam. Consider the years of many generations, Ask thy father... thine elders about the time when the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance.' The whole context suggests a period long past, remote, shrouded in mystery, but still within history.

Joshua 4:7 states that the twelve stones carried out of Jordon were set up as a memorial ad olam. It is possible that someone thought the cairn would last 'forever.' It has long since been lost. 'Permanently' with the meaning set out earlier seems appropriate here.

Similarly in **Joshua 8:28**, of Ai, it is reported that Joshua made the city a tel olam. Archaeological evidence shows Ai was occupied again in the Iron Age. The question of the dating of Joshua is still debated, but as in Joshua 4:7 above, 'permanent' meaning 'with no ending of the period foreseeable at the time,' appears adequate.

In Samuel 1:22 Hannah is said to have promised that when her son was weaned she would take him to Shiloh that he might abide there ad olam, obviously for his lifetime - the duration of which at that stage was unpredictable, but still not limitless. I Chronicles 23:25 records David's words, 'The Lord... hath given rest unto his people and he dwelleth in Jerusalem ad le olam.' If David or the author-editor of Chronicles envisaged Jerusalem as God's abode throughout endless time or timeless eternity, such expectation has been sadly disproved, not only by history, but by condemnatory pronouncements of later prophets. If we keep to the basic idea of indefinite duration or obscure point or period, then all become consistent, David saw no end to the happy theo-centered kingdom. That does not imply that he had infinity in view.

In Ezra, the two cases of olam are very simple and clear. In **Chapter 4:15**, the Jews are reported to the Persian king as 'seditious subjects olam,' and in verse 19, 'had made insurrection olam,' obviously in past time, no specific date being given. The period of revolt had a beginning and had passed. Nothing precise as to time or times is stated.

Nehemiah 13:1 states that the exiles read 'in the book of Moses... that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not enter into the assembly of God ad olam.' There can be little doubt that the reading was from Deuteronomy 23:3, where the specified period of exclusion was ten generations, no fixed number of years, a long indefinite period.

Job 22:15 asks "Wilt thou keep the olam away which wicked men have trodden?" The common rendering is commended - 'old, ancient, or old-time way,' the customs of some past era.

In **Job 41:4** the question is whether man may tame the crocodile to be his servant olam, for the beast's lifetime, not the 'forever' of common versions.

Psalms 21:4 reads, 'He (the king) asked life of thee, Thou gavest it (to) him, even length of days olam wa ad. The A.V. and R.V. have 'for ever and ever'. One wonders what the second 'ever' can mean. If the king was one of the monarchs of Israel the period must be limited to a long lifetime. Since olam so often means for the rest of someone's life, it may be that the meaning of the formula is 'for a normal life span and something more beyond'. As no specific monarch can be identified and a check of his life span made, it may be correct to regard this as a liturgic type of hymn. To treat the passage as Messianic is to open the door to various interpretations which cannot be proved to have been in the author's mind. It is here suggested that an extra long life was the original thought.

There seems to be a good reason for holding that Psalms 24 was the triumphant antiphonal anthem which was sung to celebrate the Davidic carrying up of the Ark into the city of Zion after its capture from the Jebusites (II Sam.6:12-19). In verses 7 and 9 we have, 'Be lifted up ye doors olam.' Various Messianic interpretations have been advanced for this psalm but there is not evidence to show that such far off matters were the subject of the poet's song. Though the versions give 'everlasting doors', the construct expression should, one would think, be translated 'doors of old time' or 'ancient doors'. Even if a future reference could be proved, since the doors were terrestrial objects, they would not be 'everlasting'. The view that the psalmist here envisaged the entry of the Messiah into 'heaven', involves concepts not found elsewhere in the O.T., so is not considered here.

The many other examples of olam in the psalms, referring to times periods, bounded in some way by their contexts may be grouped thus; (a) those meaning 'for all one's lifetime' (Psa.78:66, 79:13, 86:12, 89:1, 110:4, 112:6, 115:18 etc.) or (b) 'while the occasion or need exists.' (89:2, 100:5, 106:1, 107:1, 118:1,2,3 and 4 and so on).

Proverbs contains two examples - the same sentence repeated. (Proverbs 22:28 and 23:10) 'Remove not the olam landmarks.' 'Ancient landmarks' is obviously meant.

Ecclesiastes 1:10 contains the plural olamim, and will be discussed later. In **Ecc.2:16** the preacher remarks, 'For the wise man even as the fool, there is no remembrance le-olam.' The context refers to death. 'No remembrance at all' seems adequate - both are forgiven, 'out of sight, out of mind.'

Isaiah and Jeremiah both contain many examples of olam bounded both as to beginning and ending. In **Isaiah 42:14**, 'I have held my peace me olam. Now I will cry out.' Me olam must mean 'from long ago' or 'for a long time.' In **58:12**, 'They shall build the waste places of olam,' offers no alternative to 'ancient' or 'old time.'

Jeremiah 5:15 states, 'I will bring upon you an olam nation,' 'ancient' obviously fits as also in 6:6, 'olam paths.' The many other similar cases of olam in Isaiah indubitably referring to limited periods of time need not be quoted here.

Lamentations 3:6 mentions 'those olam dead' where 'ancient' or 'long time fits.' Ezekiel 25:15, 35:5, 36:2 all have the same sense - 'ancient' as also Joel 2:2, Amos 9:11. Micah 5:2, and 7:14 and Malachi 3:4.

In **Daniel** the following contain examples of ritualistic court flattery.

(‘O King live le olamin’) Daniel 2:4, 3:9, 5:10, 6:6, 6:21, (M.T.22). What the speakers had in mind, if anything, respecting the time factor, is a moot question not regarded as worth any attempt at analysis here. Daniel 9:24, a much more important passage, is discussed later along with other examples of the plural, in Chapter 4. The question may now be asked, ‘What do the above passages, covering all the O.T. writings, suggest about the most common meaning of olam?’ In the case quoted, and these are representative of the great majority of occurrences, olam certainly refers to periods of time, which when considered contextually cannot possibly be rightly rendered ‘for ever’, or ‘everlasting’, much less ‘eternal’; and these words should be eliminated from English translations of all the passages in which olam is bounded by contexts.

CHAPTER FOUR OLAM, OLAMIM

The form of these Hebrew words suggests a normal noun and its plural. Unless there are convincing arguments to prove otherwise, we should so regard them. However during the last century much discussion has centered around the question of whether the plural when used in the O.T. represents a concept of eternity, or is in fact indicative of a plurality of the entity covered by the singular. A related question might be put thus. If it can be shown that ‘olam’ expressed the concept of an ‘age’, some identifiable period of time, should we then conclude that ‘olamim’ represented a concept of a number of such periods or may it have been used in a loose way as meaning an extended time, as when we say, ‘I’ve been waiting here for ages’? In the latter case ‘olamim’ would be a plural of grammatical form, but scarcely of concepts. This matter will be discussed later when the occurrences of ‘ha olam’ and the plural are listed synoptically and some conclusions suggested.

For the present the questions to be kept in mind are these,

(a) If the assumption that the Hebrew had some concept of endlessness as to both past and future, was not injected into the ‘olamim’ passages, would these bear a rational interpretation consistent with the contexts in which this word occurs and with the Bible in general? In other words, should we use ‘for ever’, ‘everlasting’ or ‘eternal’ to translate ‘olamim’?

(b) Are there better alternatives?

In I Kings 8:13, Solomon is quoted as saying regarding the temple,

‘I have built Thee a house to dwell in olamim’. It appears most unlikely that Solomon had in mind a ‘timeless eternity’ or eternity at all; but rather long periods or extension of time stretching into obscurity. We can scarcely think that he or his editor thought his edifice of wood and stone would last for ever. Besides, it could be only a future duration anyway, and so but a portion of ‘eternity’. Actually the temple stood about five hundred years. And thus it belonged to a limited time. II Chron.6:2 repeats I Ki.8:13.

Psalms 61:4 has ‘I shall dwell in Thy tabernacle ‘olamim.’ If we could be sure that the Hebrews had expectation of resurrection life in some state figuratively represented by, ‘Thy tabernacle’, we would have some grounds for regarding this statement as approximating to endless future bliss in heaven.

If we take this verse literally we still find difficulty unless we regard ‘olamim’ as having connotations similar to those ‘olam’ frequently possesses, i.e. constantly till the end of one’s life. The passage may well be understood as a pious aspiration of longing to practice the presence of God all one’s days. At any rate the ‘dwelling’ began in this life and so cannot be ‘eternal’. In Psalm 77:5 the psalmist with poetic hyperbole expresses his state of depression. He looks back over past history - presumably Israel’s - seeking comfort.

‘I have considered the days of old, years of ancient times (olamim).’

One seriously doubts whether anyone should hold that ‘olamim’ here could refer to ‘eternity’, ‘everlasting’ or even ‘perpetuity’.

In all probability ‘the days of old’ and ‘years of ancient times’ are meant to cover the same periods of past history with ‘olamim’ signifying the plural ‘periods’. We express the same thought, ‘O God, our help in ages past.’

The R.V. 'ancient times' appears a quite satisfactory translation.

In **Psalm 77:7** the writer continues his lament,

'Will the Lord cast off le olamim?' (A.V. & R.V. 'forever')

The Hebrew may be translated literally.

"For ages will my Lord reject,

And not again grant favour any more?

Rotherham, 'Hath his loving kindness come to a perpetual end?'

If one reads the poetic couplets of verses 7,8 and 9, in any translation, the impression gained is that the Psalmist is asking, 'Hath God withdrawn His Grace from us altogether? Shall we see it no more at all?' (cf. Ex.14:13). Since the plea refers to the future, 'everlasting' might be acceptable, but 'eternity' is ruled out since in the past God's favor had been enjoyed. It seems very far fetched to claim that the writer had any thought of eternity in mind any more than when we say, 'He doesn't love me any more'. **Psa.145:13** states,

'Thy kingdom is kingdom of all olamim, And thy dominion over all, generation and generation (Lit.)'

R.V. 'over all generations'

Rotherham 'generation after generation.'

'Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all ages' (or even periods of time) fits well with 'all generations'. It is possible to construe this into meaning that the rule of Yahweh is co-existent with the being of the Eternal but 'all generations' suggests that the thought of the writer was that God rules in the affairs of men (Daniel 4:25) and there seems to be no reason to think the psalmist had any concept beyond time in mind. The literal 'all ages' appears to be quite satisfactory.

It seems obvious that these two probably liturgic expressions in this poetic couplet cover the same duration of time. Evidence must be very scarce, if it exists at all, to show that O.T. authors, even if exilic, had any expectation of an everlasting future, whether in time or timeless, in which generations of humans would go on reproducing their kind ad infinitum. When the Sadducees (Matt.22:23, Luke 20:27) posed the question of the much married woman's relationship with her seven husbands in resurrection life, our Lord is recorded as answering, 'Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God, for in resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage.' The phrase 'not knowing the Scriptures' of course must refer to the O.T., and the force of the reply must be, 'The Scriptures will teach you that in the future life there are no generations at all'. Hence the idea that 'all generations' and 'all ages' refer to duration beyond the period of human life on earth appears untenable.

Isaiah 26:4 (b) has, 'in the Lord Jehovah is an everlasting Rock'. R.V. (Heb. a rock 'olamim'). The R.V. note reads 'a rock of ages' and so also Rotherham. The A.V. text has 'the rock of ages' a concept enshrined in the time honored hymn. the thought appears to be that Yahweh is a safe refuge in any time of need. Isa.45:17 reads; 'Israel shall be saved by the lord olamim. Ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded.' The difficulty of the Hebrew tenseless verbs is apparent here. The A.V. and R.V. (1884) give 'Israel shall be saved'; the R.S.V. and Rotherham, 'hath been saved (delivered),' which, in view of Israel's history from Isaiah's time until now, and her present (1977) condition, make one wonder what the latter translators took the passage to mean. The use of the future tense avoids the clash with the facts of Israel's history. There seems to be no sensible alternative to "Israel shall be saved by the Lord, olamim'. But then, of course 'olamim' can scarcely be the plural of extension meaning 'eternal' for obviously this 'eternity' has not even began yet. Apart from holding that the biblical writer was mistaken in his expectations, there are but two alternatives. Either (a) the time of Israel's

deliverance has not yet begun, or (b) there is a big interim gap of several millenniums in the period. Neither (a) nor (b) will accord with the concept of eternal.

