

## Age: Eternal or Temporal?

What follows is a short study on the Greek word “aionios” and its family of words. The impetus for the study was an e-mail question sent to me regarding the eternity of hell (August, 2005), and my response was via the same medium. With the very subject matter of eternal torment at the center of debate currently, I thought it appropriate that this study be offered.

Indeed, the article titled, “Is hell truly FOREVER?” found just above this study on the homepage of ZinYi.com, was written based on the conclusions derived from this study.

Please note that studies presented in the Bible Internet Radio room on Sunday mornings (click “Click to Listen” below) are of a more expansive nature; thus I would suggest to everyone reading this to conduct a thorough study of his own. However, the brevity of the study ought to not be interpreted as conveying any current uncertainty on my part. If the conclusions offered in this study are in error, may the Lord be gracious in showing us that they are so.

Zin Yi  
November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007

Every instance in which the English word “eternal” occurs in the King James New Testament, we are reading the translation of the Greek word, *aionios*, and its family of words:

166 αἰωνιος *aionios* *ahee-o'-nee-os*  
from [165](#); TDNT-1:208,31; adj  
AV-eternal 42, everlasting 25, the world began + [5550](#) 2, since the world began + [5550](#) 1, for ever 1; 71

The root of 166, *aionios*, is 165, or *aion*:

165 αἰων *aion* *ahee-ohn'*  
from the same as [104](#); TDNT-1:197,31; n m  
AV-ever 71, world 38, never + [3364](#) + [1519](#) + [3588](#) 6, evermore 4, age 2, eternal 2, misc 5; 128

In turn, as you can see, the root of *aion* is "from the same as 104":

104 αἰ *aei* *ah-eye'*  
from an obsolete primary noun (apparently meaning continued duration); ; adv  
AV-always 4, always 3, ever 1; 8

In other words, both 104 as well as 165 come from "an obsolete primary noun (apparently meaning **continued duration**)." This is probably why the Young's Literal Translation (YLT) renders *aionios* by the expression, "age-during."

In fact, a look into 104 itself confirms this sense:

Mr 15:8 And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had **ever** <104> done unto them.

Ac 7:51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do **always** <104> resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

It seems clear that the word *aei* does **not** convey a sense of that which is unending, but rather, that which is repeated, constant, or *all of the time* - *that is*, within a certain time frame that is in view. Indeed, when we now look into *aion*, 165, this sense does not change much:

Mt 12:32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world <165>, neither in the *world* [that] to come.

It is important to notice in the above that God has 2 distinct *worlds*, or *aion*'s, in view (165 occurs only once – the italicized “world” is clearly implied by the Greek definite article). Surely, the sense of 165 as it pertains to “this world (*aion*)” cannot be that which is unending, for, by the weight of the multitude of other scriptures we can understand that this *aion*, our present age, shall end. Another such example, confirming the sense of *aion*, is the following:

Lu 18:30 Who shall not receive manifold more in **this present time**, and in the world <165> to come life everlasting.

Let us recall that a sense of *aei*, 104, that we saw previously, was “*all of the time*.” In Lk. 18:30 above, the Lord links *aion* with “time,” or *kairos*.

Now, then, how do we understand the following verse?

Lu 1:33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever <165>; and of his kingdom **there shall be no end**.

A look into “*ouk estai telos*,” or “shall be no end,” indicates that a time frame which is **unending** is really in view. How can we reconcile these two contradictory senses conveyed by *aion*? - by understanding that with *aion* God has a **certain, particular time-duration in mind**. When He uses the word as it pertains to “this present time,” then the full, “all of” time-duration is from creation to the return of the Lord Jesus. On the other hand, when He uses the word referring to that age “to come,” then the full, “all of” time-duration He has in view is that which has **no end**. It is still an age, a certain time frame: it just happens to not have an ending point.

Over abundantly, we find that Biblical words (and their respective relatives) carry the same basic meaning in all their occurrences, yet with a dual application. The basic meaning of *aion* is that of a time frame or time-duration. As it refers to our present age, it

has a point of termination; as it describes the world coming, it does not. Either way, the basic definition of the word has not changed.

We can see this is the case also with the adjective, *aionios*, #165:

Joh 10:28 And I give unto them eternal <166> life; and they shall never <3364> <1519> <165> perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

Notice that God employs both the noun, *aion*, as well as the adjective, *aionios* here. Based on what we have thus far seen, *aionios* could be rendered "time-lasting," or, as per the YLT, "age-during." The portion translated "shall never perish" could be rendered "shall not unto time-duration perish." In both the cases, God has the set time frame of eternity in view. This eternal time frame is not the only one in view, however, in the following verse, which has *aionios* referring both to the time frame that is eternal, as well as that which is temporal:

Tit 1:2 In hope of eternal <166> life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world <166> began;

The first use of *aionios*, surely, has the time-duration which does **not** end in view. As for the second usage, let us render it more literally first:

"...promised before the seasons of time-endurings."

What we can learn here is that the history of this present world, which ultimately comes to an end point, is divided into "seasons" (*chronos*), which in turn is made up of multiple full passages (endurings) of time frames. These *endurings*, or *time-lastings*, are certainly *not* without end.