

# Age and Eternal

## Eternal (or Everlasting) Life – is it or isn't it?

*A very short discussion on the New Testament use of the words, age and eternal*

In the English (and Greek) languages, the grammars describe what are called nouns and adjectives. In both these languages, an adjective is just a different grammatical form of the noun from which it is derived and therefore *necessarily embodies the same meaning as the noun*. This is reflected in the fact that the adjective is spelt the same way as the noun except of course for its adjectival ending. For example, if *beauty* is the noun then *beautiful* is its adjective. Thus the word *graceful* can not be the adjectival form for the noun *beauty*. Rather *graceful* is the adjectival form of the noun *grace*. Some more examples will help.

If I were to ask you what is the noun from the adjective, beautiful, you would tell me, beauty. If I were to ask you what is the noun from the adjective, dusty, you would tell me, dust. If I were to ask you what is the noun from the adjective, entertaining, you would tell me, entertainment. Note the adjectives are spelt the same way as the noun except for the adjectival endings.

Perhaps at this point, so that you get the full picture, I should ask the question the other way round. For example, what is the adjective from the noun, distinction, and you would tell me, distinct, or what is the adjective from the noun, contrition, and you would tell me, contrite, or what is the adjective from the noun, diagram, and you would tell me, diagrammatic. Finally, I ask, what is the adjective from the noun, eternity, and you would correctly say eternal. Did you notice that the noun and adjective are spelt the same way except for their endings which tells us if it is a noun or adjective. **In other words, the adjective can not mean something different to the noun since it derives its meaning and spelling from it.** This relationship is at the root of this article.

This entirely consistent concept is clearly seen in the following handful of English noun–adjective examples.

NOUN	ADJECTIVE
beauty	beautiful
hell	hellish
dust	dusty
blood	bloody
septicaemia	septicaemic
diagram	diagrammatic
industry	industrial
lust	lustful
grease	greasy
dirt	dirty
wind	windy
sun	sunny
horizon	horizontal
eternity	eternal

Thousands of such examples can be found in any English dictionary. It is to be noticed in these examples that, again, the only difference in spelling between the noun and adjective are the endings which make it a noun or an adjective.

The exact same noun-adjective pattern also occurs in the ancient Koine Greek language in which the New Testament is written. Here are a handful of examples.

NOUN	ADJECTIVE
ἀγιοτης (sanctity)	ἅγιος (sacred)
αγαθωσυνη (goodness)	αγαθος (good)
αρχη (origin)	αρχαιος (original)
ειρηνη (peace)	ειρηνικος (peaceful)
καινοτης (newness)	καινος (new)
ξύλον (wood)	ξύλινος (wooden)
μισθος (hire)	μισθιος (hired)
μωρια (foolishness)	μωρος (foolish)
σαρξ (flesh)	σαρκινος (fleshy)
αιων (age)	αιωνιος (?)

Again, thousands of examples of this noun-adjective pattern can be found in any Ancient Greek dictionary and hundreds can be found in the New Testament itself. Notice again that the only difference in spelling between the noun and adjective is the grammatical endings which make it a noun or adjective. This noun-adjective pattern we find in the Greek is exactly the same as in the English.

Take particular note of the last Greek example given, *αιων* (age) — *αιωνιος* (?). The question mark is used here, because it is the traditional but false English translation of this adjectival form of this Greek noun which is so important to this short discussion. *αιωνιος* is nearly always translated “eternal” (or similarly as “everlasting”), but this gives the adjective, *αιωνιος*, an entirely different meaning to the noun, *αιων*, (age) from which it is derived. This does not make any sense considering what has just been said about noun-adjective relationships. So I have to ask, why do translators persist in telling us that the adjective from the noun, age, is eternal? Apart from making no grammatical sense, it happens to be quite erroneous as we will soon see.

The existence of this very clear noun-adjective relationship, demonstrated in the two groups of examples of both languages above, shows the adjective *necessarily embodies the same meaning as the noun*. No English or Greek words depart from this relationship.

Let’s now focus on the words particularly relevant to the New Testament, by bringing them together in the table below.

NOUN	ADJECTIVE
eternity	eternal
αιων (age)	αιωνιος (eternal)

Do you see the inconsistency here?

