Aion and Aionios: The Word Study Beneath Everything

Paper 5 in a 12 Part Series

by Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

Turn to almost any page of the New Testament that speaks of what lies ahead, and you'll find the word "eternal" or "everlasting" close by. Eternal life. Everlasting punishment. Eternal glory, the eternal inheritance, eternal redemption, the everlasting kingdom, the everlasting gospel. Most readers take the English at its word: *forever*, without end, outside of time altogether. Very few stop to ask which word the apostles actually wrote.

Nearly every time, they wrote the same one. Behind "eternal" and "everlasting" alike stands a single Greek adjective, *aionios*. It appears seventy-one times in the Greek text the New King James Version translates. The adjective is built on a noun, *aion*, which appears another 128 times, and which the same English Bibles render "age," "world," "forever," "ever," "never," and, a few times, "eternal." Forty-four of the adjective's uses attach it to one word, *zoe*, life. The NKJV translates those forty-four as "eternal life" thirty-two times and as "everlasting life" twelve times. There's no difference at all in the Greek between the two English phrases; a reader who notices that John 3:15 says "eternal life" and John 3:16, one verse later, says "everlasting life" has noticed a translator's choice, not an apostle's.

This paper takes up the whole word family. It asks what *aion* means in Scripture's own sentences, what the adjective built on it means, where English has hidden the word "age" behind "forever" and "never," and what all of that does to the phrase "eternal life." The teaching can be stated in a sentence. *Aionios* means *pertaining to the age*, or to the ages, and it carries that one meaning everywhere it appears; what changes from verse to verse is how the thing described stands in relation to the ages, whether it happens *inside* one or belongs to the One who *made* them. Read that way, "eternal life" is the life of the age to come: the life Jesus promised to those who hear Him and follow Him, to be received in His coming kingdom. It is not the name Scripture gives to what a person receives the moment he first believes. That has names of its own, and they'll be shown.

None of this rests on a dictionary. It rests on the verses where Scripture puts the noun and the adjective side by side, on the verses where the translators themselves could not write "eternal," and on the pattern that shows up once all seventy-one uses of the adjective and all 128 uses of the noun are laid out and sorted. Where the Greek matters, it's printed and explained. An appendix at the end lists every occurrence of *aionios* in the New Testament, with its NKJV rendering and the thing it describes, so that nothing here depends on a sample.

The Mainstream Landscape

The three traditions this series engages doctrine by doctrine are the Reformed, the Wesleyan, and the Catholic. On this word they begin from the same place, so it helps to see the shared starting point first and then how each builds on it. What follows describes each tradition in its own terms; where this paper parts from them is taken up in the sections after.

All three read *aionios*, wherever it appears, as meaning "without end," and all three read "eternal life" as the life a Christian receives when he's saved: life with God that begins now and never ends. The scholars' standard dictionary of New Testament Greek reflects the same understanding for most of the word's uses. It's known by the initials of its editors, BDAG, and like any lexicon it sorts a word's uses into numbered senses. The sorting gets technical, but what it shows is simple. BDAG gives *aionios* three senses: a long period of time reaching back "long ago," which is where it places Rom. 16:25, 2 Tim. 1:9, and Titus 1:2; a period without beginning or end, which is where it places Rom. 16:26; and a period without end, which is where it places "eternal life," "eternal punishment," "the eternal kingdom," and the great majority of the other uses. So the lexicon grants the word a bounded sense in three verses and an unbounded one nearly everywhere else. Those three verses are the places where the word describes time itself, and they'll come back later in this paper.

All three also receive the Nicene Creed, the confession settled at Constantinople in 381 and still recited in many churches every Sunday. It closes, "We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." In the creed's own Greek, that last phrase is *zoen tou mellontos aionos*, "the life of the coming age," and the Latin form reads *vitam venturi saeculi*, "the life of the age to come." It's a phrase many have said for years without being told that the creed speaks of an *age*.

Many modern scholars go a step further on the phrase "eternal life" itself. They agree that behind it stands the Jewish expression "the life of the age to come," the hope of Daniel 12:2, and that the phrase originally meant exactly that: the life belonging to the coming age of God's reign. They then read John, especially, as teaching that this life of the coming age has already broken into the present, so that the Christian possesses now the life that properly belongs to the age to come. C. H. Dodd's work on John's Gospel made that reading influential, and George Eldon Ladd built it into the framework widely called "already and not yet": the age to come has already begun in Christ, though it's not yet complete. On this view, "eternal life" is both a quality of life, the life of God's own age, and a duration without end, and the Christian has it from the moment of faith.

The Reformed tradition

The Westminster Confession of Faith describes the last judgment in these terms: "then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fulness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord; but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the

gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (WCF 33.2). "Everlasting" and "eternal" there mean without end on both sides.

Reformed theology holds that the life a Christian receives when he's saved can never be lost. The Confession says that those whom God has "effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved" (WCF 17.1). "Eternal life," then, is a possession that's already secure.

What does this tradition say about a man who professes faith and then shows no fruit, or lives on in disobedience? It says his life reveals that he never truly had eternal life at all. A true Christian may fall into grievous sin for a time, the Confession allows (WCF 17.3), but he won't stay there; if a man does, his profession was false. The verses that warn Christians of losing something are read as the means God uses to keep the elect persevering, or as warnings that expose those who were never His. Either way, for the Reformed reader, there are two outcomes and only two: a man has eternal life, which he cannot lose, or he never had it.

The Wesleyan tradition

John Wesley's Articles of Religion, prepared for American Methodists in 1784, state in Article XII that "after we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and, by the grace of God, rise again and amend our lives." Wesleyan theology agrees with the Reformed that eternal life is received at faith and that, in its fulfilment, it has no end. It disagrees on whether it can be lost. Wesley's sermon "The Great Assize" closes its description of the last judgment on the unending duration of both outcomes.

What does this tradition say about a Christian who stops bearing fruit, or turns back to sin and stays there? It says that such a man can fall from grace, and that if he dies in that condition, he loses the eternal life he once had and faces eternal punishment. The warning passages are read at full strength, as warnings of a real loss, and what they threaten is the loss of salvation itself. So the Wesleyan reader, too, has two outcomes and only two: a man who dies in grace has eternal life, and a man who dies fallen from it does not.

The Catholic tradition

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that "the teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, 'eternal fire.' The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God" (CCC 1035). Of mortal sin, it says, "If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell" (CCC 1861). Those who die in God's grace and friendship, and are perfectly purified, "live for ever with Christ" (CCC 1023).

What does the Catechism say happens to a baptized Catholic who shows no fruit, or lives in ongoing disobedience? It sorts sins into mortal and venial. A mortal sin, committed knowingly and willingly in a grave matter, destroys the grace of God in the soul; unless it is repented of and forgiven, it brings "exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell," and those two phrases name one outcome. Lesser sins don't destroy that grace, and a Christian who dies with them unpurified undergoes purification, purgatory, before entering heaven. So the Catholic reader has two final outcomes as well, with a purification on the way to one of them.

An internal evangelical debate

One more thing belongs in this landscape, because it shows that the meaning of "eternal" in the punishment texts isn't a closed question even within evangelicalism. In the late twentieth century, a number of respected evangelical scholars argued that the unsaved are finally destroyed rather than kept in endless conscious torment. John Stott set out the view tentatively in *Essentials* (1988; published in the United States as *Evangelical Essentials*), and Edward Fudge gave it book-length treatment in *The Fire That Consumes*. Their case rests mostly on the New Testament's vocabulary of destruction, words like *apollumi* and *olethros*, rather than on *aionios*. Those who hold the traditional view have answered them at length, and the debate continues. It's a debate about the fate of the unsaved, and it takes for granted, on both sides, that "eternal life" is what a Christian receives when he's saved.

The Word of the Kingdom Position

None of the three traditions just described treats *aionios* as a word that marks out a span of time. Each reads it as a flat synonym for endlessness and then builds its account of salvation on that reading. The position taught here makes one structural move that none of them has a category for: read the adjective by its noun, and read the noun by the sentences Scripture writes with it. Everything else follows from taking the word *age* seriously.

Start with the noun: what an age is

Aion means "age," a span of time with a beginning and an end. Scripture does not leave that to be inferred. It speaks of "this age" and "the age to come" as two periods, one after the other, often in the same breath. When the Pharisees credited Jesus' casting out of demons to Beelzebub, He told them that speaking against the Holy Spirit "will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come" (Matt. 12:32). When Paul describes where God seated Christ after raising Him, he places Him "far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:21). Two ages, named in order, the second following the first.

The present age had a beginning. Paul says so in the course of explaining why the powers of this world did not recognize Jesus:

> *However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor. 2:6-8)*

There was a *before the ages*, plural. God ordained His hidden wisdom then, and the present age came afterward. Notice, too, that this age has *rulers*, and that they are "coming to nothing." Paul names the chief of them elsewhere as "the god of this age," who "has blinded" minds so that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ does not shine on them (2 Cor. 4:4). Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). The present age is ruled, and its ruler is at work in it; it is not a neutral stretch of time.

The present age also has an end, and Jesus told His disciples what happens at it. Explaining the parable of the wheat and the tares, He said, "The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age" (Matt. 13:39-40). The disciples took the phrase up themselves on the Mount of Olives: "what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3). And His last words in Matthew's Gospel carry it: "lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Look closely at that "always," because it is not an age-word at all. The Greek is *pasas tas hemeras*, "all the days," and the sentence itself marks where the days run to: *heos tes sunteleias tou aionos*, "until the consummation of the age." Even the promise of His presence is measured against the age.

Two habits of English translation have blurred all this for the ordinary reader. The first is rendering *aion* as "world." The King James Version does it dozens of times, and the NKJV, though it restores "age" in many places, still keeps "world" in a good number of them. "The cares of this world" choke the seed (Matt. 13:22); "the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light" (Luke 16:8); "do not be conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2); Demas deserted Paul, "having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10). Every one of those is *aion*. The Greek has a separate word for the world as an ordered arrangement, *kosmos*, and one verse puts the two side by side. Paul reminds the Ephesians that they once walked "according to the course of this world" (Eph. 2:2), which in Greek is *kata ton aiona tou kosmou toutou*: "according to the *age* of this *world*." The age and the world are two different things, and Paul uses both words in one phrase.

The second habit is rendering the plural as "the worlds." God, says Hebrews, has spoken to us by His Son, "through whom also He made the worlds" (Heb. 1:2), and "by faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God" (Heb. 11:3). In both verses the word is *tous aionas*, "the ages." The Son is the One through whom God made the ages, and the ages were set in order by God's word. That is an extraordinary thing to say about time, and English has turned it into a statement about planets.