'Salvation of ages' may better be thought of as deliverance for which Israel has waited 'long time.' This interpretation avoids the dilemma, and shows the verse to be in harmony with Israel's history and the prophet's expectations.

The parallel, "Ye shall not be confounded 'ad olamei ad' is universally rendered future in English. The A.V. and R.V. 'world without end' cannot be regarded as translation at all. Jerome's 'aeternum plus ultra' may be considered feasible only if we accept the probability that in his day 'aeternum' did not mean 'endlessness', otherwise to speak of a 'beyond' is a contradiction in terms which one is not prepared to ascribe to a scholar of Jerome's skill and devotion. It is here suggested that the meaning is 'unto the ages of the future' or 'for ages of times to come' a concept consonant with inter testamental writings and the Qumran scrolls.

That the faithful in Israel even today, still retain this hope that the deliverance awaited so long, for ages (olamim), will someday come and will extend beyond the foreseeable future periods - indefinitely or to obscurity - shows that their understanding corresponds with the view set out above. The introduction of the terms 'eternal,' 'everlasting' or 'forever' involves incongruities at variance with known facts.

Isa.51:9 'Awake, awake put on strength, O arm of the Lord. Awake as in the days of old, the generations of ancient times (olamim).' For this latter phrase, the A.V. has 'in generations of old'; R.V., 'of ancient times'; R.S.V., 'of long ago'; Rotherham 'of by-gone ages.'

Any if these makes good sense. Obviously 'olamim' coupled with 'generations' and 'days of old' must be limited to humanity's history. The apposition of the two phrases confirms the reasoning of the discussion above.

Ecclesiastes 1:10 'Is there a thing whereof men say, See this is new? It hath been already in the ages which were before us.' (olamim) (R.V. and R.S.V.). The A.V. has 'of old time'. More literally the verse would run, 'Already hath it been for ages; it is something which was before us', and so Rotherham renders it.

The use of 'old time or times', 'Ages before us' or 'for ages past' would seem to reproduce both the wording and the thought of the text.

Daniel 9:24, "Seventy weeks have been divided (A.V. 'determined', R.V. 'decreed', Rotherham 'divided') concerning thy people and concerning thy holy city,

(a) to put an end to the transgression,
(b) and fill up the measure of sin,
(c) and put a propitiatory cover over iniquity.

And

(d) bring in the righteousness of ages, (olamim),
(e) and fix a seal to vision and prophecy,
(f) and anoint the Holy of Holies (or most holy)'.
(f) and anoint the Holy of Holies (or most holy)'.

We have here first a definite time period, 'seventy weeks' (probably weeks of years). Then follow six items indicating the objectives to be accomplished in the divided period. The first three (a), (b) and (c) above, are preparatory, negative prerequisites for the three long-awaited positives (d), (e) and (f) to emerge.

Of these latter (d) mentions 'olamim'. Perhaps one way to think of this 'righteousness' may be as an attribute of the Deity and hence as 'eternal', but the context in which the passage is to be understood must be that of the author who is thinking of 'thy people' and the 'holy city'. If that interpretation is right then righteousness 'olamim', may well mean a righteousness that rectifies the wrongs of ages and last for ages. There is considerable evidence, as we shall later see, to indicate that the time of writing of the book of Daniel, the

concept of 'an age' and 'the age' had evolved. 'Righteousness of ages' is commended as a satisfactory translation.

It can now be claimed, with considerable assurance that the above examination of all the 'olamim' passages indicates that the questions posed earlier should be answered thus.

(a) All the texts containing 'olamim' can be logically translated and interpreted without any reference to eternity at all.

(b) The introduction of concepts of endless time or timelessness leads to incongruities in almost every case.

(c) The view that 'olamim' is a normal plural signifying extensive periods of time, often obscure as to dating either of inauguration, or ending, or both, provides meaningful renderings consistently throughout, and consonant with the context, in every case.

CHAPTER FIVE OLAM REPEATED

The phrases 'from olam and to olam' and 'from the olam and to the olam' are not common in the O.T. There are eleven examples of which eight are liturgical. The phrase follows such expressions as 'Blessed the Lord or Blessed be the Lord' (six cases). 'Thou art God' (Psa.90:2) and 'The mercy of the Lord,' (Psa. 103:17). Three others refer to the promise or possession of the land or kingdom. (Jer.7:7 and 25:5, Dan.7:18)

Some cases are anarthrous (no 'the') a few contain the definite article. These latter are in Chronicles, Nehemiah, Daniel and the Psalms. (41:13; 106:48) The use of the definite article strongly suggests the existence of some concept of time which we may call 'ages.'

The very use of 'min', (from) and 'ad' (to) demands a distinguishable difference between two entities. In respect to time (as of course to space) one may speak of passing 'to' and 'from' a single entity (to-X-from); but to go 'from' one point or period 'to' another logically requires two entities (from X to Y). Of course if we are talking about eternity itself then 'from' and 'to' can have no meaning at all.

Therefore the form of the phrase 'from the olam and to the olam' demands the concepts of separate periods and proves that the idea of periods of some sort expressed by olam had developed.

In Jer.7:7 and in 25:5, the Jews are urged to mend their ways that 'I may cause you to dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers 'from olam to olam.' One Jer.7:7 Rotherham comments, 'From times long past even unto times long to come. Scarcely from everlasting to everlasting.'

We might add, certainly not 'from all eternity to all eternity'. Both the promise of the land and its occupancy had a beginning in history, so cannot be eternal, but are terrestrial in location and scope. There must be an element of devious eisegesis in introducing either 'everlasting' or 'eternal' into these two passages.

Daniel 7:18 states (R.V.) 'The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, even forever and ever' (to olam and to olam of olams).

The form of this composite phrase is unique in the O.T. There are no other identical formulae for comparison. the following comments are offered as likely pointers to its original meaning.

(a) The repetition of 'olam' suggests that this term did not of itself represent unlimited duration, otherwise the first 'olam' would have covered all time.

(b) The whole context is oriented to a future period, which had then not even begun.

(c) In the one phrase we have both singular (olam) and plural (olamim). A plural eternity is by definition an impossibility, so the terms must refer to some periods of time.

(d) 'Remotest time' is more plausible; but 'remotest time and remotest time of remotest times is self contradictory.

(e) To a remote time even a remote time of remote times would conform to Hebrew idiom making the second phrase a normal Hebraic polytonic superlative. (Compare King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Holy of holies, Song of songs, etc.)

(f) Presently evidence will be advanced to show that at least by the time of the writing of the book of Daniel, late by any theory of dating, the concept of an age, and of 'periods' of time had developed. If this be accepted, the text may then be translated 'to (or for?) an age, even an age of ages'. By treating 'an age of ages' as a normal Hebraic superlative we get, "the saints... shall possess the kingdom unto (perhaps, for) an age even (the best) age of ages'.

From the standpoint of the Jew of the exile even to the present day, the envisaged age of their nation's possessing the kingdom has been regarded as the 'age of ages', the time of restoration and promised blessing of which the O.T. has much to say.

This rendering and interpretation is simple, direct, and consistent with Hebrew grammar, with the context, with the overwhelming majority of the cases of olam, and with the Bible throughout.

Further, acceptance of the above remarks removes all difficulty from Jeremiah 25:5, "Return... from the wickedness of your doings, so shall ye remain on the soil which Yahweh hath given you and to your fathers even from age to age.'

Of the eight liturgical passages containing 'from olam and to olam' or 'from the olam and to the olam' four call for blessing of the Deity. (I Chron.16:36,29: 29:10, Neh.9:5 and Psa.41:13) What does it mean to 'bless the Lord?' In each case the root of the verb is barak. Davidson gives the primary adoration, meaning as 'to bend the knee,' 'to worship.' This suggests adoration, and if the verb were applied only to man's attitude to God, this would suffice; but often the order is reversed and God is said to 'bless' individuals, groups and nations; and this seems to mean the conferring of benefits.

However in the texts now being considered the expression appears to be a call to worship the Lord, made to human beings and as such must apply at the most to a period co-terminus with that of the human race. This sets a limit so far as the past is concerned.

Liturgical expressions tend to be poetic and unsure grounds for precise doctrinal statements of fact. The common liturgical expression 'world without end' is in conflict with credal statements about 'the end of the world', and eschatological matters related thereto.

The sentences calling for "blessing Yahweh" from olam and to olam read like pious aspirations or desires that men would remember God's goodness and thank him always. If it could be shown that in other contexts the phrase (or its component terms) embraced infinite duration, then it would be fair to regard it so here also. The evidence set out in the preceding pages suggests, 'Bless the Lord from age to age" is a proper translation. Probably the writers had nothing more definite in mind than 'all the time.'

In Psa. 90:2 "From olam and to olam Thou art God', the author appears to be struggling to express the concept that the existence of Deity precedes all creation, reaching into the past beyond the capacity of the human mind to comprehend, and likewise with regard to the future, but the repetition of olam and the form of the phrase show that this Hebrew word did not itself compass infinity. The same conclusion arises from the present survey of the cases of olam repeated.

It may of course be urged that it is the whole formula which is meant to convey the sense of eternity. For those who think of eternity as time extended beyond measure into both past and future that could be a possible interpretation wherever the content will permit, but then it would not be olam which implied unbounded duration since when that concept is attributed to the term itself incongruities continually emerge.

CHAPTER SIX HA OLAM, OLAMIM AND HA OLAMIM

The question of whether 'olam' in O.T. times ever represented a concept of an age or period of time possessing some distinctive characteristics and therefore recognizable as separate in some sense from another age or ages, has some importance in this attempt to discover the meaning of the above terms during the composition of the O.T.

In modern times we commonly speak of 'the stone age,' 'the scientific age,' 'the age of reason' and so on without envisaging any exact limiting date lines. The beginning and end are obscure, but nevertheless the use of the definite article and some qualifying adjective or phrase indicates the existence of the idea of a recognizable period in some way individualistic. Such periods often overlap, and many complex factors are involved, so precise limits cannot be determined.

Also when we use the term 'age' figuratively and hyperbolically, we omit the definite article e.g. 'She takes an age (or ages) to choose a frock.' The relatively long time, and the uncertainty of the moment of conclusion of the project correspond, as we have seen, with the majority of the O.T. cases of the use of 'olam'.

While it is common knowledge that the Hebrew of O.T. times showed little regard for the sort of logical systematic thought patterns for which Greek philosophers are noted, it seems both rational and psychologically sound to expect that if the concept of an age existed, and did not mean the whole time, there would also accompany it, not only the plural form of the word but also the concept of a plurality of ages. The two ideas are necessarily related and supplementary - the one cannot exist without the other and the use of one presupposes the existence of the other.

The argument might be set out thus.

(a) Unless 'an age' means all the time i.e. if it means a part of time, there must be another part or parts. Hence the existence of 'one age' necessitates a plurality.

(b) Normally a plural for which a singular exists presupposes the existence of single individual entities. There cannot be more than 'one' of an entity of which there do not exist separate 'ones'.

Therefore we present in this chapter a list of the occurrences of the terms 'the olam', 'olam' repeated and 'olamim' in the O.T., and the following questions should be kept in mind as the passages are considered.

(a) Can we establish the period in which 'the olam' appeared in writing?