Let’s first examine the English adjective, eternal, often also rendered “everlasting” in many English translations, and most often found in the well known expression, eternal life. Eternal occurs 67 out of 70 times in the KJV as the translation of the Greek adjective, *αιωνιος*. If consistency in translation were part of the fabric of the

KJV, then, according to the noun-adjective relationship, every occurrence of the corresponding Greek noun form, *αιων*, should have been translated eternity, since eternity is the noun from which the adjective, eternal, is derived. Of course we find there is no such consistency in the KJV. Why? Because to translate the Greek noun, *αιων*, as *eternity* makes an absolute nonsense of nearly every sentence in which it occurs. Fortunately though, scholars are unanimous that the Greek noun, *αιων*, actually means age or aeon/eon<sup>1</sup>, and can be demonstrated in many New Testament examples, to be **a period of time having a definite beginning and definite end**, unlike the word eternity which has no beginning and no end. A few classic examples from the NASB demonstrating this point will suffice here to prove that the noun *αιων* (age) can not mean eternity:

1) Matt. 12:32 *“Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either **in this age (eon) or in the age (eon) to come.**”*

If *αιων* were translated eternity, we would have the nonsensical phrase ***in this eternity or in the eternity to come.***

2) Mark 10:30 *... but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the **present age (eon)**, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and **in the age (eon) to come**, eternal life.*

Again, eternity makes a nonsense if we have *“present eternity and in the eternity to come”*.

3) Luke 18:30 *... who will not receive many times as much at this time and **in the age (eon) to come**, eternal life.”*

This verse when compared to the Matthew verse above, shows that an age has a time frame — a beginning and an end.

4) Eph. 1:21 *... far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only **in this age (eon) but also in the one to come.***

The same comment as for Matt 12:32 above applies. This verse again shows that ages have a beginning and an end.

There are more<sup>2</sup> nonsense examples which can be given, but these adequately demonstrate the consistent concept that the Greek noun *αιων* is a period of time, having a definite beginning and end. If you are checking me as we go, you may have noticed that the KJV uses the word *world* instead of *age* in each one of these above examples. Beside introducing much confusion, this translation is horribly inconsistent and false since the KJV makes no distinction between the Greek words *αιων* and *κοσμος* both of which the KJV translates as *world*. A quick glance at Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance will determine their correct translations. Incidentally, the New King James Version (NKJV) corrects the old KJV and uses the word *age* in every case. A further check of many other different versions also confirms this.

The meaning of the Greek word, *αιων*, (transliterated *aion*, and written in English as *aeon*) is quite subtle and very interesting, in that it not only embodies the idea of a period of time, but also the idea that the end of that time period is unknown till it arrives. Thus we might say that the present *αιων*, (present age) is a definite but, as yet, indeterminate period of time. This idea is clearly seen in the use of *αιων* in other Ancient Greek writings where it is used to refer to the time period of a person’s life. Thus, while the person is alive, we know when this time period began i.e. at birth, but we don’t know when it will finish because we don’t know when this person will die, but we do know it will end when he does die.

Since the noun, *αιων*, clearly embodies this notion of a distinct period of time having a beginning and an end, then the exact same meaning ABSOLUTELY MUST be embodied in its adjectival form, *αιωνιος*. We know from the scholars that the noun means “age” or “eon” and so the adjectival form must embody this same meaning. Unfortunately in the English language, there is no adjectival form for the noun “age” or “eon” and so, to grasp the

<sup>1</sup> Aion is the *transliteration* into English letters of the Greek word, *αιων*, and has become the English word, *aeon*, over time. Aeon has also since been shortened to just *eon*.

<sup>2</sup> A few more examples of nonsense verses can be found in these scriptures if eternity is used as the translation of *αιων*: Mt. 24:3, Mt 28:20, Lk. 20:34, Lk. 20:35, Jn. 9:32, Acts. 3:21, Rom. 12:2, Rom. 16:25-26, 1Cor. 10:11, Eph. 1:21, Gal. 1:4, Eph. 3:9, Eph. 2:7, Heb. 6:5, Heb. 9:26

concept, we need to construct an adjective which embodies this “indeterminate but definite period of time” idea. Thus the adjectival form must be something like *age-lasting*. One author, A. E. Knoch (Concordant Publishing Concern), has coined a new adjective, eonian, (sometimes elsewhere spelt aeonian), which does well as an adjectival form of eon. Nevertheless, I like the term age-lasting since we are already used to the idea embodied in the term, ever-lasting.