Once the plural is seen, it turns up everywhere. God ordained His wisdom "before the ages" (1 Cor. 2:7). The mystery "has been hidden from ages and from generations" (Col. 1:26), and "from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God" (Eph. 3:9). Christ appeared "once at the end of the ages... to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26), and the Corinthians are those "upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11). And God raised us up with Christ "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7). Ages before, ages past, ages to come. Scripture's picture of time is not one undivided line running off to infinity in both directions. It is a sequence of ages, each with its own beginning and end, all of them made by God and ordered by His word.

Where this age and the age to come sit

Where do the two named ages, "this age" and "the age to come," fall in that sequence? Scripture answers on its first page, in the way God went about restoring the world.

Genesis opens with two verses that describe two different conditions:

> *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Gen. 1:1-2)*

The first verse is a finished act. "Created" is *bara*, the word Scripture keeps for what God alone brings into being. The second verse finds that same earth formless, empty, dark, and under water. Many read its "was" as "became," and the Hebrew allows it, but the case doesn't hang on that one word. Isaiah settles it. Speaking of the same act, he says God "did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited" (Isa. 45:18). "In vain" is *tohu*, the very word Genesis 1:2 uses for "without form." God didn't make the earth *tohu*; it became that way. Something happened between the first verse and the second.

Scripture names what happened. Ezekiel takes up a lament for "the king of Tyre" (Ezek. 28:12), but the one he describes was never a man. He was "in Eden, the garden of God" (Ezek. 28:13), and he was "the anointed cherub who covers" (Ezek. 28:14). No man fits that description. This is Satan, the devil, an angel God had set in the highest place, and God says of him, "I established you" (Ezek. 28:14). Then God tells him, "You defiled your sanctuaries By the multitude of your iniquities" (Ezek. 28:18). His sanctuaries were the domain he'd been set over, the heavens and the earth, and his rebellion left them in ruin. The heavens were part of the wreck. There was no light anywhere until God called for it on the first day (Gen. 1:3), and the fourth day is spent working on the heavens themselves (Gen. 1:14-18).

So what follows Genesis 1:2 is restoration. Over six days God brought order back to a ruined creation, and on the seventh He rested: "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done" (Gen. 2:2). When Moses gave the Sabbath commandment, he used the word that fits: "For in six days the

LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day" (Exod. 20:11). "Made" is *asah*, the ordinary word for working on something already there. *Bara* comes back in those six days only where something new enters the restored world, the living creatures and man (Gen. 1:21, 27).

Then the pattern ran a second time. God created man in His image and gave him the restored domain to rule (Gen. 1:26-28), and man fell. The ground was cursed with him: "Cursed is the ground for your sake… Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you" (Gen. 3:17-18). Another of God's creations lay in ruin, and God has been at work restoring it ever since.

How long does that work run? Moses supplied the measure in his own psalm: "For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it is past" (Ps. 90:4). Peter took that measure up and applied it, in a passage that goes back to the first page of Genesis:

> *knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (2 Pet. 3:3-8)*

Most readers have been taught that verse 6 is Noah's flood. Look at what Peter sets side by side, though: "the heavens… of old" against "the heavens and the earth which are now" (vv. 5, 7). Noah's flood left the heavens untouched, and the earth that came out of the ark was the same earth that went in. The one place Scripture shows the heavens and the earth brought to ruin together, with the earth under water, is Genesis 1:2, where darkness lay "on the face of the deep" and the Spirit hovered "over the face of the waters." The scoffers say nothing has changed since "the beginning of creation," and Peter answers them from the beginning. The world that then existed perished, and the present heavens and earth are a restored order, kept by God's word until a coming judgment. Then, still answering the question of when Jesus comes, he gives the measure: a day is as a thousand years.

Lay that measure over the week. Six days of work become six thousand years in which God works to restore ruined man. A seventh day of rest becomes a thousand years. Revelation names a thousand-year span six times in six verses, the span in which, John says, "they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4; see 20:2-7). And Hebrews, quoting Genesis on the seventh day, says that rest hasn't come yet: "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:4, 9).

That's where the two named ages sit. "This age" is the long stretch of the six days of work. Before it lay ages Scripture doesn't number, when Satan held the place God set him in, "perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you" (Ezek. 28:15). This age runs under that same fallen angel, Paul's "god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4), the one who ruined what he'd been set over and hasn't yet been removed. When the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, he said their authority "has been delivered to me" (Luke 4:6), and Jesus didn't dispute the claim. Hebrews says the coming order will be different: "For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels" (Heb. 2:5). For now Jesus is seated at God's right hand, "waiting till His enemies are made His footstool" (Heb. 10:12-13). "The age to come" is the seventh day: the thousand years of Christ's reign, a specific, future, heavenly and earthly kingdom. What sets the two ages apart is who holds the rule.

After the seventh day, Scripture shows a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1), and Peter calls what follows "the day of God" (2 Pet. 3:12). It's a "day" only because Peter names it that. The measure of a thousand years belongs to the seven days and stops there, and Scripture does not give the length of what comes after. It says very little about it at all, and the paper on the afterlife's vocabulary is where that part of the picture is worked out. What matters here is simpler. The two ages Scripture names over and over, *this age* and *the age to come*, are both bounded periods inside God's seven-day restoration of what was ruined.

From noun to adjective

Aionios is the adjective formed from *aion*. Moving from a noun to the adjective made from it does not change the meaning of the word; it changes what the word does in a sentence. A rock is a stone, and *rocky* ground is ground that pertains to rocks. Hair is hair, and a *hairy* arm is an arm that has it. So if *aion* means "age," then *aionios* means "pertaining to the age," or "belonging to the age," or, since some things belong to more than one, "pertaining to the ages." Robert Young's literal translation of 1862 saw this and rendered the word "age-during" throughout: the "life age-during in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23, Young's Literal Translation).

A careful reader will want to know whether that's enough. It isn't, and it shouldn't be. Words drift away from their roots all the time, and a derivation shows where to begin looking, not where the search has to end. What settles the meaning of *aionios* is how Scripture uses it, and the next three sections put that usage on the page: a passage where the noun and the adjective sit in one sentence, a set of verses where the translators found they could not write "eternal," and the single verse where the adjective describes God Himself.

Before those, one principle needs to be set down, because the rest of the paper depends on it. *Aionios* carries one meaning everywhere it appears. It never has a special sense reserved for God and an ordinary sense for everything else. What differs from verse to verse is the relation between the ages and the thing being described. A kingdom, an inheritance, a judgment, a life, a punishment: these happen *inside* an age, and they're bounded by the age they belong to. God

does not. He made the ages, through His Son (Heb. 1:2), and that relation is taken up in its own section below. One meaning, then; two kinds of relation. That is the whole principle, and it carries the paper.

The noun and the adjective in one sentence

The clearest single passage puts both words in the same sentence, from Jesus' own mouth, so that nobody has to infer how they relate. Peter had just watched a rich young ruler walk away rather than sell what he had and follow Jesus, and he asked what those who *had* left everything would receive. Mark records the answer:

> *So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life [the life of the age]." (Mark 10:29-30)*

Luke has the same answer in nearly the same words: "who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life [the life of the age]" (Luke 18:30). The noun names an age, *the age to come*. The adjective then describes a life as belonging to it. Read with the one meaning the word carries, Jesus is saying, "in the age to come, the life of that age." The two halves of His answer are set against each other deliberately: a hundredfold *now in this time*, with persecutions, and *in the age to come*, age-life. The first half is paid out in the present age; the second waits for the next one.

Matthew's account of the same conversation fixes when the next one begins. Jesus told the Twelve that "in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel," and then added, "everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life [the life of the age]" (Matt. 19:28-29). Thrones, the Son of Man seated in glory, the tribes of Israel judged, and *eternal life* in the same breath. That is the age to come: the kingdom, the seventh day.

Where the translators could not write "eternal"

If *aionios* meant "without beginning or end," it should be possible to translate it "eternal" everywhere it appears. It is not possible, and the translators found that out in three verses where the word describes *time*.

Paul opens his letter to Titus this way:

> *Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life [the life of the age] which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior. (Titus 1:1-3)*

The adjective appears *twice* in verse 2. The first time it is "in hope of *eternal* life," *ep' elpidi zoes aioniou*. The second time it is "before *time began*," which is *pro chronon aionion*: literally, "before *aionios* times," before age-times. The translators could not write "before eternal times," because nothing comes before eternity, and a phrase that says something does is nonsense. So in the second half of the same verse they abandoned "eternal" and wrote something else. The reader of the English never learns that the word behind "eternal life" is the word behind "before time began," one line later.

Read with the one meaning, the verse makes perfect sense from start to finish: Paul serves "in hope of the life of the age, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the times of the ages." God made the promise before the ages began to run, and its fulfilment is the life of the age He promised. The same phrase, *pro chronon aionion*, appears in Paul's second letter to Timothy, where God's purpose and grace "was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (2 Tim. 1:9), and again the NKJV cannot say "eternal."

The third verse is the one that ought to settle the question, because the adjective appears twice in a single Greek sentence, and in the second instance it describes God:

> *Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. (Rom. 16:25-27)*

"Kept secret since the world began" is *chronois aioniois sesigemenou*, "kept silent in age-times," or "kept silent through the times of the ages." Nobody renders that "kept silent in eternal times," because the mystery was kept silent for a while and is now made known; the sentence itself says it has been "now made manifest." One clause later, the same adjective describes God: "the commandment of the *everlasting* God," *tou aioniou theou*. The traditional reading requires the word to mean "age-times" in verse 25 and then, a few words later in the same sentence, to change its meaning completely in verse 26. Read with one meaning, the sentence holds together: the mystery was kept silent through the ages and is now made known by the command of the God whose ages they are.

Now the lexicon's own layout, described earlier, becomes telling. BDAG files these very verses, Rom. 16:25, 2 Tim. 1:9, and Titus 1:2, under its first definition of *aionios*, a long period of time

reaching back "long ago." So the lexicon agrees the word can describe a long, bounded span. What it does not do is ask why a word that plainly carries that sense in three verses should be presumed to carry an entirely different one in the other sixty-eight.