(b) Does its usage (the way it is used) indicate the nature of the concept it represented?

(c) Is the emergence of "the olam' in any way contemporaneous with the earliest cases of the plural and/or with 'olam' repeated?

HA OLAM OLAM REPEATED OLAMIM
THE OLAM FROM OLAM TO OLAM PLURAL
I Chron.16:36 I Chron.16:36 II Chron.6:2
17:14 29:10 I Kings 8:13
Psa.28:9 Psa.41:13 Psa.61:4
41:13 90:2 77:5
106:48 103:17 77:7
133:3 106:48 145:13
Eccles.3:11 Jer.7:7 Eccles.1:10
Jer.28:8 25:5 Isa.26:4
Neh.9:5 Neh.9:5 45:17

Dan.12:7 Dan.7:18 (a and b)
Joel 2:2 51:9
Dan.2:4
9:24

Since dating of O.T. books can be no more than approximation, no precise conclusions can be drawn from these lists. The following notes are suggestive only.

Chronicles is now generally regarded as a late compilation.

It is placed first on the list because in it all three terms appear.

From this we may infer that by the time of its editing into the form we have, "the olam" and the plural "olamim" were being used concurrently.

In I Ki.8:13 'olamim' is used in Solomon's prayer at the temple dedication. If these words are those actually used by him, that would show that the plural was then in use. It is likely that many psalms should be dated earlier than this; Psalms 41 is commonly attributed to David. Both 'the olam' and 'olam' repeated occur in verse 13. the fact that all three expressions appear a number of times in the Psalms suggests that in answer to question (a) (Can we establish the time when 'the olam' appeared in writing?) we may tentatively reply, 'Yes, broadly speaking in the days of the Undivided Kingdom'. The fact that in Psa.41:13 we have 'from the olam to the olam'. which implies two periods and hence plurality, supports the view that 'the olam' and 'olamim' if not contemporary in emergence, at least were linked in usage.

Since the expression here, as is common with most cases of 'the olam,' is liturgic, it probably does not justify any specific statement respecting the idea behind the term. For example it gives no indication of any idea of a beginning or an end, nor any characteristic features. This obscurity or indefiniteness is not to be equated with eternity; non-clarity is not equivalent to endlessness.

To our second question (b) (Does the way 'the olam' is used indicate the nature of the concept it represented?) the answer must be, 'No. It is not at all clear.'

To the third question © (Is the emergence of 'the olam' in any way contemporaneous with the earliest cases of the plural, or of 'olam' repeated?) the answer must be, 'Yes. These terms appear in the same books or those usually ascribed to the same period.'

In this regard, we repeat, it is important to keep in mind that the element of obscurity regarding a concept of time does not at all justify the introduction of endlessness when time periods are indefinite. In such cases the imposing of post biblical or philosophic concepts upon the text instead of admitting that we do not know, is worse than useless; it impedes the progress of the search for the truth.

The synoptic lists above suggest that the development of the use of 'olam' in the sense of a period of time similar to that covered by 'aion' and accompanied by the use of the plural 'olamim' arose during the existence of Israel as a united nation somewhere about 1000 B.C.

PART TWO

CHAPTER SEVEN 'OLAM' AS ETERNAL?

At the outset of this chapter it will be wise to recall the definition of 'eternal' as 'duration' without beginning or end'. The writer confesses that when he set out to examine the four hundred plus occurrences of 'olam' and its plural the held the view that a number of these, especially those relating to the Deity, would at least support the view that some, if not all, O.T. writers had a concept of eternity for which the term 'olam' was used. That view has been severely shaken, as upon critical examination, passage after passage initially listed as possible

examples of 'olam' signifying infinite duration were found in contexts that required the meaning of indefiniteness or obscurity in reference to time.

Some folks may say that since God is eternal, whenever 'olam' or any other time term, is applied to the Deity, it must mean eternal. Such specious argument can never lead to valid results. This point may need some clarification.

Let us be agreed that God is eternal. To then say that he is God of time, God of this age, God of the days of old, or even God of this moment, does not in any way conflict with his eternal being. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not by that title limited to the patriarchs, nor does the 'Lord of the whole earth', (Joshua 3:11,13) confine him to the terrestrial sphere. By association finite concepts of time or space with the name of God, we do not in any sense question or impugn His infinite transcendence.

If then a study of the context or grammar of a passage where 'olam' is linked with the divine name points to some meaning other than 'eternal' our course is clear. In cases where it is not possible to determine the meaning precisely, honesty of purpose and of method demands that we admit our ignorance and refuse to equate 'obscurity' with 'eternity.'

Looseness of expression should be rigidly avoided. In English 'eternal' is often used ambiguously. In the aphorism, 'The price of freedom is eternal vigilance', the meaning is 'constant', 'unremitting, perhaps 'perpetual', whereas to infer that such vigilance was, is, and will be needed through the duration of the being of God, without beginning or end, must be rejected as having no relevance to the matter at all. Such loose use of 'eternal' is eschewed throughout these studies.

Further it must be remembered that whatever may possibly have been the effect of Greek concepts upon N.T. writers, an open question still, any process by which unconsciously, such ideas may be applied to O.T. statements must be guarded against. Then too, liturgical ascriptions are seldom critically examined. How many millions of times has 'Glory to the Father... world without end' been recited, the participants giving no consideration to the meaning of the last phrase which presumably signifies simply 'always' or 'perpetually'. Constant vigilance then is necessary lest we read into biblical passages extra-biblical concepts, modern views, theological indoctrination, or our private ideas. To avoid all such influences many be a counsel of perfection, but it should engage our utmost endeavors.

The following passages have been chosen for examination in this chapter because at first glance it may appear that in them 'olam' could represent a concept of eternity in the mind of the biblical author. The question to be asked is, 'Do these verses demonstrate that their writers had that concept, and expressed it by 'olam?'

In Genesis 21:33 the statement appears, 'Abraham called there (at Beersheba) on the name of Yahweh, God olam.'

Here we have the only instance of 'el' (God) and 'olam' conjoined.

Various renderings have been advanced:

God, the Hidden One, the Unseen God, the Obscure Deity (i.e. unknown, unless self revealed). Luther suggested, 'God of the Ages', Rotherham, 'age abiding God'. Some scholars have linked Abraham's planting of the tamarisk tree in Beersheba with the tree cult of pre-Israelite Canaanite religion and have regarded the name 'el olam' as a title borrowed from that source. If this should be the case we can see why the term is never repeated in O.T. writings since its use would tend to favor the syncretism of monotheistic Yahwahism with pagan cults against which the Hebrew prophets unanimously campaigned. The only conclusion we may draw from the expression is a negative one. Genesis 21:33 does not disclose the meaning of 'olam'.

Now **Ex.3:13-15** uses 'olam' in a different grammatical sense. **Verse 15** reads 'Yahweh, the God of Abraham hath sent me unto you. This is my name **le olam**'. In Gen.21:33 'olam' appears to be used adjectively, in Ex.3:15, adverbially, with a time reference to the name not to the duration of God himself. Several reasons may be given for rejecting eternity here.

(a) As Yahweh was a new name for the Deity, it could not have been His eternal name.

(b) All names couched in human language must of necessity be limited in relation to the time period during which humanity has lived (or lives) and thought (or thinks) on such matters.

(c) This name, in fact every name for God, represents a concept; hence it must follow, not precede the emergence of the idea, and so cannot be eternal.

(d) The name 'Yahweh' is recorded as emerging in Hebrew history as a point in time. it will be used for an indefinite period, 'olam', by humans on earth. For how long? No one knows; hence 'olam' with its basic sense of obscurity is an appropriate expression. Let it be clearly recognized her that this discussion is not about what may possibly be the name to be used by humans or any other creatures in some envisaged further life in 'eternity'. The Hebrew O.T. has nothing to say about that, and this enquiry concerns the thought in the Hebrew writers mind, not that is some modern theological system. Therefore the question is, 'What did this verse mean to the Israelite of pre- kingdom days?'

The parallel is very suggestive: 'This is my name le olam. And this my memorial to generation (after) generation.'

Though preserved in most versions, the parallel is lost in the R.S.V. which translates the second line 'and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations' which suggests and imperative rather than indicative mood. First we should inquire as to the antecedent of 'this'. Is it (a) Yahweh or (b) the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Issac, of Jacob or (c) the whole formula?

That © should be chosen seems to be indicated by the repetition of the whole formula in verse 16. This repeated reference to the patriarchal generations, 'your fathers' emphasizes the 'generation (after) generation' and directs the thought backwards, as well as forwards in time. So the idiomatic 'le dor dor" almost certainly takes in some generations past and possibly all future activities on earth.

The memorial name must be limited in time as to its inception, and indefinite as to the period of its future usage, the only indication at all being the parallel, which certainly should not be equated with infinite duration or even everlasting futurity. Since the period for which the memorial name was predicted would be as obscure to the Hebrews as it is to us, 'le olam' may have meant throughout Israel's history. about the absolute duration of which, the Exodus writer appears not to have had nay views, or if he possessed some, wisely refrained from committing them to writing.

Regarding the oath attributed to Yahweh in Deuteronomy 32:40, similar remarks apply. The passage is intensely anthropomorphic. To interpret it literally would be naive in the extreme. The Deity is represented as taking an oath respecting the vengeance He proposes to take upon 'the long-haired head of the enemy' and he begins with hand raised to heaven.

If we were writing in similar context today we would use the words, 'As I live eternally', employing a Latin term, but no evidence can be gained by anachronistically applying our concepts to writings about 3000 years old. It is possible that the writer of Deuteronomy may have had limitless being in mind here, but the use of 'olam' for time periods limited at least as to their beginnings, in more than four hundred other cases, must be little short of proof that eternity was not here envisaged, but just some indefinite period stretching into the unknown past and future.

Deut.33:27 forms part of a highly poetic, metaphoric, anthropomorphic passage.

'THE ANCIENT GOD IS A DWELLING PLACE AND BENEATH ARE THE OLAM ARMS.'

The interpretation one arrives at is simply that the Lord is a constant comfort to those in need at any time, always. When today a person quotes this verse, he is not thinking of endless eternity spent upheld in God's

arms; but that God is always a support in time of need; and that thought, along with the associated parallelism appears to be the idea intended in **Deut. 33:27**.

An uncritical reading of **Psalms 45:6**, "Thy throne O God olam wa ad", suggests that here eternity is in view, and that 'olam' had been used to convey that concept, but a little analysis throws grave doubt on this conclusion; for, if 'olam' itself meant eternal, then 'ad' becomes redundant. A suggested analogy with the English idiomatic 'for ever and ever' cannot be entertained, since in that phrase we have repeated the same word 'ever', while in the Hebrew phrase being examined 'olam' and 'ad' are two different terms. Also 'ever' has a nebulous adverbial nuance, and as soon as it is replaced by some noun or phrase, either the idea of endlessness disappears (long time and long time) or incongruity emerges (endless time and endless time), or eternity and eternity), and so it would be if both Hebrew terms meant the same. Even if it could be proved that the phrase 'olam wa ad' formed an idiomatic expression meaning infinite duration, that would still not show that 'olam' itself meant eternal. A more likely explanation seems to be that the author wished to express his concept of the inexhaustible unlimited power of Yahweh and knowing that 'olam' did not signify infinity, added 'wa ad' 'and beyond', or 'further still', so that his readers might be directed to think of duration beyond that usually covered by 'olam.'

The dozen or so liturgic repetitions of 'His mercy endureth le olam.' (I Chron.16:34,36.41; II Chron. 5:13, 7:3,6; 20:21) and in the psalms provide little support for using 'eternal' to translate olam. Mercy relates to sinful humans. No one supposes such folk to have existed eternally. God's mercy operates in human need. The liturgy would recognize its availability at all times - perhaps conditioned by repentance and faith.