The adjectival form, *αιωνιος*, certainly can not be translated “eternal,” a word which does not embody any notion of a set period of time. Perhaps now, the reader can see that the adjective, eternal (having no notion of a set period of time and therefore no beginning or end) does not embody the meaning of the noun, age, (meaning a period of time having a beginning and an end) from which it is derived and therefore eternal (or everlasting) should never be used to translate the Greek adjective, *αιωνιος*. The inaccuracy of translating *αιωνιος* as eternal is very poignantly exemplified for us by some words from Joseph Herrin (<https://www.heart4god.ws/gods-plan-of-the-ages.htm>), who, when referring to Mark 10:30 in his book, *God's Plan of the Ages*, says: “How then can one receive eternal life inside the bounds of an age to come? This would be akin to trying to contain that which is infinite inside something that is finite.”

Several writers have previously commented on this inconsistency in the KJV. Robert Young, compiler of *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, highlights these inconsistencies by translating *αιωνιος* as “age-during” in his Literal Translation of the New Testament. Further support to Young's position is given by the Joseph Rotherham in his Emphasized Bible, where *αιωνιος* is translated “age-abiding.”

Marvin Vincent in his *Word Studies in the New Testament* adds an Additional Note about half way through (see <http://www.godrules.net/library/vincent/vincent2the1.htm>) which treats the subject in great depth. He says, “*Aiwn* transliterated eon, is a period of time of longer or shorter duration, having a beginning and an end, and complete in itself. Aristotle says: “The period which includes the whole time of each one's life is called the eon of each one.” Hence it often means the life of a man, as in Homer, where one's life (*aiwn*) is said to leave him or to consume away. It is not, however, limited to human life; it signifies any period in the course of events, as the period or age before Christ; the period of the millennium; the mythological period before the beginnings of history. ... It does not mean a period of a fixed length for all cases. There are as many eons as entities, the respective durations of which are fixed by the normal conditions of the several entities. There is one eon of a human life, another of the life of a nation, another of a crow's life, another of an oak's life. The length of the eon depends on the subject to which it is attached.... The word always carries the notion of time, and not of eternity. It always means a period of time. **Otherwise it would be impossible to account for the plural, or for such qualifying expressions as, this age, or the age to come. It does not mean something endless or everlasting.**”

C. Gary Reid and Ernest L. Martin have also written most thoroughly on this in the article called, *The Time Periods for Salvation, Part 1* (<http://www.askelm.com/doctrine/d041101.htm>).

## Summary

If we choose to translate *αιωνιος* as eternal (or everlasting) as in the KJV, then we should be consistent and translate the noun, *αιων*, as eternity. Since this makes an utter nonsense of the sentences in which *αιων* occurs and since we do know from the scholars that the correct translation of *αιων* is age or eon, we are compelled to translate the adjective *αιωνιος* with an adjectival form something like age-lasting, age-full or even eonian.

It is worth noting here, that there is a word in the Greek of the New Testament (NT) which does mean eternal. It is the word *αιδιους*. It only occurs twice in the NT, in Rom 1:20 (His eternal power) and in Jude 6 (eternal bonds) and is never used in association with life, as in the phrase, eternal life.

Now the reader might ask, why mention all this, for, without doubt, it will require the over-turning of the theology of many Christians? Yes it will, but interestingly Truth does not depend on what you or I believe or think. The Truth we have in written form exists only in the text of the original language manuscripts. All translations always fall short, some, far more than others.

If what is written in this article is considered rational comment on the original languages then we have no alternative but to embrace it. If we don't, we will answer to the Master. We are reminded of our own responsibility in the words of Jesus to us, in Matt. 15:14 "Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, **both** will fall into a pit." We must search these things for ourselves lest we too be cast into the pit along with our blind guides. Obviously, the ramifications of the thoughts expressed in this article run deep for current orthodox Christian teaching. Dare we ignore it?

Several articles have now been written (and available on the internet including <https://www.the-logos.net/resources/PDF's/A-Study-of-the-Greek-for-age.pdf>) which examine in detail the specific ways in which the Greek words *αιων* and *αιωνιος* are used both in the singular and the plural. Such articles discuss such phrases as: *age of the ages* (e.g. Eph 3:21); *age of the age* (e.g. Heb 1:8) and *ages of the ages* (e.g. Rom. 16:27; Gal. 1:5; Philip. 4:20), all of which are badly translated in nearly every Bible and consequently hide the meaning and real significance of the ages. These articles also deal with phrases like "eternal dwellings" in Luke 16:9 which is fraught with difficulty if the idea of eternal is upheld. Some such articles have already been mentioned but another includes the relevant parts of the article at: <http://www.tentmaker.org/books/asw/>. "asw" stands for Analytical Study of Words.