A fourth verse doesn't involve time at all, but it shows the same thing from another angle. Onesimus was a runaway slave who met Paul, became a Christian, and was being sent back to his master Philemon. Paul writes, "For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother" (Philem. 15-16). "Forever" is *aionion*. Paul sets it against "for a while," *pros horan*, "for an hour." The Law of Moses had a provision for a slave who loved his master and chose to stay: "his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever" (Exod. 21:6), and that "forever" meant for the rest of his life. Paul reaches for the same idea and turns it: Philemon may have Onesimus back for good, no longer as a slave but as a brother. It's a lovely use of the word, and it's the word's ordinary sense: for the span that matters, as opposed to a passing hour.

The God of the ages

Romans 16:26 is the only verse in the New Testament in which *aionios* takes God Himself as its subject. That observation comes from the standard theological dictionary of the New Testament (Kittel's *Theological Dictionary*, in Hermann Sasse's article on *aion*), which sorts every use of the adjective into three groups: God; God's gifts and possessions; and the kingdom, inheritance, judgment, and the rest. One verse in the first group. Everywhere else, the word describes something other than God's own being.

So what does "the everlasting God" mean if the adjective means "pertaining to the ages"? It means *the God of the ages*: the One who made them (Heb. 1:2; 11:3), who orders them, who fills them, and to whom they belong. Scripture calls Him exactly that in the noun. Paul closes a doxology to "the King eternal" (1 Tim. 1:17), and the Greek there is not the adjective at all. It is *toi basilei ton aionon*, "to the King of the ages." The NKJV has turned a noun into the English word "eternal." Abraham called on "the LORD, the Everlasting God" at Beersheba (Gen. 21:33), and the Hebrew is *El Olam*, God of the age. The Greek Old Testament translated that name with this very adjective, *theos aionios*: the "everlasting God" of the Septuagint is the God of the age. The same relation shows up where the adjective describes what is His: "to whom be honor and everlasting power" (1 Tim. 6:16) is the dominion of the ages, and Christ offered Himself "through the eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14), the Spirit of the ages.

English does this constantly, and nobody stumbles over it. The word for it is that some adjectives can only mean "full of" or "characterized by," and others mean no more than "having to do with," leaving the noun to settle what the relation is. *Rocky* and *hairy* are the first kind, which is why they never flip. *Musical* and *criminal* are the second kind, and they flip all the time. A *musical evening* is an evening filled with music; a *musical director* is not a director who is musical, but the director set over the music. A *criminal act* is an act that is criminal; a *criminal*

lawyer is not a criminal, but a lawyer whose work is over criminal matters. In both pairs the adjective holds still and means one thing, having to do with music or with crime. What decides the relation is the noun it lands on: a thing the subject fills and measures, or a person set over it.

That is the whole of what happens between "eternal life" and "the eternal God." The life is filled and measured by the age it belongs to. God is set over the ages He made. No one hearing "criminal lawyer" concludes the man is a criminal, and no one should hear "the God of the ages" and conclude He is bounded by them.

That reading has to be guarded, and it's guarded by keeping one thing clear. "God of the ages" means the ages are *His*. It does not mean He is *in* them, subject to them, or measured by them. God's own freedom from time does not rest on this adjective, and it does not need to. Scripture grounds it elsewhere and more directly. When Moses asked God His name, God answered, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exod. 3:14): not *I was* or *I will become*, but I AM. Through Isaiah He says, "Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me" (Isa. 43:10). And the psalm of Moses says, "Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Ps. 90:2). "From everlasting to everlasting" in Hebrew is *me'olam ad olam*, "from the age to the age," and the Greek Old Testament renders it *apo tou aionos heos tou aionos*. The strongest statement of God's being before and beyond all things that the Old Testament contains is made by *doubling* the age-word, stretching it from one end to the other. It does not reach for some separate word meaning "timeless."

Genesis adds the last piece. On the fourth day of the restoration God set the lights in the heavens "for signs and seasons, and for days and years" (Gen. 1:14). The measures by which men count time are appointments God made, and the One who hung the lights is not governed by them. That's as far as the text goes, and it is far enough. Nothing here claims that God created time itself; Genesis 1:1 speaks of a beginning, and the Scriptures do not explain what came before it.

One more word needs attention here, because it's often grouped with this one. Paul says that since the creation of the world God's invisible attributes are clearly seen, "even His eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1:20). That "eternal" is a different word altogether: *aidios*, "perpetual," which appears only twice in the New Testament. Its other use is in Jude, of the angels who left their proper domain, whom God "has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6). Two things follow. Romans 1:20 and Romans 16:26 must never be treated as the same statement, since Paul used two different words. And no one should build a case that *aidios* is a special word reserved for strict endlessness, since its only other use describes chains that hold their prisoners *until* a judgment. The New Testament had another adjective available, and it used it twice. That is all the evidence will carry.

The age and the ages

Scripture uses the noun *aion* in fixed phrases, and those phrases are where most English readers meet the word without knowing it. Sorting all 128 uses of the noun turns up something the English has flattened entirely: Scripture distinguishes between *the age*, singular, and *the ages*, plural, and it does not use them for the same things.

The singular phrase is *eis ton aiona*, "unto the age," or "with respect to the age." It appears twenty-nine times in the Greek text behind the NKJV. The NKJV translates it "forever," and when it is negated it becomes "never": *ou me... eis ton aiona*, "shall not... unto the age," turns into "shall never." (Twice more the same idea appears in slightly different forms: once without the article, at 2 Pet. 2:17, and once as "unto the age of the age," at Heb. 1:8.)

The plural comes in two forms. *Eis tous aionas*, "unto the ages," appears eight times, and *eis tous aionas ton aionon*, "unto the ages of the ages," twenty times, with a handful of close variants. The NKJV translates the first "forever" and the second "forever and ever."

Now look at what each carries. The singular, *unto the age*, is the phrase under John's "never thirst" (John 4:14), "live forever" (John 6:51, 58), "never see death" (John 8:51), "never perish" (John 10:28), and "never die" (John 11:26). It is under the son who "abides forever" in the house while the slave does not (John 8:35), and the Helper who will "abide with you forever" (John 14:16). It is the fig tree that will bear no fruit "ever again" (Matt. 21:19), the blasphemer who "never has forgiveness" (Mark 3:29), and Paul resolving that "I will never again eat meat" (1 Cor. 8:13). It is Christ "a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:6), the word of the Lord that "endures forever" (1 Pet. 1:25), the man who "does the will of God" and "abides forever" (1 John 2:17), and the false teachers "for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 13). Every one of these is measured against *the age*, the span of time the story is moving toward or passing through.

The plural carries something else. It is the phrase of the doxologies, where glory is given to God "forever and ever" (Gal. 1:5; Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:17). It is the phrase for God Himself, who is "over all, the eternally blessed God" (Rom. 9:5), where "eternally" is *eis tous aionas*, "unto the ages." It is the phrase for Christ's own person: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8), and "I am alive forevermore" (Rev. 1:18). And it is the phrase for the reign that runs past the seventh day. The angel told Mary that her Son "will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33), and the "forever" is plural, *unto the ages*. When the seventh trumpet sounds, voices in heaven announce, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15). In the new heaven and new earth, God's servants "shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22:5). And the devil, cast into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet are, "will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10).

The pattern is clear enough to state. When Scripture wants to speak of what runs on past the age, past the seventh day and into whatever God has prepared after it, it uses the plural, and it doubles the plural for emphasis: *the ages of the ages*. This is how the New Testament writers said "without end" when they meant it, and they did mean it. Nothing in this paper takes that away from any verse. But notice what the phrase is built from. Even Scripture's strongest expression of endless duration does not leave the age-word behind for some separate word meaning "infinity." It piles *ages* on *ages*. Time, for the New Testament writers, is not abolished. It is multiplied.

There's a reason the writers reached for ages piled on ages instead of a word meaning "endless." They didn't have one. The apostles were Jews writing Greek, and the Scriptures they had grown up on were Hebrew, where the word behind all of this is *olam*. That word points at the far horizon, time out of sight, the span whose end a man cannot see from where he stands. It covers a slave's lifetime (Exod. 21:6), a boy's years at the tabernacle (1 Sam. 1:22, 28), and three days in the dark (Jonah 2:6), and biblical Hebrew has no separate noun for eternity to set beside it. When the Greek Old Testament rendered *olam*, it reached for *aion*, and that's the word the apostles inherited.

What an English reader hears in "eternal" came from somewhere else. The idea of timelessness as a category, existence with no duration at all, belongs to Greek philosophy and reached the Church's vocabulary through centuries of Latin theology. The apostles had access to that world of thought and didn't write in its terms. They wrote in the terms of the Hebrew Scriptures they were expounding: ages, with beginnings and ends, running one after another under God's hand.

English erases all of this. "Forever" translates the singular and the plural alike, so a reader of the NKJV has no way of knowing that the "forever" of John 6:51 and the "forever" of Heb. 13:8 are different phrases. Sometimes the NKJV even uses the doubled "forever and ever" for the singular. The Son's throne in Heb. 1:8 is "forever and ever," but the Greek there is *eis ton aiona tou aionos*, "unto the age of the age," a singular phrase, quoting Ps. 45:6 about the Messiah's throne and measuring it against the age of His reign.

This distinction also bears on a question the companion paper on the afterlife's vocabulary also takes up. In Matthew 25:41, the King sends those on His left "into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." That's the adjective: the fire *of the age*. In Revelation 20:10, the devil himself is finally cast into the lake of fire, and there the torment runs "forever and ever," the plural doubled. Were two fires prepared for one being, or is one reality being described twice? The vocabulary points to the second. When the fire is spoken of at the threshold of the coming age, in a scene about who inherits that age's kingdom (Matt. 25:34), it is described by what it is *in* that age. When it is spoken of at the end, with the devil himself thrown in after the thousand years, it is described by the plural, which runs past the age. One fire, prepared because rebellion entered through the devil and his angels, named first by its place in the age and then by its continuance beyond it. That reading leans on the vocabulary rather than on any single verse saying so, and it's offered as a reading.

"Forever" and "never": the age hidden in English

The singular phrase, *eis ton aiona*, needs a closer look, because it sits under several of the most quoted promises in John's Gospel, and English has made it vanish. Start with the verse where its meaning is clearest, because it comes in a setting about a household.

Jesus was speaking to "those Jews who believed Him":

> *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." (John 8:31-36)*

Both instances of "forever" in verse 35 are *eis ton aiona*. A slave does not abide in the house unto the age; a son abides in the house unto the age. Jesus is speaking about standing within a household: who stays in it, and who doesn't, when the age comes. Every Jew listening knew the Law's provision for the slave who loved his master and chose to "serve him forever" (Exod. 21:6), and the Greek Old Testament renders that "forever" with the very phrase Jesus uses here, *eis ton aiona*. Jesus says the slave's place in the house has a limit and the son's does not; and the whole saying hangs on a condition He stated at the start: "*If* you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed." The sonship in view here is something lived, shown in abiding in His word, and the reward is abiding in the house unto the age.