Some special attention should be given to the use of 'olam' in Deutero-Isaiah (the present writer is using the term Deutero-Isaiah to mean the second section of the book from chapter 40 onwards). Some writers have claimed that because of the development of new concepts regarding the 'eternity of God', 'olam' is here used to denote temporal infinity. A careful systematic objective study of the usage of this word and other expressions in theological contexts in Deutero-Isaiah tends rather to a different view. Only once (Isa.40:27,28) is 'olam' linked with the divine name and then in the context of past history 'Hast thou not known. Hast thou not heard that the God olam, Yahweh, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not?' If olam elsewhere signified eternity we might well accept that meaning here, but when Isaiah wishes to express a concept of the being of Yahweh as transcending that of creation he resorts to circumlocutionary phrases such as **'I am the First and I am the last.'** (Isa.41:4; 48:12)

Perhaps Isaiah was struggling to express some idea of infinite duration but it must be doubtful whether 'first' and 'last' and 'from the beginning' indicate that concept. Rather, do these terms suggest Yahweh's casual creative activity as Originator and Controller of cosmic forces, dynamic rather than temporal references.

It would appear that if Isaiah wished to express the eternity of God all that would have been needed would have been to say that Yahweh had no beginning and would have no ending. At the same time we must recognize that the human mind cannot compass the infinite and this present study leads to the view that the O.T. biblical writers wisely refrained from attempting the impossible. Nor does there seem to be any passage in the O.T. where olam is employed to convey an idea of absolute eternity infinite in duration without beginning or end, a concept that has probably been anachronistically associated with the word by writers influenced by later philosophy.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUGGESTED CONCLUSIONS RESPECTING OLAM, OLAM REPEATED, AND THE PLURAL

It is fitting now to set out the conclusions which may be drawn from the material in the preceding pages.

(a) Eternity, without beginning or ending is never mentioned as such in the 'olam' passages of the O.T., nor so far as we can discover, is there any statement from which convincing evidence can be obtained in relation to 'olam', to show that the concept of infinite future duration existed among Hebrew writers in O.T. times. Hence the words 'eternal' and 'everlasting' should not be used to translate the 'olam' terms.

(b) In books now usually regarded as late (I Chronicles, Nehemiah, Ecclesiastes and possibly late Psalms 41,48,106,133) the occurrence of 'the olam' suggests the emergence of some idea of an 'age'. This is supported by the use of the plural in books of the same period (II Chron., Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Daniel, Psalms 61,77,145, and in I Kings 8:13). But there is no indication of any view of boundaries of any sort pertaining to age or period such as say, from creation to the flood, or the like. This of course corresponds to our usage also; the stone age, the age of steam, the dark ages, and other such expressions are never precisely dated.

(c) The element of hidden-ness, indefiniteness as to duration, and of obscurity pervades the whole range of 'olam' terms throughout. Even in cases where the meaning is clearly for the rest of one's life, 'a slave olam', or a limited period such as Jonah's three days, because of the imprecision respecting the length of the period (in Jonah's case the impossibility of his assessing the time), the sense of obscurity is still present. This highlights the difficulty of transferring nuances from one language to another particularly from Oriental to Western. The contexts require the use of terms such as - 'any more,' 'always,' 'remote or obscure times,' 'long past,' and 'far future.' Sometimes 'everlasting,' if understood as futuristic only, may be considered, but only if the 'ever' is regarded as equivalent to 'long time future to the point of obscurity', and even then 'remote or obscure future' would be more accurate as a rendering for 'olam.'

'Age abiding' (Rotherham) and 'age-during' (Young), while more appropriate than 'eternal', or 'for ever' are too suggestive of a concept of time composed of, or divided into recognized 'ages,' an idea which probably was emerging in post exilic Hebrew thought but of which there is no sure evidence (elsewhere) in the O.T. However by N.T. times the idea of several ages had become explicit in Rabbinic thought (see Chapter 10) and formed an important element in the doctrines taught by our Lord and the apostolic writers.

CHAPTER NINE AION, AIONES, AIONIOS

Translation from one language to another is a notoriously difficult task, the expression of nuances felt to be present in one tongue being often practically impossible in another because of lack of appropriate vocabulary. Therefore it is to be expected that some discordance will arise.

In the translation of 'aion' in well-known English versions, the following forty different renderings appear: Age, eon, time, period, today, the future, universe, course, world, worldly, world without end, since the world began, from the beginning of the world, ever, evermore, forever and ever, end of my days, eternal, everlasting, always, permanently, constantly, of old, ancient times, all time (since) time was, (since) time began, (before) time began, all time, (since) the beginning of time, eternal ages, eternal life, eternity, course of eternity, utter (darkness), (the son) does (remain), ages of the eternities, (in and through) the eternities of the eternities, etc.

For 'aionios' the English versions use:- everlasting, eternal, eonian, age lasting, age during, age duringly, age abiding, (in) the time of the ages, age times, (before) the ages of time, of the ages, (in) the periods of past ages, (before) the ages began, for the ages of time, (before) the beginning of time, since the world began, (before) the times of the world, (before) times eternal, from eternity, from all eternity, for ever, unending, final, unending, permanent, immemorial, enduring, lasting, eternally, long, perpetual, an immeasurable eternity, last, heavenly.

The above lists, compiled by J. Kirk, Eonian, Everlasting or Age-lasting. (Sacred literature Concern, Los Angeles, undated) have been gathered from The Douay Version (1582), The King James Version (1611), Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott (1881), Rotherham's Emphasized Bible (1872), The English Revised Version (1881), The American Standard Version (1901), Young's Literal Translation, The Modern Reader's Bible (1898), The Numerical Bible (1899), The Twentieth Century New Testament (1901), The N.T. in Modern Speech (Weymouth) (1903), The Complete Bible in Modern Speech (Fenton) (1906), Moffat's N.T. (1922), Goodspeed's N.T. (1923), The Centenary N.T. (Montgomery) (1924), Darby's W.T., The Concordant N.T. (1930), The Numeric English N.T. (Ivan Panin) (1935), The N.T. or Covenant (Cunnington) (1935).

The present writer expresses his indebtedness to the late Mr. J. Kirk, for these lists.

From the above multiplicity of terms it is evident that there has been no uniformity among translators as to how these Greek words should be rendered in English. While it is to be expected that, in different contexts, the

terms will carry varying shades of meaning, it should be possible by studying all the occurrences of the derivatives of the root, to arrive at a common basic significance. Since aion is used consistently in the Septuagint to render 'olam.' Our study of that word should form a basis for work on Greek terms.

The N.T. however provides only two quotations from the O.T. containing 'olam', both in Hebrew. In chapter 1 verse 8, Psalm 45:6 is cited,

'Thy throne O God (is) olam wa ad'. The LXX has 'eis aiona aionos' Heb.1:8 alters the phrase to 'eis ton aiona tou aionos', 'unto (or into) the aeons of the aeon.'

These phrases and other similar one have no particular meaning in Greek.

They must be regarded as Hebrew constructions in Greek words. The use of the definite article in the N.T. text suggests that in the intervening 300 years since the translating of the LXX about 250 B.C. the concept of an aeon as a time period corresponding in some degree with 'the olam' had been established in biblical thought patterns. A simple explanation of the slight difference in the LXX phrase and the N.T. quotation may be that the psalm writer envisaged the rule of God as extending into the remote unforeseeable future and beyond any human prognostication, whereas the N.T. eschatology embraced the concept of several aeons to come, the conditions in the second being resultant from the activity of Christ as the Son in the preceding one; that is, one aeon the outcome of the other and hence 'the aeon of the aeon'. On the other hand the N.T. phrase may be due to the carrying over of the Hebrew construct idiom into the Greek. The influence of the normal Hebrew polytonic expression of the superlative degree, upon the Greek N.T. phrase will be discussed later.

In Heb.5:6, Psa.110:4 'Thou shalt be a priest 'to olam', is quoted as in LXX 'to (or for) the aion'. No difficulty arise here. Rev.21:22 states that in the New Jerusalem, the seer saw 'no temple'. It matters little how one interprets the term 'New Jerusalem', the fact remains that the N.T. predicts that in those far off future times of the consummation of the aeonian purpose of God, sin and death, enmity and sorrow "shall be no more'. Where no sin remains, no sacrificial priestly service can be needed. the Son's office as priest therefore cannot be 'for ever", but only for the age or period in which any humanity are estranged from God.

The whole argument of this section of Hebrews is that the Aaronic priesthood and sacrificial ritual 'brought nothing to completion'. It was a treadmill of repetitive service which could not make the participants perfect. But Christ's priestly intercession is to continue "for ever", his priesthood will have no more attained its objective than the Aaronic. Once human estrangement has been replaced by universal reconciliation, no further priestly mediacy will be needed. Hence Christ is, 'priest after the order of Melchisadech for the age, 'eis ton aiona'. These remarks apply also to Heb.6:20, 7:17,21,24 and 28 each of which refers to the Son's priesthood.

By N.T. times there had developed in Hebrew Rabbinic thinking the concepts of 'the present age' and 'the age to come'. Since the N.T. writers were familiar with the LXX Greek version of the O.T., from which they frequently quoted, and which employed 'aion' (age) and 'aiones' (ages) to translate 'olam' and 'olamim', we can readily see how these Greek terms took on the meaning belonging to the Hebrew words. The phrases 'the present age' and 'the age to come' are common in the N.T.

The dozens of various English expressions used by translators to render 'aion' and its derivatives can readily be divided into two groups, (a) those relating to finite time such as 'age,' 'aeon,' 'old time,' 'age-abiding' and the like; and (b) those pertaining to infinity, 'eternal,' 'eternity', and probably in the translators' thinking, 'everlasting' and 'for ever'. The distinction in definition set out in Chapter 1 regarding 'eternal' and 'everlasting' should be kept in mind, but translators who use these terms for 'olam' and 'aion,' often appear to regard them as synonyms, and along with many theological writers, employ them interchangeably with consequent confusion.

Since consideration of space precludes discussion of all of the 180 occurrences of 'aion' and its derivatives, a selection of typical cases follows, along with an examination of contexts, the objective being to discover the concept or concepts represented by these terms.

The questions to which answers will be sought are these:

- (a) Does the basic meaning of 'an age' or 'aeon' of time pervade the whole N.T. usage and provide a basis for a consistent understanding of those writings?
- (b) Does the use of the plural, 'aiones,' indicate a concept of some recognizable periods within the total duration covered by biblical history and predictive prophecy?
- (c) Are these expressions used to say something about 'eternity,' thought of either as timelessness or as infinite time?

Definitive answers to these questions must basically affect our understanding of predictive prophecy and the N.T. teaching regarding human destiny.

CHAPTER TEN AION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

It is common practice to base a discussion of the N.T. use of 'aion' upon some association with the Rabbinic concepts of 'this age' and 'the coming age'. This is a useful starting point for it shows that by N.T. times the concept of recognizable periods with distinguishing characteristics had become established in Hebrew thinking and, although the earliest proven occurrence of the above expressions in Rabbinic writings belongs late in the first century A.D., the frequency of N.T. references to 'this aeon,' 'the present aeon,' 'that aeon,' 'the coming aeon' indicates that the idea of one age giving place to another was common in both Judaic and Christian thought. An important question is to determine what events or developments were regarded as bringing about or indicating the change over from 'this aeon' to 'the coming aeon.'

In Rabbinic works the advent of Israel's long awaited Messiah forms the disjunctive point, and therefore may biblical scholars and students have argued that since Christians hold that Jesus was in fact the Messiah, the Christ event formed the demarcation between 'this age' and 'the age to come.'

Now the concept of the messianic advent and associated developments took definite shape and became invested with urgent expectation during the inter-testamental period. The Qumran scrolls provide much evidence of the Messiah(s) upon the sect's religious theory and conduct. Also the utterances of Simeon and Anna recorded in Luke 2, indicate the state of expectancy existing in devout Jewish circles at the time of the birth of Jesus.

Little definite material can be found in the O.T. itself to show what characteristics were anticipated in the Messiah. The **'Deliverer who should come out of Zion and turn away ungodliness from Jacob' (Isa.59:20,21 quoted in Rom.11:26)** appears to have to have been envisaged as an ideal king who would establish Israel as the supreme terrestrial race in a kingdom without end. This concept is expressed in Luke 1:32,33, which contains ideas from II Sam.7:11-13 and 16; Psa.89:4; 132:11; Isa.9:6,7; and 16:5. Looking back with hindsight, N.T. writers and Bible students ever since have linked up many O.T. passages and even isolated sentences with the person and work of Jesus; but that the O.T. authors or their pre-Christian readers regarded many of such statements as applying to the Messiah seems doubtful. Probably the establishment of Israel as a people faithful to their God in a kingdom holding world-wide sway, formed the most important ingredient in the Messianic hope. The disciples' question in Acts 1:6 accords with this view.

Of course the Rabbis did not regard the first advent of our Lord as the disjunctive episode between the two ages, but since the N.T. writers regarded Jesus as the promised Messiah, the question arises whether they believed his birth, life, death, and resurrection actually and completely fulfilled the O.T. prophecies on which the Rabbinic expectations were based, and hence the then 'present age' closed with his birth and 'the coming age' opened with say Pentecost so that the whole Christ event formed a transition period between the two ages.

For an answer we turn to a study of the N.T. usage of the word 'aion' and its derivatives. Respecting 'this aeon' it should be noted that Jesus is recorded as using the phrases 'in this aeon', 'in the coming aeon' and sons 'of this aeon' (Matt.12:32, Mark 10:30 and Luke 16:8; 18:30, 20:34 and 35) but the great majority of occurrences are in the Pauline letters. (Rom.12:2, I Cor.1:20; 2:6,8; 3:18, II Cor.4:4, Gal.1:4, Eph.1:21; 2:2, II Tim.4:10,

Tit.2:12). The only other case is in Heb.6:5. In popular versions translators have frequently used the word 'world' to render 'aion', thus deleting the time reference inherent in the original Greek term.

Now in determining the location of the demarcation between 'this aeon' and 'the coming aeon' **Luke 20:34, 35** provides a definite indication.

"The sons of this aeon marry and are given in marriage, but they that are counted worthy to attain to that aeon and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry or are given in marriage."

The whole passage - verses 27 to 36, is concerned with the future resurrection. This climactic event was future then, when Paul wrote I Cor.15, and when the Apocalypse was written. The stern warning in II Tim.2:18 against 'men who concerning the truth have erred saying that (the) resurrection is past already', shows that even in those early Christian days there were individuals who imposed their own ideas about the timing of this important event, upon the apostle's teaching and 'overthrew the faith of some.'

The unique importance of the future resurrection and its associated events and developments as the episode which will mark the division between 'this age' and 'the coming age' will become increasingly evident as we record the characteristics of each of these early periods.

Regarding 'this aeon' we note the following points:

A. Once it is seen that the N.T. writers regard the end of 'this aeon' as future still and marked by the resurrection and Christ's second advent, there is no major clash between their timing and that of the Rabbis. Unless the student of the Bible is prepared to allegorize and spiritualize the bulk of the predictive prophecies, he must soon realize that the greater part of these refer to a still future presence and work of the Messiah King. With this view the Rabbinic writers agree but do not identify the Coming One with Jesus.

B. The characteristics of 'this aeon' are clearly stated in various N.T. passages.

1. It is a period of anxieties.

Mark 4:19, 'And the cares (or anxieties) of the aeon... choke the word.'

2. During 'this aeon' the good seed and the bad grow together till the consummation of the age.

Matt.13:24-30 and 36-43. Verse 39, 'The harvest is the end of (the) age.' **Verse 40**, 'Thus it will be at the end of the age.'

3. Believers are called to non-conformity with the patterns of this age. **Rom.12:2**, 'Be not conformed to this aeon'. **Titus 2:11 and 12**, 'The grace of God bringing salvation for all hath shone forth putting us under discipline so that...in a sober minded, righteous, and Godly manner we should live in this present age.'

4. The rulers of this aeon crucified the Lord of Glory.

I Cor.2:8 refers to a sacred secret 'which none of the rulers of this aeon know or would not have crucified the Lord.'

5. 'The god of this aeon blinds unbelievers respecting the evangel of the glory of Christ.' **II Cor.4:4**

6. It is an evil aeon. **Gal.1:4**, 'Our Lord Jesus Christ (who) gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us out of this present evil aeon.' 2

7. 'The sons of this age marry.' **Luke 20:34**

In contrast, 'the coming age' will see significant changes.

1. The resurrection from the dead. **Luke 20:35**, 'Those deemed worth to obtain that aeon and that resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage'.
2. The bestowal of aeonian life. **Mark 10:30**. Those who in this life forsake all for Christ will receive 'in the age to come, aeonian life.'
3. 'The forth-shining of the glory of the Great God and our Saviour.' **Titus 2:12 and 13**
4. The forth-shining of the righteous in their Father's kingdom. **Matt.13:39-43. Verse 39 (b)**, 'The harvest is the end (consummation) of (the) age.' **Verse 40 (b)**, 'Thus shall it be at the end of the age.' Many manuscripts have 'end of this age.' **Verse 43** 'Then the righteous shall shine forth in the kingdom of their Father.'
5. 'Those counted worthy to obtain that aeon do not marry but are as the angels,' **Luke 20:35 and 36**
6. A foretaste of the powers of the coming age had been experienced by some folk in N.T. times. **Hebrews 6:5**. Some had 'tasted the powers of the coming age.'

From this analysis it appears obvious that in the N.T. there exists a very definite contrast between 'this present evil age' and the glories of 'the age to come,' a contrast also prominent in Rabbinic thought, and in more nebulous form in parts of the O.T.

It may be noted here that whatever may be held regarding the duration of the coming aeon or aeons (Eph.2:7) the N.T. view of the present age is that it will come to an end. The phrase 'end of the aeon' will now be considered.

The Authorized Version, 1611, by invariably mis-translating this phrase as 'end of the world,' has produced a great deal of confusion respecting predictive prophecy regarding the future. To a lesser but still significant degree the R.V. (1881) and the A.S.R.V. (1901) have followed the same pattern. Three Greek words have thus become confused in English versions - 'aion' a time period, 'kosmos' the world of humanity (John 3:16, Rom.3:6, Rev.11:15 and 166 other N.T. cases) and 'ge' the physical earth. (II Pet.3:5-15) If for 'end of an age or this age', we read 'end of the world' we are apt to think of some catastrophic destruction of 'the earth' at doomsday. The N.T. inspired writers were not guilty of such loose, imprecise use of language, nor should we be.

Obviously if 'the world' should come to an end either (a) no further terrestrial life and development could go on (that is if we mean 'end of the earth') or (b) the human race will have concluded its career (if we mean 'humanity'). The scriptures repeatedly refer to the end (in some cases 'consummation') of 'an age', 'the age' or 'this age' but not to the end of the world.

In the Authorized (1611) and R.V. (1881) Matt.24:3 is translated, 'What shall be the sign of thy coming (Gr. parousia presence) and the end of the world?' and **Eph. 3:21**, 'To whom be glory world without end'. The contradiction in the English versions does not exist in the originals where 'aion' and its plural occur and if we render the texts accurately using 'aeon' and 'aeons' or 'age' and 'ages' no problem arises in English.

Further it should be noted that the phrase 'end of the aeon' occurs in Matthew only, and may possibly have been due to Rabbinic influence, but the use of the plural or an expression that demands plurality ('this aeon' and 'the coming aeon') in more than two third of the occurrences of 'aion' prove that several aeons were envisaged. Since one 'aeon' must follow another we cannot accept 'eternity' as a meaning for this Greek word.

Now by far the greater number of cases of the use of the singular 'aion' are in phrases of which the commonest is 'into, unto or for the aeon' (eis ton aiona). The first example is in Matt.21:19 with regard to the barren fig tree, 'May no fruit grow on thee 'eis ton aiona.'

Here the meaning may be simply 'not at all' or 'not any more'. but as our Lord's miracles were signs (John 20:30) and hence to be interpreted symbolically, the barren fig may well be representative of Israel to whom

the Messiah came (John 1:11) and was rejected. The nation was then, and has ever since been barren, withered, insensitive. (Isa.6:9, Matt. 13:13-15, John 12:37-41, Acts 28:26 and 27, cf. Luke 13:6-8.) But restoration is promised when 'the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (filled full, Luke 21:24) when 'the complement of the Gentiles' be come in (Rom.11:25 and 26) and thus, by 'the Deliverer coming forth out of Zion to turn away ungodliness from Jacob, all Israel shall be saved'.

Unless there be some symbolic meaning, the cursing of the fig must be regarded as a rather meaningless and frivolous exhibition of power. If the figurative symbolism is accepted 'unto or for the age' becomes literally pertinent, and the 'curse' or rejection of Israel will be reversed and 'the new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Jacob' will become operative at the end of the period of insensitivity as predicted by Jer.31:31, Rom. 11:27 and Heb.8:8-12.

This symbolic interpretation is consistent with Eastern thought patterns and the rest of biblical predictions and promises for Israel, and is commenced here with consequent acceptance of 'for the age' rather than 'for ever'. "Eternity" is out of the question. 'Let no fruit grow on thee for duration without beginning or ending' has only to be stated to show its inapplicability. **Mark 11:14** recounts the same incident.

Luke 1:55 is important. The concluding verse of the Magnificat speaks of Yahweh's care for Israel, 'He hath supported Israel his servant (or child) to be mindful of mercies, according as he spake unto our fathers to Abraham and his seed 'to or during an age'. The A.V. and R.V. have 'forever' but that is obviously incorrect especially as this question from the O.T. in Micah 7:20 reads 'Thou wilt give the truth to Jacob, the mercy to Abraham which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from days of old'.

From this it would appear that the Hebrew phrase in Micah, 'from days of old', would form an excellent paraphrase for the concluding phrases in **Luke 1:55**.

In John's gospel there are seven cases where 'always' and 'never' may serve to render the phrase 'unto or for the aeon', provided these terms are not taken to imply eternity.

John 4:14 reads, 'Whosoever will drink of the water that I shall give him in no wise shall thirst unto or for the age, but the water... will become in him a fountain springing up unto life aeonian.' The Samaritan woman's error of taking 'water' literally should not be ours; but read in the light John 7:39, we may understand the 'water that I shall give him' to mean the gift of the Spirit which at the time had not yet been given. An understanding of the doctrine of the Spirit in John leads to an appreciation of the appropriateness of 'unto or for the age' in John 4:14. The gift of God's Spirit was contingent upon the departure of Jesus and his later return. In the interim period of his absence the Spirit's consoling presence will abide with his followers, but in the promised reunion presence of their Lord, no such consoling representative activity of the Spirit could be needed. Hence if taken literally 'unto or for the age' seems fitting, but to force 'eternity' or even 'for ever' or 'everlasting' into these passages would make it appear that the Comforter will be needed 'for ever' even in the presence of Christ himself. (John 14:3). The Spirit's abiding in the believer's person, 'the inner fountain of life', belongs to the period between the ascension and the parousia (presence) of our Lord, that is, within this present evil age.'

In John 1:31 the Spirit is said to be given to Jesus; in 20:22 to the ten apostles, Thomas being absent; and in Acts 1:8 and 2:1-8, to the Jerusalem assembly. The seeming contrast between John 20:22 and Acts 1:8 and 2:4 may be resolved by the phrase 'with power' in Acts 1:8, there being no evidence of the power of the Spirit's presence prior to Pentecost.