Now look at verses where "unto the age" plainly cannot mean "without end."

Paul, discussing whether a Christian may eat meat that had been offered to idols, says, "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" (1 Cor. 8:13). "Never again" is *ou me... eis ton aiona*, "I will not eat meat unto the age." Paul is not making a vow about the ages beyond the seventh day. He's saying he won't eat it as long as this age runs, and the King James translators, who normally wrote "forever," saw it: they rendered his words "while the world standeth."

The Old Testament uses its own word the same way. The Hebrew *olam*, which the Greek Old Testament regularly renders with *aion* and *aionios*, is the word behind the slave who would "serve him forever" (Exod. 21:6), and he served until he died. Hannah said she would bring Samuel to the tabernacle "that he may appear before the LORD and remain there forever" (1 Sam. 1:22), and six verses later she explained what she meant: "as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD" (1 Sam. 1:28). Jonah, praying from inside the fish, said, "The earth with its bars closed behind me forever" (Jonah 2:6), and he was there three days. The Law barred the Ammonite and the Moabite from the assembly of the LORD "even to the tenth generation...

forever" (Deut. 23:3), and the verse itself puts the two phrases side by side. The age-word means the span that matters in context: a lifetime, a generation, three days in the dark, an age.

The most striking case in the Gospels is the fig tree. The morning after Jesus entered Jerusalem, He was hungry, saw a fig tree by the road, and found nothing on it but leaves. He said to it, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again," and it withered at once (Matt. 21:19; cf. Mark 11:14). "Ever again" is *eis ton aiona*: "no fruit from you unto the age." In Scripture the fig tree is Israel. God said through Hosea, "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season" (Hos. 9:10). Jesus acted out on a tree what He was about to say to the nation's leaders in words: "the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matt. 21:43). If "ever again" meant *never, to the end of all time*, the fig tree would be finished. But a few days later, on the Mount of Olives, the same Jesus told His disciples, "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near" (Matt. 24:32). And Isaiah had already said, "Israel shall blossom and bud, And fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isa. 27:6). The curse was *unto the age*: the nation would bear no kingdom fruit through the age then running. A curse with no horizon could not put out leaves.

The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shows the phrase being explained by a parallel Gospel. Mark records the scene: scribes from Jerusalem had said Jesus cast out demons by Beelzebub (Mark 3:22), and He answered that "he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation"; Mark adds, "because they said, 'He has an unclean spirit'" (Mark 3:29-30). "Never has forgiveness" is *ouk echei aphesin eis ton aiona*, "does not have forgiveness unto the age." Matthew, reporting the same saying, spells out what the phrase covers: "it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come" (Matt. 12:32). One Gospel writer says "unto the age"; the other says "this age or the age to come." The phrase is measured against the two named ages. (Mark's "eternal condemnation," in the Greek the NKJV follows, is *aioniou kriseos*, "the judgment of the age"; the critical text reads "an eternal sin" instead. Either way, the adjective is the same age-word.)

Two short epistles use the same phrase of false teachers. Peter warns that "there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them" (2 Pet. 2:1), and says of them, "These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" (2 Pet. 2:17). Jude, writing of the same kind of men who are "spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you," calls them "wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 12-13). "Forever" in Jude is *eis ton aiona*, unto the age (Peter's verse has the phrase in the Greek text the NKJV follows, though not in the critical text). These are men the Lord "bought," men who feast at the church's own tables. The darkness reserved for them is measured against the age: the same outer darkness Jesus described for the unprofitable servant, cast "into the outer darkness" at his master's return (Matt. 25:30).

With those verses in view, read the promises in John's Gospel that rest on the same phrase:

- "whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst" (John 4:14): *shall not thirst unto the age*.
- "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:51, 58): *he will live unto the age*.
- "if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death" (John 8:51-52): *shall not see death unto the age*.
- "they shall never perish" (John 10:28): *shall not perish unto the age*.
- "whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:26): *shall not die unto the age*.

Each of these is a promise measured against the age to come. None of them, read in its own Greek, is a statement about what happens at the moment a person first believes. The section on John's Gospel below takes each of them in its setting.

One more thing about this phrase needs saying, because a careful reader will ask it. If "unto the age" is a horizon, does everything said "unto the age" lapse when the age ends? Is the word of the Lord only good until the thousand years are over (1 Pet. 1:25)? Is Christ a priest only until then (Heb. 5:6; 7:24)? No. The phrase names the horizon a statement is measured against; it does not announce what happens on the other side of it. Matthew 28:20 proves the point. "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" is bounded by the age in so many words, and no reader has ever taken it to mean that Jesus will leave His people when the age ends. The promise is made about the age the disciples were being sent into, and it's kept for the whole of that age. What happens after is a different question, and where Scripture speaks to it, it uses the plural. Some things said "unto the age" go on past it: the word of God, the Son's priesthood, the Spirit. Some don't: the fig tree's barrenness, Paul's abstinence from meat, the darkness reserved for false teachers. The phrase itself does not decide which. The subject does.

Eternal life: the life of the age

That brings the paper to the phrase that matters most. Forty-four times the New Testament speaks of *zoe aionios*, life pertaining to the age. What does Scripture itself say about it?

Start with its history, because a timeless truth about how a person is saved should run through the whole of Scripture. This one does not. The phrase "everlasting life" appears in substance only once in the entire Old Testament, in Daniel's vision of the time of the end:

> *At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life [the life of the age], Some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Dan. 12:1-2)*

The Hebrew is *chayei olam*, "the life of the age." Look at who is in view: "your people," Daniel's people, Israel, raised at the time of the end. Some of them awake to the life of the age and some to shame. The angel then tells Daniel his own portion in the same terms: "you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days" (Dan. 12:13). The one Old Testament occurrence of the phrase stands in a passage about Israel's resurrection at the end of the days and her inheritance in the age that follows. Jesus echoed Daniel directly when He spoke of the hour when "all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29), and Paul stood before Felix confessing the same hope (Acts 24:14-15). There are Old Testament anticipations of resurrection life elsewhere (Job 19:25-27; Ps. 16:10; Isa. 26:19), but the phrase itself appears once. It arrives in force in the New Testament with the King who brings the age, and it becomes the settled vocabulary of the Christian's hope in the letters written after His resurrection as the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20, 23) and after the mystery was made known (Eph. 3:5; Col. 1:26). A flat, timeless truth would not be nearly absent from the Old Testament. A life that belongs to a coming age would arrive with the One who brings that age, and that's what the record shows.

Next, look at the verbs. What does Scripture say a person *does* with regard to eternal life? He *inherits* it (Matt. 19:29; Mark 10:17; Luke 10:25; 18:18). He *lays hold on* it (1 Tim. 6:12, 19). He *reaps* it (Gal. 6:8). He *receives* it in the age to come (Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30). He *keeps* his soul *for* it (John 12:25). The reaper *gathers fruit for* it (John 4:36). God *renders* it (Rom. 2:6-7). It is the *end* of a road (Rom. 6:22), the *hope* a Christian is called in (Titus 1:2; 3:7), a *promise* (1 John 2:25), and something to be *looked for* at the mercy of the Lord's coming (Jude 21). Every one of those is a coming-into-possession word. Not one is a purchase word. No text says a man earns the life of the age or that God owes it to him, and a gift that is still a gift can nevertheless be *inherited*, *laid hold of*, and *reaped*. That's the shape of it: a gift in its origin, conditional in the attaining.

Three questioners in the Gospels asked Jesus about it, and all three asked the same way: "what shall I do?" A rich young ruler asked, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life [the life of the age]?" and Jesus answered, "if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:16-17). When the man went away grieved, Jesus told His disciples that it is hard for a rich man "to enter the kingdom of heaven," and they asked, "Who then can be saved?" (Matt. 19:23-25). *Eternal life*, *entering into life*, *entering the kingdom*, and *being saved* are used for one subject in one conversation. A lawyer asked, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life [the life of the age]?" and when he had quoted the Law's two great commandments, Jesus said, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live" (Luke 10:25-28), which is the Law's own promise: "which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD" (Lev. 18:5). Both men were Israelites, sons of a people God had already redeemed out of Egypt, and neither was asking how to be made alive toward God. They were asking about the life of the age, and Jesus answered them in terms of doing. If "eternal life" meant the gift

received at initial salvation, His answers would contradict the gospel of grace. If it means the life of the coming kingdom, His answers mean exactly what they say.

Luke, who wrote both his Gospel and Acts, supplies two sentences that belong together. When the Sadducees tried to trap Jesus with a question about marriage in the resurrection, He answered, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Luke 20:34-35). "That age" is set against "this age," and a person must be *counted worthy* to attain it, and with it "the resurrection from the dead," which in Greek is *tes anastaseos tes ek nekron*, the resurrection *out from among* the dead. Then in Acts, when the Jews of Pisidian Antioch contradicted Paul's preaching, Paul and Barnabas told them, "since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life [the life of the age], behold, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). The same writer, the same vocabulary of worthiness: counted worthy of *that age* in one book, judging oneself unworthy of *the life of the age* in the other.

Paul's letters say the same things in their own terms. Writing to Rome of the judgment of God, he says God "'will render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life [the life of the age] to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath" (Rom. 2:6-8). "Render" is *apodidomi*, a paying-back word, and what God renders is the life of the age, to those who continue patiently in doing good. God does not settle a debt here. A master who rewards faithfulness freely is not a debtor paying what he owes, and Paul says as much two chapters later, when he bars wages and debt from the spirit's judgment altogether (Rom. 4:4). But the rendering is according to deeds.

Paul comes back to it at the end of Romans 6, in a passage written to men already raised to newness of life:

> *For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life [the life of the age]. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life [the life of the age] in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:20-23)*

Verse 22 lays out a road: set free from sin, slaves of God, fruit, holiness, and at the end of it, the life of the age: *everlasting life*. "The end" is *telos*, the place where a road arrives. Verse 23 then opens with "For," explaining verse 22, and it's the most quoted verse in the chapter. "Wages" is not the ordinary word for a laborer's pay. It's *opsonia*, the soldier's rations and pay, the word John the Baptist used when he told soldiers to be content with their wages (Luke 3:14), and Paul uses it four verses after telling these same Christians they are slaves of whomever they obey (Rom. 6:16). Sin is pictured as a commanding officer paying his troops in kind, and the pay is death: separation from the life of fellowship with God. The second half of the verse is a clause

without a verb: *to de charisma tou theou zoe aionios en Christo Iesou to kurio hemon*, "but the gift of God, life of the age, in Christ Jesus our Lord." The gift is equated with the life. Then Paul says where the life is: *in* Christ Jesus our Lord. Every English Bible reads "in" here; Young's Literal has "life age-during in Christ Jesus our Lord." The life of the age is located in a Person, not issued as a detachable possession. A critic will say that every Christian is "in Christ," so every Christian must already have the life in hand. But "in Christ" answers *where* the life is. It does not answer *when* a man comes into it, and verse 22 has just answered that: it's the *end* of the road.

To the Galatians, Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life [the life of the age]. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Gal. 6:7-9). Reaping is future, it comes "in due season," and it comes "if we do not lose heart." Timothy was told, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life [the life of the age], to which you were also called" (1 Tim. 6:12), and a few verses later Paul tells him how the rich should use their money: "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty... Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life [the life of the age]" (1 Tim. 6:17-19). Both ages are in one paragraph: "this present age," in which the rich have their riches, and "the time to come," for which a foundation can be stored up now. Paul reminded Titus that God saved us "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy... that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life [the life of the age]" (Titus 3:5-7). There, the order is laid out in a single sentence. First, saved by mercy and not by works; *then* heirs, and heirs "according to the hope" of the life of the age. The ones who hope for it are the ones who have already been saved.

And Jude, closing his letter to "beloved" Christians surrounded by false teachers, told them, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life [the life of the age]" (Jude 20-21). *Keep yourselves*: a command. *Looking for the mercy*: at His coming. *Unto eternal life*: the destination.

What, then, does Scripture call the life a person receives when he first believes? It has its own vocabulary, and "eternal life" is not part of it. The Philippian jailer asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" and was told, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30-31). Paul tells the Ephesians that God, "even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:5); the verb is *suzoopoieo*, to make alive together with. And he tells the Corinthians that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17), the work of the God "who commanded light to shine out of darkness" and "has shone in our

hearts" (2 Cor. 4:6). Made alive, made a new creation, saved by believing: that is initial salvation, the spirit's judgment rendered once and for all in a man's favor, and it is eternally secure. The life of the age is the hope set before the man who has it.

John's Gospel: the life of the age offered to Israel

John's Gospel supplies seventeen of the forty-four occurrences of "eternal life," and First John supplies six more, so over half of the New Testament's uses of the phrase come from one apostle. It's John's usage, more than anyone's, that has fixed the idea that "eternal life" means the life a person receives the moment he believes. So John has to be read carefully, in his own settings.

He states his purpose at the close of his Gospel:

> *And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31)*

"The Christ" is a title with a history. It means the Anointed One, the promised King of David's line, and it meant that to every Jew who heard it. John's Gospel is written so that its readers may believe that Jesus of Nazareth *is that King*. That puts the Gospel's frame where the Gospels themselves put it: God, Israel, and Israel's Messiah, offering the nation the kingdom He came to bring. The primary sense of John's "believe" is Israel believing on her Messiah, and the primary sense of the life John holds out is the life of the age that King brings.

That doesn't make John irrelevant to anyone else. The kingdom was offered to Israel; the nation's leaders refused it; and it's now offered to the Christian. So what John says travels to the Christian reader along the line of that offer: what prepares a person to receive it, what hardens him against it, what he forfeits by refusing it. It doesn't travel along the line of Israel's own promises, her land, her city, her restoration, which remain hers. And there's one further application, for the reader who has never believed on Jesus at all. For him, believing on the Son is where initial salvation happens, the same believing the jailer was told to do (Acts 16:31). That is a secondary application of John's words, and a true one. But what John's verses promise *by name* is the life of the age.

Nicodemus and the serpent. John 3 opens with "a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews," who came to Jesus by night (John 3:1-2). Jesus told him, "unless one is born again, he cannot *see* the kingdom of God," and "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot *enter* the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5). The whole conversation is about the kingdom: seeing it, entering it. Notice what the birth does there. Jesus' word is *anothen*, which John uses everywhere else to mean "from above" (John 3:31; 19:11), and He spoke it to a ruler of a nation already redeemed under the Passover. Being born from above is God's *continuing* work in a man, and it's what fits him to see and enter the kingdom; Paper 6 takes up the whole

conversation. Peter tells Christians that God "has begotten us again to a living hope... to an inheritance" (1 Pet. 1:3-4), and in his second letter he tells them that "if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom [the kingdom of the age] of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:10-11). An entrance supplied on a condition is not an entrance already in hand. And Jesus called Nicodemus "the teacher of Israel," asking him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" (John 3:10). The rebuke only lands if these things were already in Israel's own Scriptures, and they were. God had promised the nation, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean... I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes" (Ezek. 36:25-27). Water and Spirit, promised to a people already redeemed, with the kingdom in view. Then He reached for a picture from Israel's own history to explain what He meant:

> *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life [the life of the age]. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life [the life of the age]. (John 3:14-16)*

Nicodemus knew the story. Here it is, because the picture Jesus chose is the key to the verse:

> *Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. (Num. 21:4-9)*

Look at who was bitten. These were not Egyptians. They were Israel, a people God had already redeemed out of Egypt under the blood of the Passover lamb, near the end of forty years in the wilderness and on their way around Edom toward the land promised to them. They were complaining, and the thing they complained about was the bread God gave them from heaven: "our soul loathes this worthless bread." The serpents came, many died in the wilderness, and those who looked at the serpent on the pole *lived*: lived to go on toward the land. That's the picture Jesus chose to explain "should not perish but have everlasting life." The one who looks on the lifted-up Son of Man doesn't perish short of the inheritance, the way so many of that redeemed generation did; he has the life of the age. Jesus came back to the same wilderness

bread three chapters later, and He made the same point: "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead" (John 6:49).

The word "perish" is *apollumi*, and it does not mean "cease to exist." It is the word for the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son of Luke 15, none of whom were annihilated; they were ruined, lost to their owner, and recovered. It is the word for wineskins that burst (Matt. 9:17). And it is the word in "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6), sheep who belonged to Israel's own flock. So John 3:16, read in its setting, is the love of God giving His Son so that Israel, God's own people, looking on her Messiah lifted up, might not be lost short of what was promised but have the life of the age. Its application to the Christian reader travels along the offer: the same Son, lifted up; the same looking; the same life of the age held out. And its application to the man who has never believed is also true: looking to the Son is where his life with God begins. But the verse's own promise is the life of the age.

Twenty verses later John adds a contrast: "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life [the life of the age]; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). "Does not believe" in the second half is not the negative of "believes" in the first half. It is *apeithon*, "does not obey," "refuses to be persuaded." And "shall not *see* life" repeats the verb Jesus used to Nicodemus: unless a man is born from above he cannot "see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). The man who refuses the Son will not see the life of the age any more than he'll see its kingdom.

The woman at the well. To a Samaritan woman drawing water, Jesus said, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life [the life of the age]" (John 4:13-14). "Never thirst" is *ou me dipsesei eis ton aiona*, "shall not thirst unto the age." And the water springs up *into* everlasting life, *eis zoen aionion*, the life as the place the water is heading. A few verses later He told His disciples, "he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life [the life of the age]" (John 4:36). That sentence keeps two things apart. The reaper receives *wages* (*misthos*, the word Paul uses for what a builder receives at the fire, 1 Cor. 3:8, 14), and he gathers fruit *eis* the life of the age, the same "into" as the fountain and the same *telos* as Romans 6:22.

Passed from death into life. The verse most often set against everything said so far is John 5:24, and it has to be printed with its context:

> *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life [the life of the age], and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming*

> *in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (John 5:24-29)*

"Has passed from death into life" sounds like a description of initial salvation, and it's usually read as one. But John himself uses this exact Greek phrase again, in a letter to Christians, and there it describes something else entirely. *Metabebeken ek tou thanatou eis ten zoen*, "has passed out of the death into the life," in John 5:24, is word for word what John writes in his first letter: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life [the life of the age] abiding in him" (1 John 3:14-15). In the letter, the passing from death into life is something Christians *know* by how they're living: they love the brethren. The man who doesn't love his brother "abides in death," and John says it to Christians, about Christians. "Death" there cannot mean physical dying, and it cannot mean the spirit's dead condition before initial salvation, since the letter's readers are not in that condition. It means what death means throughout Scripture: separation, here separation from the fellowship with God that is life. And "no murderer has eternal life *abiding* in him," *menousan*, remaining. John's own letter is the best commentary on John's own Gospel, and it places "passed from death into life" in the walk.

Read John 5:24 with that in mind, and the rest of the passage falls into place. "Shall not come into *judgment*" uses the noun *krisis*. Five verses later the same noun appears again: some come forth "to the resurrection of life," and others "to the resurrection of condemnation [*kriseos*]" (John 5:29), and the division between them is drawn by what they did: "those who have done good" and "those who have done evil." That passage echoes Daniel 12:2 almost word for word, and Daniel 12 is about Daniel's own people. So the man who goes on hearing Jesus' word and believing the One who sent Him (both verbs are present participles, describing what he is *doing*) has the life of the age in view and won't come into the judgment that the resurrection of condemnation represents. It is one hour with two outcomes, sorted by what men did, and John 5:24 describes the man on the good side of it.

Bread, work, and the last day. After feeding the five thousand, Jesus told the crowd that followed Him, "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life [the life of the age], which the Son of Man will give you" (John 6:27). "Labor" is *ergazesthe*, work. They asked the obvious question: "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" He answered, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:28-29). Asked what work God wanted of them, Jesus named believing on Him, and He named it in a conversation about laboring for food that endures to the life of the age. In the same discourse He tied that life to a date: "everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life [the life of the age]; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40), and again, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life [the life of the age], and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54). And He set it against the wilderness generation

again: "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead... If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:49, 51), "he will live unto the age." The manna kept a generation alive in the wilderness, and that generation died there without entering the land. The bread from heaven does what the manna could not: the one who eats it lives unto the age, and is raised up at the last day to reach what that generation never did.

"He shall never see death." When Jesus said, "if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death," His hearers took Him to mean physical dying, and they answered, "Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death'" (John 8:51-52). They misunderstood Him, and John records the misunderstanding. English readers who take "never see death" as a statement about dying, or about initial salvation, repeat the crowd's mistake in a new form. What Jesus said was, "if anyone keeps My word, he shall not see death *unto the age*." It is conditional on keeping His word, it concerns death as separation, and it's measured against the age.