In Matthew's gospel, which contains no promise of the Spirit's indwelling of the believers, Jesus is stated to have pledged his own presence till the consummation of the aeon. (**Matt.28:20**) As this presence is spiritual, not carnal, no difficulty arise in linking this promise with those in John's account.

The sic passages in John (John 6:51,58; 8:51,52; 10:28; 11:26) which treat of 'eating my flesh and drinking my blood,' 'keeping my words,' 'believing' and the like, and consequently 'not tasting death,' or 'living, unto or for the aeon,' need only be read in the light of their context (John 6:39,40,44 and 54) 'I will raise him up at the last day,' for the thought to appear that the promise of living and not dying applies to resurrection life in the coming

aeon. Those 'given me by the Father' (6:39) 'believers' (6:40) 'drawn by the Father' (6:44) 'who feed on me' (6:54) and have died along with other mortals, and are dependent upon being raised at the last day of this age to 'aeonian life.' (Luke 18:36) This is in complete harmony with the words of our Lord to Martha about resurrection life 'at the last day.'

'He who believeth on me though he die, shall live, and all the living and believing shall not in any wise die unto (or for) the aeon.' (John 11:26)

There are of course two classes of believers mentioned here,

(a) those who will have died previously to the resurrection which as we have already noted Jesus said will mark the inauguration of 'the coming age' (Luke 25:34,35); and (b) believers then living will not die. It should be particularly noticed that the context of both John 11:26 and Luke 20:34,35 is that of future resurrection. It must be evident that Martha's 'last day' is the end of this age' of Matt.13:39,40 and 49; 24:3 and 28:20, when resurrection of believers will usher in "that aeon' as Jesus is recorded as saying in Luke 20:34,35.

Further this exegesis corresponds with Paul's declaration in **I Thess.4:15-17**. "The Lord himself with a word of command, with a chief messenger's voice and with God's trumpet shall descend from heaven and the dead in Christ shall be raised first; thereupon we the living who are left over shall at the same time, together with them be caught away in cloud's (anarthrous, not in the clouds') to meet the Lord in the air, and thus evermore with the Lord we shall be.'

Thus the two classes of believers are by Paul, explicitly distinguished and related as by our Lord in John 11:26; and both passages are in full accord with references to the conclusion of this age in Matthew, (13:39,40,49; 24:3; and 28:20) to be followed by aeonian life for believers in the age to follow. (Mark 10:30, Luke 18:30; 20:35, John 4:14; 11:26)

In John 12:34 is recorded the statement of the crowd. 'We have heard out of the law that the Christ abideth 'unto or for the aeon.' As no specific O.T. reference is mentioned, it is presented that one or more of the promises respecting David's seed was in view, perhaps Psa.89:4 and subsequent verses. Here the Septuagint uses 'aion' to translate 'olam;' and the promise, 'thy throne I will build up generation after generation', suggests a terrestrial dynasty, with the probability that infinite future time was not in mind. Probably 'continuously,' 'permanently,' or 'indefinitely' would express the idea.

On the other hand, if the clause, 'We have heard out of the law,' referred to Rabbinic doctrine respecting the age to come, then the phrase 'into, unto, or for the aeon' may be read literally.

In Paul's use of the same expression in I Cor .8:13, 'In no wise will I eat flesh eis ton aiona', the meaning appears simply to be 'not for the rest of my life' or 'not any more'. Similarly in II Cor.9:9, in the quotation from Psa.112:9 regarding 'the man who revereth Yahweh and generously helps the poor, whose righteousness standeth unto the aeon', we may probably use 'all his life', 'permanently', or 'lastingly'.

From this study of the use of the singular 'aion', in various syntactical relationships, the following conclusions may be drawn.

- (a) With the prepositions 'from' and 'out of', 'aion' has the significance of 'past time' or 'a bygone age or period'.
- (b) The present age is clearly distinguished from a future age.
- (c) In some case the concept expressed by 'permanently', 'indefinitely' or 'lastingly' with the negatives 'not any more'. 'not at all', or 'never' seems appropriate.
- (d) The singular is never applied to the Deity.

There is therefore no reason to suggest that it ever includes the idea of eternity either as infinite time or timelessness.

CHAPTER ELEVEN THE PLURAL – AIONES

Of the 124 N.T. occurrences of 'aion' in its various forms, sixty cases are in the plural. In twenty-two cases, the plural is implied by the expressions 'this aeon' or 'that aeon'. This obviously rules out the possibility of 'aion' in the singular ever meaning, eternity; we cannot have several eternities; but it may be asked whether eternity itself may consist of an infinite number of such time periods. Philosophically such an idea appears attractive since an infinite series of any time spans short or long must amount to infinite duration: but our task relates solely to biblical usage not to philosophy as such.

In **I Cor.10:11** we find, 'These things (O.T. records) were written for our admonition unto whom the ends of the ages have reached along, (or maybe 'come down.')

If the N.T. aeons here meant eternity, their end or ends could never be realized; but a purpose of the ages (Eph.3:11) must come to fruition during the ages or at any rate at the consummation. In N.T. thought then, the aeons have a goal, an objective 'to which the whole creation moves.' (**Rom.8:19-21**) This of course does not imply that time then ceases, nor that other ages may not follow. These are matters about which the sacred scriptures say nothing and speculation is useless.

But during the ages God has a purpose, 'to head up all things in Christ'. This Paul calls the mystery or sacred secret. (Eph.1:9,10 and 3:9,10) In Eph.1:9, the apostle says this sacred secret 'had been hidden away from the ages in God... in order that NOW God's manifold wisdom might be made known.' The tenses of the verbs and the adverbs 'now' show that these spans of time are past.

Heb.1:2 tells us that the ages were made by God through the Son, and in **11:3** we read 'By faith we understand the aeons to have been fitted together (or adjusted, arranged) by God's command.' The whole context refers to faith regarding the future fulfillment of the promises, not to an understanding of how the physical universe was created - an erroneous idea suggested by the common rendering 'worlds' in both the above texts.

The concordant translation 'aeon of 'ages' is therefore urged for 'aeones' and the concept commended is that out of the infinity of endless duration, God prepared a period - the ages - for the accomplishment of a certain purpose. The process began with creation effected through the Son, whose revelation of the Father in his life, death, and resurrection, formed the midpoint of redemptive history and predictive prophecy, and whose ultimate presentation of a perfect universe to the Father will complete the purpose and plan for which the aeons were prepared and 'fitted together'. **I Cor.15:28**

In keeping with these thoughts, the scriptures tell us of God's activity before the aeons. **I Cor.2:7** Paul writes, 'We speak God's wisdom in a sacred secret - that hidden wisdom which God marked out before the aeons for our glory.' and in **II Tim.1:9** 'God hath saved us and called us... according to his own purpose and that grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before times of the aeons.'

Further in **Titus 1:2** we read, 'In hope of life aeonian which God... promised before times of the aeons.' The phrase 'before times of the aeons' must provide a most decisive argument against regarding the plural, 'aeons' as equated with eternity. The absurdity of defining eternity as duration without beginning or ending and then speaking about some period before eternal times must be self evident.

Not only does Paul refer to aeons past, as we have seen in Eph.3:9, but he also mentions ages to come. In **Eph.2:7** he states that God's redemptive activity for sinners is 'in order that he might show, in the coming aeons, the surpassing riches of his grace'. This reference to future ages, accords with the plural in **Luke 1:33**, 'He shall reign over the house of Jacob for the aeons.' and in **Rev.11:15**, 'He shall reign for the aeons of the aeons.'

Further in the doxology of **I Tim.1:17**, God is given the title 'King of the ages,' implying, one should think, that the existence of these periods and the activities therein are under his control.

From the above survey the conclusion may be drawn that the N.T. writings envisage a span of time from creation to the consummation of world history covered by at least five ages, the use of the plural 'aiones' respecting both past and future times, taken to mean at least two aeons in each case.

Now the majority of the occurrences of the plural of 'aion' appear in the phrases 'aeon of the aeons' or 'aeons of the aeons.' Such expressions are foreign to Greek literature outside the N.T. books and would appear to be meaningless if considered apart from the Hebraic background of the inspired authors. In the Hebrew language the superlative degrees is expressed in polytonic phrases such as, 'The book of books' is the best book, 'the song of songs' the finest song, 'the holy of holies' the most sacred spot, and 'the King of kings and Lord of lords,' the supreme potentate than whom no other can rank higher. If we remember that all the N.T. writers, with the possible exception of Luke, were Hebrews, and consider the phrases 'aeon of the aeons' and 'aeons of the aeons' as Hebrew constructions in Greek words, we may regard their meaning to be that the future ages in which God's purpose is approaching realization, will be the finest, the most blessed, of all the times covered by the sacred scriptures.

The passages in which the above phrases are found may be divided into two groups, (a) doxological expressions (Rom.11:36; 16:27; II Cor.11:31, Gal.1:5, Phil.4:20, Eph.3:21, I Tim.1:17. II Tim.4:18, Heb.13:21, I Pet.4:11 and 5:11, Rev.1:6 and 18; 7:12) and (b) statements in the Book of Revelation (Rev.4:9 and 10; 10:6; 11:15; 15:7; 19:3; 20:10; 22:5) The doxologies employ terms such as 'blessed,' 'honor,' 'glory' and 'praise' calling for worship of the Deity and contain no contextual evidence respecting the time element. If these be read as ascriptions of praise and calls to worship God throughout the coming ages viewed as the best periods of all humanity's history, then no difficulties arise either linguistically or theologically. There is no suggestion that worship will cease at the end of the ages mentioned in the N.T. but speculation beyond that point ventures outside the biblical frame.

Of the nine examples of the polytonic phrases in Revelation, four refer to the Deity living 'unto the ages of the ages', two to 'smoke ascending from the punishing of the devotees of the wild beast' and from the destruction of Babylon, one each to the torment of Satan, the reign of Christ and of his people with him. (Rev.4:9 and 10; 10:6; 15:7; 14:11; 19:3; 20:10; 11:15; 22:5) With respect to the first four, it may be said that if these were the only cases of the use of these phrases, then 'forever' or 'eternally' might well be accepted in English, but unless these aeons can be shown to express the concept of infinite duration in other contexts, there appears to be no good reason to so render them here especially as these texts are quite meaningful and consistent when the phrases are considered as applying to the time periods discussed in the Apocalypse itself, that is, to the future aeons. As three of these cases are quotations from the O.T. (Rev.4:9,10; 10:6) and the fourth (Rev.15:2-7) in a section of four sentences contains more than a dozen O.T. expressions, the influence of Hebrew thought and language must be recognized and since the O.T. contains no references to "eternity" it appears improbable that the seer of the Apocalypse was thinking in terms of infinite duration.

The interpretation of the symbolism and time points of Revelation is a baffling task. No two expositors appear to agree on all matters and it would seem that those most positive in their opinions are most likely to be wrong. Still one point is almost unanimously accepted - that the apocalyptic survey include the closing periods of world history as envisaged in the N.T. In these far future times the aeonian drama will reach its consummation with all creation in harmony with the Creator. The periods during which this is accomplished by judgment, cleansing, restoration, creation renewed, and God, All in All, are aeons of time.

Beyond this point, the biblical revelation goes no further, other than in the 'mighty negatives' such as 'immortal', 'incorruptible', 'indissoluble', 'fadeth not away', and 'never any more' (I Cor.15:42,53; I Pet.1.4; Heb.7:16; Rev.18:14,21,22,23).