The sheep who follow. The verse most often quoted for eternal security is John 10:28, and it has to be read with the verse before it:

> *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life [the life of the age], and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. (John 10:27-29)*

The sheep are described by what they *do*: they hear, and they follow, both in the present tense, describing an ongoing activity. To sheep who hear and follow, He gives the life of the age, and they "shall not perish unto the age," *ou me apolontai eis ton aiona*, the same *apollumi* as John 3:16, lost and ruined, not annihilated. The final clause protects the sheep from being *snatched* by someone else; it's about an outside force, and it's a real and precious promise. But it does not turn a promise made to followers into a promise about something that happened once, at the moment of initial salvation. The sheep Jesus was speaking of were first of all Israel's, "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" He was sent to (Matt. 15:24), with "other sheep... which are not of this fold" still to be brought in (John 10:16).

Martha. When Lazarus had been dead four days, Jesus told his sister, "Your brother will rise again," and Martha said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus answered, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:23-26). Martha's own words set the frame: resurrection at the last day. Jesus' answer holds together physical death ("though he may die") and the life that follows it ("he shall live"), and then He promised that the one who lives and believes "shall not die unto the age." Martha answered with John's purpose statement in her own mouth: "I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:27).

The soul kept for the life of the age. One verse in John names the soul outright. Just before His death, Jesus said:

> *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life [the life of the age]. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. (John 12:24-26)*

"Life" in "he who loves his life" and "hates his life" is *psuche*, the soul. The man who hates his soul-life in this world "will keep it *for* eternal life," *eis zoen aionion*: he guards his soul *unto* the life of the age. Then comes service, following, and the Father's *honor*. This is the salvation of the soul, stated in John's vocabulary, and it's the same teaching Matthew records in other words: "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?... For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works" (Matt. 16:25-27). The soul, its loss or saving, the Son of Man's coming, and reward according to works, all in one statement.

"This is eternal life." In His prayer the night before the cross, Jesus said, "this is eternal life [the life of the age], that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). This is the verse most often read as defining "eternal life" by its *quality* rather than by an age. But look at what it says. The life of the age consists in *knowing* God and His Son: fellowship, which is what life has meant in Scripture from the Garden on. "May know" is a present subjunctive, *ginoskosin*, "may go on knowing." And *knowing*, in Jesus' mouth, is the word of acknowledgment and ownership. God said to Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2), and He certainly knew the others existed. Jesus will say to men who prophesied and cast out demons and did wonders in His name, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matt. 7:23), and those are men who will be denied entrance into the kingdom (Matt. 7:21). The life of the age is being known by Him and knowing Him in that age. John 17:3 does not define the life apart from the age; it tells what the life *of* the age consists of.

First John. John's first letter is written to Christians, "little children," and its use of "eternal life" is consistent with everything above. It opens by calling Christ Himself "that eternal life [the life of the age] which was with the Father and was manifested to us" (1 John 1:2). The life of the age *is* a Person before it's anything else, and the whole letter is about having fellowship with Him (1 John 1:3). It locates the life there: "God has given us eternal life [the life of the age], and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life" (1 John 5:11-12), the same location Paul gave it (Rom. 6:23). It calls the life a *promise*, and hangs the promise on a condition: "If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life [the life of the age]" (1 John 2:24-25).

It dates the payoff: "abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28). It says the life can fail to be *abiding* in a Christian who hates his brother (1 John 3:15). And its famous assurance, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life [the life of the age], and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:13), is written to "you who *believe*," a present participle, *tois pisteuousin*, the ones who are believing; and it closes, in the text the NKJV follows, "that you may *continue* to believe." The ones presently believing and abiding may know that they presently have what the letter calls a promise: that is John's own conditional structure, producing confidence at His coming. When the letter's last verse calls the Son "the true God and eternal life [the life of the age]" (1 John 5:20), it names the One in whom the life of the age is found, the same relation Romans 16:26 names in calling God the God of the ages.

The rest of the aionios texts

The remaining uses of the adjective fall into a handful of groups, sorted by what the word describes. Sorting them matters, because each group stands in a different relation to the age.

Fire, punishment, judgment, destruction. In Matthew 18, the disciples came to Jesus asking, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matt. 18:1). Part of His answer was this: "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire" (Matt. 18:8-9). The two verses are exact parallels. "Enter into life" in one is "enter into life" in the other, and "the everlasting fire" in verse 8 is "hell fire" in verse 9, which in Greek is *ten geennan tou puros*, the Gehenna of fire. Mark's account of the same teaching completes the triangle: "It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire" (Mark 9:47). So *entering into life* is *entering the kingdom of God*, and *the fire of the age* is *Gehenna*, and the whole of it was spoken to disciples asking about greatness in the kingdom. The fire of the age belongs to the same age as the kingdom they were asking about.

Matthew 25:41 and 46 belong to the same group, and the scene dates itself. "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him" (Matt. 25:31-32). This is the end of the Tribulation, at His return, before the kingdom begins, and what's at stake is the kingdom: "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). So when the scene closes, "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life [the life of the age]" (Matt. 25:46), both halves use the same adjective, and both are measured by the same age. The punishment is *kolasis*, a word whose root has to do with pruning and correcting rather than retribution without end;

the life is the life of the age. The kingdom is bounded, so the recompense is bounded, on both sides of the verse. The fire of verse 41 is the fire of the age, the Gehenna picture again, prepared for the devil and his angels and used afterward for any who rebel as they did.

Mark's "eternal condemnation" (Mark 3:29) has already been treated. Paul tells the Thessalonians that when "the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," these "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day" (2 Thess. 1:7-10). The destruction is dated to "that Day," the day of His coming, and it is described as *olethron aionion*, destruction of the age: exclusion from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power in the age He comes to bring. Paul names two groups in verse 8, “those who do not know God” and “those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and when He is revealed, vengeance falls on both. But the “these” of verse 9 is a relative pronoun, *hoitines*, and the nearer group is the one that did not obey. That fits what the verse describes. Exclusion from His presence and the glory of His power in the age He comes to bring is a loss only a man who could have had a place in it can suffer, and it’s men already saved who are told to obey; the unsaved are told to believe (Acts 16:31). Those who do not know God meet His vengeance as His enemies do when He comes (Rev. 19:19-21), and their judgment waits until the thousand years are over (Rev. 20:11-15).

Hebrews lists "eternal judgment" among the elementary principles a Christian should already have in hand before going on to maturity (Heb. 6:1-2). It is *krimatos aioniou*, the judgment of the age, and it stands in a letter that announces its own subject in its second chapter: "the world to come, of which we speak" (Heb. 2:5). A few verses on, the writer speaks of those who "have tasted... the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:5). The judgment of the age is the judgment that decides a person's place in the age to come. For the Christians Hebrews was written to, that judgment is the Judgment Seat of Christ, and the writer counts it among the foundations.

Jude says Sodom and Gomorrah "are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7). Sodom is not burning now, and God has promised through Ezekiel to restore her fortunes (Ezek. 16:53, 55). The paper on the afterlife's vocabulary takes that verse up in detail; here it's enough to see that "eternal fire" describes a fire whose effect has lasted through the ages without the fire itself still burning.

Glory, kingdom, inheritance, salvation, dwelling. A second group of uses describes the reward itself, and every one of them sits in a conditional setting. Paul endured all things so that others "may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory," and he followed at once with "If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:10-12). Peter prayed for Christians whom God "called... to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while" (1 Pet. 5:10). Peter also told his readers to add to their faith virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love, "for if

you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom [the kingdom of the age] of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:5-11). The entrance is supplied *abundantly*, and it's supplied *so*, on the condition just stated, into the kingdom of the age. Hebrews speaks of those called receiving "the promise of the eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9:15), and of Christ as "the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Heb. 5:9): a salvation of the age, conditioned on obedience, in a letter about the world to come. And Jesus, closing the parable of the unjust steward, told His disciples to use the money of this age so "that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home" (Luke 16:9), *aionious skenas*, the dwellings of the age.

The weight of glory and the things not seen. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:17-18). This is often taken as the one verse that settles the matter the other way, since "eternal" is contrasted directly with "temporary." It's taken up among the objections below. For now, notice what "eternal" describes in verse 17: a *weight of glory* that affliction is *producing*. That's reward vocabulary, and it's the same pairing Paul makes in Romans: "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

A few verses later Paul continues: "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven... not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life" (2 Cor. 5:1-4). The house of the age is the body, and what Paul longs for is to be *clothed* with it. He then goes straight to the reason for his aim in life: "Therefore we make it our aim... to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:9-10). The building exists, and it's from God. Being clothed with it is tied to the judgment seat four verses later.

Things done once, for the ages. Christ "with His own blood... entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12). Hebrews 9 and 10 are built on frequency: the high priest entered "once a year" (Heb. 9:7), "often" (Heb. 9:25), "continually year by year" (Heb. 10:1). Against all that repetition, Christ entered *once for all*, having obtained a redemption *of the ages*, one that carries through the ages without ever needing to be done again. That's the plain sense of the word at full strength, and the sufficiency of the cross is the passage's own point. The same chapter says He offered Himself "through the eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14), the Spirit of the ages. And Hebrews closes with a blessing from "the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20). That covenant is the one Hebrews

has already quoted at length from Jeremiah: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Heb. 8:8). It is Israel's covenant. It is *the covenant of the age* because it comes into force for Israel when the age comes, when the nation is restored in her land and "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26). The blood that will ratify it is the same blood by which the great Shepherd was brought up from the dead. Nothing in the verse makes the Church a party to it.

John saw "another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth... saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come'" (Rev. 14:6-7). The good news of the age is announced to the earth at the age's threshold, when the hour of judgment has come. And Paul prayed that God, "who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace," would comfort the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2:16): consolation of the age, joined to a good hope.

God, and time. The remaining uses have been covered already: the God of the ages (Rom. 16:26), His dominion of the ages (1 Tim. 6:16), and the three places where the word describes time and the translators could not write "eternal" (Rom. 16:25; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2), along with Onesimus received "forever" (Philem. 15).

Sorted that way, every one of the seventy-one uses of the adjective reads naturally with the one meaning, *pertaining to the age or the ages*. Some describe what happens inside the coming age: its life, its kingdom, its glory, its inheritance, its judgment, its fire. Some describe what was done once and holds for all the ages: the redemption Christ obtained. Some describe God and what is His, the Maker of the ages. And some describe spans of time outright. No verse requires the word to change its meaning, and several verses make it impossible for the word to mean "without beginning or end."

Where They Align

Set the position back alongside the three traditions — Reformed/Calvinist, Wesleyan/Arminian, and Catholic — and the common ground runs wider than the disagreements suggest. Four points:

- **What God is and does is not bounded by the ages.** Every tradition, and this paper, holds that God is without beginning or end, and that what Christ accomplished at the cross is never to be repeated. The redemption He obtained "once for all" (Heb. 9:12) holds through all the ages. The disagreement is not over God's timelessness; it's over which words Scripture uses to express it.
- **The life in "eternal life" is life with God.** All agree that the life Scripture promises is fellowship with the Father and the Son, knowing Him (John 17:3), and not bare existence.

- **That life is tied to the resurrection and to Christ's coming.** Every tradition confesses that Jesus will "raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40), and that God "will render to each one according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6).
- **"Unto the ages of the ages" is without end.** When Scripture gives God glory "forever and ever," or says that Christ "shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15), every tradition and this paper read the phrase as unending.

Where They Diverge, and Why

A span of time, or time without end

The three traditions read *aionios* by what they take eternity to be; this paper reads it by its noun. That's the root of every other difference. If the adjective means "without end" in nearly all its uses, then the three verses where it describes time (Rom. 16:25; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2) are exceptions to be set aside. If it means "pertaining to the age," those three verses are not exceptions at all. They're the places where the word's meaning shows through because no translator could cover it. The same goes for the singular and plural phrases built on the noun. English flattens both into "forever," and the traditions read both as unending. Scripture uses the singular for what is measured against the age and the plural for what runs on past it, and this paper follows Scripture's distinction.

What "eternal life" names

This is the difference that matters most, and it's easy to misstate. It is not a disagreement about whether a Christian's initial salvation is secure. This paper holds, as firmly as the Reformed tradition does, that a person made alive toward God by believing on Jesus is eternally secure; nothing he does afterward can reverse the spirit's judgment rendered in his favor. The disagreement is about which *words* Scripture uses for that. All three traditions take "eternal life" to be the name of initial salvation's gift, and so every verse that attaches a condition to eternal life becomes a problem. The Reformed tradition solves it by saying the man who fails the condition never had the life. The Wesleyan tradition solves it by saying he had the life and lost it. The Catholic tradition solves it by the distinction between mortal and venial sin. Each solution is shaped by the same starting assumption.

This paper starts elsewhere. Initial salvation has its own names in Scripture: *saved* by believing (Acts 16:31), *made alive* (Eph. 2:5), a *new creation* (2 Cor. 5:17). "Eternal life" names the life of the age to come, which Scripture says a Christian *inherits*, *reaps*, *lays hold on*, and *hopes for*. So the conditions attached to eternal life don't threaten anyone's initial salvation, and they don't have to be explained away. They can be read at full strength, as warnings about a real loss, and the loss is the life of the coming age, the kingdom and its glory, not the spirit's standing before God.

The already-and-not-yet reading

The scholars who agree that "eternal life" means "the life of the age to come" come closest to this paper. The difference is whether that age has begun. On their reading, it has; the Christian possesses its life now. On this paper's reading, it has not. The age to come is the seventh day, the thousand-year reign, and it begins when Christ comes. Its life is something a Christian has *in hope* (Titus 1:2; 3:7) and *in promise* (1 John 2:25), and what John's present tenses describe is a man presently believing and presently abiding (John 5:24; 1 John 5:13), not a man who has already crossed into the next age.

The punishment texts

The traditions build the endlessness of punishment largely on *aionios*: "everlasting fire," "everlasting punishment," "everlasting destruction." This paper reads those uses of the adjective as the fire, punishment, and destruction *of the age*, tied to the coming age and the scene in which they're pronounced (Matt. 18:8-9; 25:31-46; 2 Thess. 1:7-10). Where Scripture speaks of what continues past the age, it uses the plural, and it's there, in "the ages of the ages" (Rev. 20:10), that the permanence of the lake of fire is spoken of. So the difference is not that the traditions affirm a final permanence and this paper denies one. The difference is *where* Scripture puts it, and therefore which verses are about the unsaved at the end of all things and which are about the recompense of the coming age.

Answering the Objections

The charge. The whole case rests on the etymological fallacy. A word's meaning isn't determined by its root. "Rock" and "rocky" is a tidy illustration, but English is full of adjectives that drifted from their nouns. *Awful* once meant full of awe and now means bad; *terrific* once meant causing terror and is now a compliment; *naughty* once meant having nothing. Greek is no different. *Aionios* came to mean "eternal," whatever its derivation.

The answer. The warning about derivation is correct, and this paper doesn't rest on derivation. The root shows where to begin looking. What shows the word's meaning is usage, and the usage is on the page: the noun and the adjective in one sentence with the age named (Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30); three verses where the adjective describes time and no translator can write "eternal" (Rom. 16:25; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2), one of them using the word twice in a single verse; the only verse with God as the adjective's subject standing one clause after one of those three (Rom. 16:25-26); and seventy-one uses that all read naturally with one meaning. If the word had drifted to mean "without beginning or end," it would be possible to translate it that way everywhere. It is not possible, and the lexicon's own first definition concedes the bounded sense in the very verses where it cannot be avoided.

The charge. *Aionios* describes God (Rom. 16:26), the Spirit (Heb. 9:14), God's power (1 Tim. 6:16), and Christ as "the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20). God is not bounded by an age. So the word must mean "eternal."

The answer. The word means the same thing in those verses as everywhere else: pertaining to the ages. What differs is the relation. God is the God of the ages as their Maker (Heb. 1:2; 11:3). Scripture calls Him "the King of the ages" in the noun (1 Tim. 1:17), and the Greek Old Testament rendered *El Olam*, "God of the age," with this very adjective (Gen. 21:33). None of that puts God *inside* the ages, and the paper's section on the God of the ages shows how ordinary that relation is in English: a musical director is not himself a piece of music. God's own freedom from time rests on other verses entirely (Exod. 3:14; Isa. 43:10; Ps. 90:2), and those verses stand on their own. What the objection needs, and doesn't have, is a reason to give the word one meaning in Rom. 16:25 and a different one a few words later in Rom. 16:26.

The charge. Paul contrasts the two directly. "The things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). If *aionios* meant a long but bounded age, the contrast with "temporary" would collapse.

The answer. The contrast holds perfectly well, because "temporary" does not mean "bounded" as opposed to "boundless." The word is *proskaira*, from *kairos*, a season: "for a season," "for the moment." Jesus uses the same word for the seed on stony ground, which "endures only for a while" (Matt. 13:21), and Hebrews uses it for "the passing pleasures of sin" that Moses refused, "for he looked to the reward" (Heb. 11:25-26). The contrast is between what lasts a season and what belongs to the age: the passing against the lasting, the present against the coming. Paul has just set up the same contrast in the previous verse, where "our light affliction, which is but for a moment" is producing "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). The moment against the age, affliction now against glory then. That's reward vocabulary, and the same pairing appears in Rom. 8:18. Nothing in the contrast requires the unseen things to be without beginning or end; it requires only that they outlast the moment, and they do.

Paul also tells us how a man looks at things he cannot see, three verses later: "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). And the New Testament's one sustained treatment of faith takes up his exact words. Faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1), and "things not seen" there is the same construction Paul uses, the same verb under the same negation.

What Hebrews 11 means by things not seen settles the question, because the chapter names them one after another and every one of them is ahead. Abraham lived in tents and "waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). The patriarchs confessed they were strangers on the earth and "desire a better, that is, a heavenly country" (Heb. 11:16). The one who comes to God must believe "that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). And Moses, who already appeared in this answer, "esteeming

the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" because "he looked to the reward" (Heb. 11:26), turned down the passing pleasures of sin for something he could not see and had not yet received. Not one of these men is described as contemplating a timeless realm. Each of them is waiting for something God has promised and has not yet given. That is what it means to look at the things which are not seen, and Paul's name for them is the things of the age.

The charge. Matthew 25:46 uses the same adjective for both outcomes: "these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." If the punishment is bounded, the life is bounded too. No one wants to say the righteous have only a temporary life.

The answer. The symmetry is real, and this reading keeps it. One word, one age, both outcomes measured by it. The scene dates itself: the Son of Man has come in His glory, the nations are gathered before Him, and the question on the table is who will "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:31-34). The kingdom is the coming age, and the recompense on both sides is the recompense of that age: the life of the age for some, the punishment of the age for others. What the verse does not say is what lies beyond the age for either group. Where Scripture speaks of that, it uses other language, the plural "ages of the ages" (Rev. 22:5; 20:10). So the objection's premise is right and its conclusion does not follow. The righteous of Matthew 25 are not given "only a temporary life." They're given the life of the age to come, which is what the verse says.

The charge. If "unto the age" marks a horizon, then everything said "unto the age" expires with it. The word of the Lord "endures forever" (1 Pet. 1:25), Christ is "a priest forever" (Heb. 5:6), and He "continues forever" (Heb. 7:24). Surely those don't lapse after a thousand years. And the angel told Mary that "of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33).

The answer. "Unto the age" names the horizon a statement is measured against; it doesn't announce a lapse on the other side of it. Jesus' promise, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20), is bounded by the age in so many words, and nobody reads it to mean He'll leave His people when the age ends. The promise is made about the age the disciples were sent into. The word of the Lord, the Son's priesthood, and the Spirit's abiding are all spoken of with respect to the age, and nothing in Scripture suggests they end after it; some other things said "unto the age" plainly do end, like Paul's abstinence from meat (1 Cor. 8:13) and the fig tree's barrenness (Matt. 21:19; Matt. 24:32). The subject decides. As for Luke 1:33, it proves the distinction rather than undoing it. "He will reign over the house of Jacob forever" uses the *plural*, "unto the ages," and "of His kingdom there will be no end" is a separate clause saying the same. The reign does not stop when the thousand years are over. The Son delivers the kingdom to the Father at the end (1 Cor. 15:24-28), and the throne becomes "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1, 3), where His servants "shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22:5). The age to come is bounded; the reign goes on into the ages.

The charge. John's Gospel uses the present tense. "He who believes in the Son *has* everlasting life" (John 3:36); "he who hears My word and believes... *has* everlasting life" (John 5:24); "he who believes in Me *has* everlasting life" (John 6:47). First John is written "that you may know that you *have* eternal life" (1 John 5:13). A Christian has it now.