It seems reasonable then for the seer to assure his readers that throughout all the titanic, cataclysmic upheavals of the unparalleled visitations of judgment, God still lives on in supreme majesty, the forces of evil receive their appropriate final annihilation, and the Lamb once slain by and for sinners receives the highest station and with his saints rules and reigns, but not 'for ever'. It comes as a surprise to uncritical Bible readers to be shown that our Lord's ruling and reigning is to continue only 'until he shall have put down all rule and

authority and power,' 'for he must be reigning until he should be placing all his enemies under his feet.' (I Cor.15:24-28)

When a perfected universe shall have been given over to the Father at the consummation of the aeons (I Cor.15:24, Rom.8:19-23) there will be no more occasion for ruling or reigning in the harmony of loving loyalty in the Family of God. This point is significantly brought out in **Luke 1:33** by the contrast, "He shall reign for the aeons, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

Regarding the torment and smoke (fumes?) some interpretation must follow exegesis. It would be naive in the extreme to hold with the medieval fantasy of a sulfurous pit of subterranean flames. Without attempting any dogmatism one may suggest that the 'torment' of the personified evil forces or the personal embodiments of these, may consist in their loss of control over the world of humanity, and their complete subjection to Christ, and that the 'smoke' may be warning recollections and evidences of the fires of suffering consequent upon sin and enmity against God. It seems reasonable to believe that this process and these signs will continue to have significance only until the consummation of the aeons, that is for or during the ages. (Note - for more information on 'The Lake of (the) Fire' see article ABC047.DOC) Any suggestion that such signs will continue without end, 'forever' seems too much at variance with the nature and purpose of our God to be taken seriously.

The material in the above survey of the use of the phrases 'aeon of the aeons' and 'aeons of the aeons' suggested that the simple process of regarding these polytonic expression as Hebraisms (idioms of one language expressed in words of another) applied to future periods of time within the scope and frame of biblical history and prophecy, leads to a rational, easily comprehended view of the revelation of future eschatology as to its times and timing, and avoids the conflicts and incongruities caused by the introduction of 'eternal' and 'everlasting.'

It is therefore urged that these phrases be treated as relating to spans of future time.

CHAPTER TWELVE AIONIOS

The adjective, 'aionios' is used seventy-one times in the N.T. Only once is it applied to the Deity, forty-three times to 'life,' five times to 'fire,' and the remainder to items such as 'judgment,' Correction (Matt.25:46) 'the gospel,' 'kingdom,' 'covenant,' 'inheritance,' 'spirit,' 'glory,' 'times,' and 'banishment.' (II Thes.1:9)

Since, as we have seen, the noun 'aion' refers to a period of time, it appears very improbable that the derived adjective 'aionios' would indicate infinite duration, nor have we found any evidence in Greek writings to show that such a concept was expressed by this term. An example of its use is found on an ancient (third century) lead tablet in the necropolis at Adrumetum near Carthage, 'I am adjuring Thee, the great God, up-above the up-above gods.' To write 'eternal and more than eternal' is too incongruous to be accepted, but to regard the Deity as living before, and in fact originating the aeons of time, (Heb.1:2) presents no problem.

First let us look at Rom.16:26 where the only case of 'aionios' linked with 'God' occurs. Paul refers to 'a sacred secret in aeonian times kept silent but now made manifest...according to the command of the aeonian God'. Since the context deals with aeonian times and processes, the apostle recognizes God's plan, purpose, and control of these periods while not in any sense limiting the Deity to these spans of time which He uses for his revelation. 'God of the ages' may well be the meaning of 'aeonian God.' If so, then no conflict arises when 'aeonian' is applied in seventy other passages, to entities which cannot be regarded as 'eternal', without beginning or ending.

In the Authorized Version of 1611, 'eternal' is used forty-one times to translate 'aionios.' Other translations and paraphrases contain over thirty different expressions which we have set out in Chapter 10. Because English has no adjective derived from 'age' various courses have been followed with the objective of consistently conveying the Greek meaning into our language. The problem is increased by the various shades of meaning in English expressions. If we follow the analogy of English usage, then an adjective formed from a noun

denoting a period of time, means DURING that period, frequently once only. Thus an hourly signal occurs once each hour, a daily visit, once each day, and similarly for weekly, monthly, annual, yearly and so on. If we wish to state that a process lasts for the whole of a time period, we add the word 'long'- an hour-long delay, a year-long banishment, and so on. The common factor in these two patterns is that the event or process occurs or continues within the period mentioned. The one certain fact is that the item under discussion belongs within the time span stated, not outside it. A weekly visit and a week-long visit both occur within the week, not extending beyond it. At the same time we should note that while hourly, daily, yearly and the like mean once each time period, they may also indicate repetition as in 'our daily bread,' weekly wage, annual tax, etc.

If we apply this principle to 'aionios', we will conclude that events or processes referred to as 'aeonian' belong within the ages of the biblical framework and some circumlocutionary phrase such as 'pertaining to the ages or ages,' 'occurring within, or lasting for the aeon or aeons' may express the thought.

In each case to treat 'aionios' concordantly and so avoid the multiplicity of conflicting terms in different versions, several translators have coined such compounds as 'age-abiding' (Rotherham) 'age-during' (Young) which suggest that the process in view lasts for the whole of an age or ages whereas the meaning may be that it occurs during these periods.

A better approach seems to be that followed in Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott, 1881 where 'aionian' is used, and in the Concordant Version of the N.T. (1930), 'eonian.' The use of this transliteration of the Greek term, while not in itself answering all the Bible student's questions does suggest caution and enquiry rather than unquestioning use of 'eternal.'

Moulton and Milligan in their Vocabulary of the Greek Testament in commenting on 'aionios' state, 'In general the word depicts that of which the horizon is not in view, whether it lies no further than the span of Caesar's life.'

A parallel may be drawn with our use of the adverb 'always'. In the two sentences, 'God always exist', and 'I always walk to work'. The meaning is very different though the primitive significance of continuance is not lost.

In II Cor.4:18 the contrast between 'temporary' (the things seen) and 'aeonian' (the unseen) appears to be between trials whose end can be foreseen, and lasting blessings with 'no horizon' envisaged.

Hebrews 9:12-15, states the contrast between the temporary nature of the old Exodus covenant with its rituals, and the abiding efficacy of Christ himself.

In verse 12 we have, 'He entered once for all the holy places' aeonian redemption having found (maybe, brought to light, uncovered, displayed).'

Theologically one might argue that God's gracious attitude being characteristic of His nature, it would be as infinite as He, and hence the 'redemption' manifested by our Lord must be 'eternal' - as stated in the A.V. and R.V.

On the other hand the need for redemption is contingent upon human sinfulness, and while the work of our Lord is irreversible it would have no relevance in periods prior to the existence of the human race but does apply on into unhorizoned futurity.

In Heb.9:14, the phrase 'through an aeonian spirit' gives no indication whether we should regard 'spirit' as a common or proper noun here. Literally the rendering would run '(Christ) through an aeonian spirit himself offered spotless (flawless) to the God'. This may well mean that a spirit of devotion knowing no bounds or horizons, the Son always throughout all the ages places himself at the disposal of the Father's will.

In the popular Authorized Version of 1611, while 'eternity' appears but once, (Isa.57:15) 'eternal' is used forty-one times to translate 'aionios' alone, so the readers have become conditioned to its use.

One of the chief difficulties in discovering what the biblical writers meant by the words they used is to rid our own minds of ingrained theological and philosophical patterns of thought which color our interpretations of many important passages.

The wisest course appears to be to regard the use of 'eternal' to render 'aionios' with great caution, and to examine each case carefully in relation to its immediate context, all other relevant passages, and the message of the sacred scriptures in general.

Once it is recognized that 'eternal' is not a satisfactory rendering for 'aionios' the question arises as to how this term of Latin origin came to be so commonly employed in the A.V. of 1611 and many later versions. Our next Chapter will briefly discuss the process.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN WHENCE ETERNITY?

In 1935 the late Alexander Thomason of Edinburgh published a series of articles in which he traced the process by which words derived from Latin came to be commonly employed in translating the Greek scriptures into English. His outline and argument are so convincing the present writer in this chapter presents a brief summary based upon Mr Thomson's work and gladly acknowledges his indebtedness to that author.

It is widely recognized that 'eternity' is not a subject for biblical discussion. One will search in vain for statements such as, 'Let us talk or think about 'eternity' or 'Eternity is endless time or timelessness'. We may go further and suggest that our study of 'olam' and 'aion' has shown that neither of these terms of itself bears our sense of 'eternal' or even 'everlasting.' How then did these terms and the concepts they represent become so common in theology, Bible study and preaching?

It is a common modern practice to contrast time with 'eternity' a line of thought almost, if not entirely, absent from the sacred writings. Jerome, about 380 A.D. in his Vulgate (Latin version of the Bible) translated Rev.10:6, 'Temus non erit amplium', Wycliffe, a thousand years later followed suit with, 'Tyme schall no more be,' the A.V. 1611 has, 'There shall be time no longer.' Though the succeeding chapters of Revelation cover a period of over a millennium with major events occurring on earth, uncritical interpretation has frequently treated Rev.10:6 as indicating the conclusion of time absolute and the institution (or restitution) of 'eternity'. Fortunately the more modern versions employ the alternative idea embraced by the Greek 'chronos,' 'intervening or waiting time' and therefore have 'Dely shall be no more,' a rendering fully in accord with the rush of events that is presented in the succeeding chapters of Revelation. Still even today it is not unusual to find scholars talking about 'time' giving place to eternity - a view of which we have found no suggestion in the scriptures.

In Old English translations produced before the Norman Conquest (1066) we may note the absence of Latin terms:even of the word 'salvation' in the Anglo-Saxon versions of 680-900 A.D. and even in Wycliffe's of 1380 where 'health' is used. Even Tyndale, 1526, has 'salvation' only in John 4:22 ('Salvation commeth of the Jewes'). Similarly for 'aionios' the Old English has not 'eternal' but 'ece.' It seems probable that if the Renaissance with its revival of interest in Greek, had preceded the Norman Conquest, our English Language, and the N.T. in particular, would have contained many Greek terms and English equivalents, instead of the great number of Latin terms resulting from the language of Rome predominating in Europe in the centuries preceding 1500 and in the ritual of the Roman Catholic church even till our own day.

With the Renaissance came a great new interest in Greek; Erasmus issued his first Greek N.T. in 1516; but by that time Jerome's Latin Vulgate dominated Christendom. It was itself an heroic attempt to bring order into the confusion consequent upon the importation of North African versions, largely unchanged since Tertullian, (around 200 A.D.) into contact with the different dialect of Italy and with the Greek manuscripts. For 'aion' Jerome found in the old versions, two Latin words - 'seculum' and 'aeternus.' From these we have derived, 'secular' and 'eternal.' 'Seculum' is commonly defined as 'a generation, an age, world, times, a century'. Secular things belong to this present time or world, usually as contrasted with spiritual matters. Ancient Roman sports were called secular games. Herodian (about 200 A.D.) calls those 'aeonian games.' Other examples of

'secular' meaning 'centuries, age, or period' appear in the decrees of the Council of Trent (1543-63) and in the works of some early fathers. This term seems never to have meant 'eternity.'

In the Vulgate 'aion' is rendered 'seculum' one hundred and one times. 'aeternum' twenty-seven. The plural 'aiones,' common in Revelation, Jerome calls 'seculums' and he uses the phrases 'from the seculums, for the seculums, before the seculum, the future seculum, this seculum, that seculum, the consummation of the seculums, the coming seculum' and so on in a clear and consistent manner. But his use of aeternum is not so readily understood unless we accept the view that in Jerome's time 'aeternum' did not mean endless infinity. Wycliffe in working from the Vulgate puts 'world' for 'seculum' but for 'aeternum' he has 'forever.' Thus there appeared in English two distinctly different words to translate the same Greek term 'aion.'