The answer. In every one of those verses, "he who believes" and "he who hears" are present participles: the one *believing*, the one *hearing*. They describe a man by what he is doing, and what's promised to him is promised as long as that description holds. That's how John's own letter reads, since the life can fail to be "abiding" in a Christian who hates his brother (1 John 3:15), and the promise hangs on abiding (1 John 2:24-25) and pays out "at His coming" (1 John 2:28). John 5:24's "has passed from death into life" is word for word the phrase John uses in his letter of Christians who know it "because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14). And the Gospel's present tenses stand beside verses that put the life at "the last day" (John 6:40, 54) and "in the age to come" (Mark 10:30). The man presently believing presently has the life of the age in the only way anyone can have it before the age arrives: as his, promised, secured in the Person in whom it is found (1 John 5:11), and awaiting its day.

The charge. "As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). God appointed certain people to eternal life, and they believed. That's the initial salvation of the elect, stated in one verse.

The answer. Read the verse with the two before it. Paul and Barnabas had just told the Jews of Pisidian Antioch, "since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life [the life of the age], behold, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). *Worthiness* is the category, and Luke, who wrote Acts, had already recorded Jesus speaking of "those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead" (Luke 20:35). The life of the age is something a man can be counted worthy of, or judge himself unworthy of; that's how Luke uses the phrase. In that setting, the Gentiles who "had been appointed" (*tetagmenoi*, set in order, arranged) to the life of the age believed, while the Jews who judged themselves unworthy of it didn't. The verb *tasso* can describe what others arrange for a person, and it can describe what people set themselves to: the household of Stephanas "devoted themselves" to the ministry of the saints, *etaxan heautous* (1 Cor. 16:15). Whichever way the form is taken, the verse says nothing about the life being the initial gift of salvation. It says who, in that synagogue, was set toward the life of the age, and it sets them beside those who had judged themselves unworthy of it.

The charge. If "unto the ages of the ages" is unending, the paper has conceded the traditional view. The devil is tormented "forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10), and so are those who worship the beast (Rev. 14:11).

The answer. Nothing here is conceded, because nothing here was denied. This paper affirms what Scripture says with the doubled plural: it speaks of what runs on past the age, without an end being named. The question under examination was never whether Scripture can speak of

endlessness. It is whether the *adjective aionios* and the singular phrase "unto the age" mean endlessness, and whether "eternal life" is the name of initial salvation. The answer to those is no, and the doubled plural is part of the evidence for it: when the New Testament writers wanted to say "on past the age," they did not use the adjective. They multiplied the noun.

Why It Matters — Downstream Effects

Getting this one word right changes how a great deal of the New Testament reads.

- **The warnings can be read at full strength.** Once "eternal life" names the life of the coming age rather than initial salvation, every condition Scripture attaches to it (reaping if we don't lose heart, laying hold of it, being counted worthy of it, keeping the soul for it) can mean exactly what it says. No one has to claim that the man who fails never had life, or that he had it and lost his salvation. What he forfeits is the life of the age, the kingdom and its glory. What he received when he first believed stands.
- **John's Gospel reads as what it is.** Written that its readers "may believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31), it holds out to Israel the life of the age her King brings, and it speaks to the Christian along the line of that same offer. Its most familiar verses, John 3:16, 5:24, and 10:28, stop being proof texts about a single moment and become promises about the coming kingdom, made to people who look, hear, believe, follow, and abide.
- **The fire texts sort themselves.** The everlasting fire of Matthew 18 and 25 is the fire of the age, Gehenna, pronounced in scenes about who enters the kingdom. The permanence Scripture assigns to the lake of fire is spoken in the plural, at the end of the thousand years. Readers no longer have to force the recompense of the coming age and the final state of the unsaved into one sentence.
- **The story stays in view.** *Aionios* keeps pointing to the age to come, and the age to come is the seventh day of a week God has been working since Genesis 1. A reader who knows that the word means "of the age" cannot read "eternal life" without asking *which* age, and that question keeps the whole story of Scripture, a ruined creation restored over six days with a seventh day of rest to come, in front of him.
- **Hope has an object.** Paul called the life of the age a *hope* (Titus 1:2), and Peter told Christians to "rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). A hope that's already in hand is not hope (Rom. 8:24). The life of the age is a hope because it's still ahead, and a Christian's present conduct bears on whether he'll receive it.

Conclusion

"Eternal" is a translator's word. The apostles wrote *aionios*, the adjective of *aion*, "age," and Scripture's own sentences show what they meant by it. An age is a long period with a beginning and an end; there were ages before this one, this one is running now under a ruler who is

passing away, and the age to come will follow it when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory. The adjective means "pertaining to the age," one meaning everywhere, with the relation differing by what it describes: things that happen inside the coming age, things done once and holding through all the ages, and the God who made them. Where it describes time, the translators could not write "eternal" at all. Where Scripture wanted to say "on past the age," it used the plural and doubled it. And where English says "forever" or "never" in John's great promises, the Greek says "unto the age."

"Eternal life," then, is the life of the age to come. It is inherited, reaped, laid hold of, hoped for, and rendered according to deeds, and it is found in a Person, "in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). It is not the name of initial salvation, which Scripture calls being made alive, made a new creation, and saved through believing. Keep the two apart, and the promises and warnings of the New Testament stop contradicting each other. The Christian's initial salvation is secure; the life of the age is his hope. And the One who holds both out to him is the King of the ages.

Appendix: Every *Aionios* in the New Testament

The seventy-one occurrences of the adjective in the Greek text the NKJV translates, with the NKJV's rendering and the thing the word describes. The critical text followed by most modern versions differs at a few points: at 1 Tim. 6:19 it reads "that which is truly life" instead of "eternal life"; at Mark 3:29 it reads "an eternal sin" instead of "eternal condemnation"; and it prints the short additional ending of Mark, after Mark 16:8, which contains one more use of the word.

#	Reference	NKJV rendering	Describes
1	Matt. 18:8	everlasting fire	fire (= "hell fire," v. 9)
2	Matt. 19:16	eternal life	life
3	Matt. 19:29	eternal life	life
4	Matt. 25:41	everlasting fire	fire
5	Matt. 25:46	everlasting punishment	punishment
6	Matt. 25:46	eternal life	life
7	Mark 3:29	eternal condemnation	judgment
8	Mark 10:17	eternal life	life
9	Mark 10:30	eternal life	life
10	Luke 10:25	eternal life	life
11	Luke 16:9	everlasting home	dwellings
12	Luke 18:18	eternal life	life
13	Luke 18:30	eternal life	life
14	John 3:15	eternal life	life

15	John 3:16	everlasting life	life
16	John 3:36	everlasting life	life
17	John 4:14	everlasting life	life
18	John 4:36	eternal life	life
19	John 5:24	everlasting life	life
20	John 5:39	eternal life	life
21	John 6:27	everlasting life	life
22	John 6:40	everlasting life	life
23	John 6:47	everlasting life	life
24	John 6:54	eternal life	life
25	John 6:68	eternal life	life
26	John 10:28	eternal life	life
27	John 12:25	eternal life	life
28	John 12:50	everlasting life	life
29	John 17:2	eternal life	life
30	John 17:3	eternal life	life
31	Acts 13:46	everlasting life	life
32	Acts 13:48	eternal life	life
33	Rom. 2:7	eternal life	life
34	Rom. 5:21	eternal life	life
35	Rom. 6:22	everlasting life	life
36	Rom. 6:23	eternal life	life
37	Rom. 16:25	since the world began	times
38	Rom. 16:26	the everlasting God	God
39	2 Cor. 4:17	eternal weight of glory	glory
40	2 Cor. 4:18	eternal	the things not seen
41	2 Cor. 5:1	eternal in the heavens	house (the body)
42	Gal. 6:8	everlasting life	life
43	2 Thess. 1:9	everlasting destruction	destruction
44	2 Thess. 2:16	everlasting consolation	consolation
45	1 Tim. 1:16	everlasting life	life
46	1 Tim. 6:12	eternal life	life
47	1 Tim. 6:16	everlasting power	God's dominion
48	1 Tim. 6:19	eternal life	life
49	2 Tim. 1:9	before time began	times

50	2 Tim. 2:10	eternal glory	glory
51	Titus 1:2	eternal life	life
52	Titus 1:2	before time began	times
53	Titus 3:7	eternal life	life
54	Philem. 15	forever	receiving Onesimus
55	Heb. 5:9	eternal salvation	salvation
56	Heb. 6:2	eternal judgment	judgment
57	Heb. 9:12	eternal redemption	redemption
58	Heb. 9:14	the eternal Spirit	the Spirit
59	Heb. 9:15	the eternal inheritance	inheritance
60	Heb. 13:20	the everlasting covenant	covenant (Israel's new covenant)
61	1 Pet. 5:10	His eternal glory	glory
62	2 Pet. 1:11	the everlasting kingdom	kingdom
63	1 John 1:2	that eternal life	life (Christ)
64	1 John 2:25	eternal life	life
65	1 John 3:15	eternal life	life
66	1 John 5:11	eternal life	life
67	1 John 5:13	eternal life	life
68	1 John 5:20	eternal life	life (Christ)
69	Jude 7	eternal fire	fire
70	Jude 21	eternal life	life
71	Rev. 14:6	the everlasting gospel	gospel

Three uses of the noun *aion* are also rendered with the word "eternal" or "eternally" in the NKJV, and are often mistaken for the adjective: "the eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11), which is "the purpose of the ages"; "the King eternal" (1 Tim. 1:17), which is "the King of the ages"; and "the eternally blessed God" (Rom. 9:5), which is "God blessed unto the ages."

Works Cited

Bauer, Walter, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG). 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. S.v. *aion*, *aionios*, *aidios*, *apollumi*, *opsonion*, *proskairos*, *tasso*.

Catechism of the Catholic Church. 2nd ed. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997. §§1023, 1035, 1861.

Chitwood, Arlen L. "Signs in John's Gospel." Norman, OK: The Lamp Broadcast, Inc.

Dodd, C. H. *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953.

Edwards, David L., with John Stott. *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989. First published as *Essentials* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988).

Fudge, Edward William. *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment.* 3rd ed. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011.

Holmes, Michael W., ed. *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition.* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010.

Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* Translated and abridged by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985. Hermann Sasse, "*aion*, *aionios*."

Ladd, George Eldon. *A Theology of the New Testament.* Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.

Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon.* 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. S.v. *kolazo*, *kolasis*.

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. Council of Constantinople, 381. Greek and Latin texts.

Robinson, Maurice A., ed. *Scrivener's Textus Receptus* (1894 edition), with morphological parsing. Public domain.

The Westminster Confession of Faith. 1646. Chapters XVII, XXXIII.

Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.

Wesley, John. *The Articles of Religion* (1784). Article XII.

———. "The Great Assize." Sermon 15, 1758.

Young, Robert. *Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible.* 1862; rev. ed. 1898.

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.