Some examples of Jerome's use of aeternum will illustrate the problems of discordance that appear to arise. In his Gallican version of the psalms from the LXX he usually translates 'eis ton aiona' as 'in aeternum' but where the plural occurs in Psa.61:4 and 72:17 he used 'seculums.' Psa.20:2 in the LXX has 'from the aeon' and 'till the aeon.' Thou art God. Here Jerome uses 'seculum' but for the same phrase in Psa. 103:17 he employs 'aeternum.'

In Exodus 15:18 and Micah 4:5 he has 'for aeternum and beyond'. Many other examples could be produced to show that for Jerome 'aeternum' probably did not represent a concept of absolute infinite duration.

When Wycliffe consistently used 'without end' to translate 'aeternum' he seems to have established a precedent in English for attaching to that word and, through it, to 'olam' and 'aion' the philosophic concept of infinitude. It may be that for periods of known or approximately calculable duration such as century, lifetime, generation or age, Jerome used 'seculum' whereas 'aeternum' served for time spans of unhorizoned extension.

Not only does thought mold language, language largely conditions thought processes. A few of the many important theological and biblical terms derived from Latin through the Vulgate which have powerfully affected doctrine and preaching may be listed:- salvation, perdition, destroy, destruction, damnation, perish, punish, torment, dispensation, priest, propitiation, mediator, redemption, person, reconciliation, oblation, justification, and eternal. Because of the varying degree in which such words differ from the meaning of the corresponding Hebrew and Greek expressions, it behooves the student (and teacher) to examine carefully the terms he meets with and uses, always endeavoring to make his own statements accord with those of the inspired authors as theirs may be discovered by concordant contextual research.

In this way we may approach more closely to an appreciation of the message of the Sacred Scriptures.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN EPILOGUE

To some earnest believers the study set out in the preceding pages has seemed a waste of time and effort. Why all this bother to discover the meaning of a few foreign words? Why not leave us with the time honored Authorized Version and the ideas learned in Sunday School?

In answer one may outline his own mental and spiritual experiences. For several decades he taught and preached along 'orthodox' lines including the theory of the absolute finality of the judgment of sinners issuing in unending punishing in 'hell'. The so called gospel consisted largely in threats and bribes. Yes, God's grace was said to be infinite, immeasurable as Calvary's sacrifice; but it could become operative only when sinners believed.

Two major problems continually pressed their claims for answer:-

(a) The great majority of the human race God had created never, in this life, heard of His grace expressed in His Son and the good news of redemption.

(b) Many plain direct statements in the sacred scriptures declared that the purpose of God is through our Lord Jesus Christ to bless all humanity and to bring the whole universe into harmony with Himself. How could this be if myriads of mankind whom He so loved, were to be kept alive 'forever' in hopeless, purposeless misery? And what kind of a 'god' could love the sinner with Calvary love until he died, and then leave him in indescribable suffering eternally?

One must be thankful that during those years of perplexity, by God's grace, faith was preserved in the sufficiency of His revelation in His Son ultimately to answer every question of the human heart, and at length the answer came.

If the judgments of God are processes and not finalities, if they, along with all His other acts, possess a benign purpose, then the problems disappear.

For those who believe the sacred scriptures to be God's word, the following passages stating His ultimate purpose and couched in plain, non-figurative terms must surely be conclusive.

Gen.12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4, 'In thee and in thy seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'

In Gal. 3:8 and 16, these verses are said to refer to our Lord, through Whom, as announced by heavenly messengers at His birth, 'Great joy shall be to all the people' **Luke 2:10**.

In John 12:32 and 33 our Lord's own promise is recorded. 'If I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself. Now this He said signifying by what death He should die.' He was lifted up to die upon the cross, so believers need have no doubt about the fulfillment of His promise.

Rom.8:19-23 sets out the cosmic outreach and efficacy of the Christ event. 'The whole creation' awaits 'deliverance from the slavery of corruption into freedom of the glory of the children of God.'

Even the universal enmity of the natural man toward obedience to God becomes the occasion for a display of 'mercy upon all,' **Rom.11:32**.

In Eph. 1:9 and 10, Paul declares that God has 'made known to us the secret of His will... to reunite all things in Christ, those things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, in Him' and this universal reconciliation is stated in **Col.1:20** to be effected 'through the blood of His (Christ's) cross.'

Naturally those who love our Saviour would long to see this purpose of the Father accomplished soon. We are however to abide God's timing. In writing to Timothy (I Tim.1:4-6) Paul describes our Lord as the 'One Mediator of God and men, the Man, Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself a ransom for all - the testimony in its own seasons'. Similarly the writer of Hebrews states, 'We see not yet all things placed under Him (Christ), but we see Jesus made some little less than angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor that by the grace of God, He might taste death on behalf of every one.' **Heb.2:8, 9**

Further, in **I Tim.4:9-11**, Paul affirms that 'God is the Saviour of all men, especially of believers.' it seems obvious that those now, through God's grace, believing are not the exclusive beneficiaries of His 'mercy upon all', but are in a special and superlative measure now blessed in Christ. In verse II we read, 'These things enjoin and teach.'

Our Saviour's all-embracing redemption also rejoiced the heart of John. In his first epistle (I John 2:2) he writes, 'He (Jesus Christ, the Righteous One) is the propitiation (mercy seat) for our sins, and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world.'

In I Cor.15:22-28 the inspired apostle to the Gentiles transports his readers' thoughts far into the future, beyond the furthest point envisaged elsewhere in holy writ. After outlining the triumph of the Son of God in bringing all creation under His benign control, Paul sets forth the consummation of the divine plan of the ages in four simple, yet infinitely profound words. 'God, All in All.'

This is our God, purposeful, wise, all loving and all mighty: His Son our Lord a Triumphant Saviour, Who destroys His enemies by making them His friends.

Yes. As Paul writes, **(Rom.11:33-36)** 'His ways are past finding out;' but the end we know, 'for out of Him, and through Him, and for Him are all things.'

To Him be adoration, love and praise now, and for evermore.

Amen

APPENDIX

WHAT IS HELL?

It is obvious that the view that most of humanity are destined to spend eternity in misery in hell cannot be reconciled with those scriptures which predict restoration for all: yet the word 'hell' occurs thirty-one times in the Old Testament and twenty-two times in the New Testament in the Authorized Version. This one English term has been made to represent the Hebrew 'sheol' and the three Greek words 'hades,' 'gehenna,' and 'tartarus.'

We must now enquire whether these four terms mean the same, and whether 'hell' in its modern fits any of them.

'Hell' is the noun form of the old Anglo-Saxon verb 'hele' which meant to hide, conceal, or bury something. In one of his poems Chaucer wrote: 'To hide and hele things,' meaning to conceal them. In its old English significance 'hell' was an appropriate rendering of the Greek 'hades' which means the unseen or imperceptible and since the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament books produced by seventy two Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews) about two centuries B.C., consistently translates 'sheol' with the word 'hades,' we must conclude that these terms are synonymous. Since both invariably refer to the grave or the condition of humans between death and resurrection, or to a state akin to death (Jonah 2:2-5), we can find no more appropriate English term than 'hell' provided we keep to its ORIGINAL MEANING.

The following are a few of the many passages which prove that 'sheol' or 'hades' is the grave or state of the dead, not the living humans in suffering.

Gen.37:35 tells us that Jacob believed Joseph to be there and expected to go there himself. 'I will go down to the grave (sheol) unto my son mourning.' Compare Gen.42:38; 44:29 and 31; I Sam.2:6, 'The Lord bringeth down to the grave (sheol) and bringeth up.' Job longed to go to sheol to rest or sleep till the resurrection, Job 14:12,13. 'So man lieth down and riseth not till the heavens be no more (cf. Rev.20:11); they shall not awake nor be raised out of their sleep. Oh that Thou wouldest hide me in sheol, that Thou wouldest keep me secret until Thy wrath be past.' In chapter three verses eleven to twenty-two Job bewailed his birth claiming that life's troubles made him and others wish for the rest that death would bring. **Ecclesiastes 9:10** confirms Job's view. 'There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in sheol.' Neither is God remembered there. **Isaiah 38:18**: 'For sheol cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee.'

The anger of God follows wickedness to the grave. **Deut.32:22**: 'It bringeth unto the lowest sheol (R.V. pit), devoureth the earth... and setteth on fire the foundations of the mountains.'

The following references indicate that both the wicked and righteous go into the grave and the death state from which only God's power can bring release: **Psa.9:17** (The wicked); **Psa.16:10** and **Acts 2:27** and **31** (Our Lord); **Psa.55:15**; **Psa.139:8**; **Prov.15:11**; **Amos 9:2**; **Rev.1:18** (God is in charge there), **Jonah 2:2** (Probably figurative, the fish's interior being like the grave), **Rev.20:13** (Recovery from hades), **Rev.20:14**. When death ceases to operate, hell (hades) too, is to pass away. **I Cor.15:54**.

The above passages present convincing evidence that scripture and our own observations agree that with death come the cessation of consciousness (Biblical sleep of death) and the dissolution of the personality in the unseen till resurrection.

The reference to hades in the parable of Luke 16, accord with the scriptures throughout. These teach that no dead person can 'lift up his eyes' apart from resurrection, which for the wicked leads on to chastening (basanos verse 23) producing beneficial results - Dives' concern for his brothers (vs 27,28).

It should particularly be noted that there is nothing whatever in the scriptures quoted above to suggest that sheol, hades, or hell is a place or condition of endless pain or torture.

'Tartarus' is mentioned once only, II Pet.2:4 and then in the verbal form - to cast down to the abode of rebellious spirits.

Certainly the Authorized Version calls this 'hell,' but as no humans are ever said to there and Jude verse 6 indicates that the spirits are there restrained by invisible (aidios) bonds UNTIL the judgment day, to include this term 'tartarus' under the word 'hell' is clearly a mistranslation of the Greek which should be rendered 'cast down to Tartarus.'

Gehenna must now claim our attention. (note - see article 'The Lake of (the) Fire' ABC047.DOC) The thirteen references to it in the Hebrew scriptures show it to be a valley on the west and south-west sides of Jerusalem where idolatrous and abominable human sacrifices were offered to Molech the fire god. (II Kings 23:10; II Chron.28:3-6; Jer.7:31 and 32:35) In fulfillment of centuries past prophecy (I Kings 13:2) good King Josiah ,made a sweeping reformation, clearing away the altars, groves, images and the high places. (II Chron.34:3-5) In Jer.7:32 and 33 we find the prediction of a future defilement of this valley. Secular historians record that the site became the cesspool and repository of the filth of Jerusalem where fires were kept burning incessantly and where worms perpetually bred in the decaying corpses of criminals.

Isaiah 66:20,23,24 predicted a future day of restoration for Israel, when the bodies of transgressors would be deposited in this valley to become a warning of the summary judgment to be meted out to evil doers. (cf. Matt.5:29 and 30)

Of the eleven New Testament references to gehenna, all contained in the teaching concerning the predicted kingdom to be restored to Israel, not one makes any reference to endless punishment, nor can one see how fire or worms could affect the soul, or spirit, or anything other than the carcasses of evil doers as Isaiah said it would. Also since our Lord confined His preaching to the land and people of Israel (Matt.10:5) and forbade His apostles to go to others, it is evident that His references to this local spot and its association do not apply to humanity at large. We therefore urge that 'gehenna' should be transliterated into English versions and thus linked up with the Hebrew passages from which the name arose. It certainly is not synonymous with hades or sheol, so should not be included under the term 'hell.'

Some expositors and preachers increase confusion by adding 'the bottomless pit' and 'the lake of fire' though these are not in English versions rendered 'hell.' The result is that while many believers find the theories about endless damnation in hell contradictory to the scripture revelation of our God's character, purpose and activity, they lack the means to check His word in the original languages, so feel obliged to believe what others have taught them about a hell of endless, and therefore purposeless and futile suffering, not realizing that such an idea has no place in the revelation of God's gracious attitude and purpose for mankind.

The end

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