

Wrong

About

Hell

This book will show you the Bible does not teach that hell is eternal.

Reading English Bible translations make it seem beyond dispute that hell is a place of eternal torment. But I challenge you to read this book! You may be as surprised as I was to find out what Scripture actually says.

The only evidence presented in this book will be taken from what the Bible says -- not depending on any human authority or opinion.

I was raised and trained in church and Bible school to believe that hell is a place of eternal torment for all people who fail to receive Jesus Christ before they die. But after long years of simply accepting what others taught me, I began studying what the Bible actually said about hell for myself.

What I found shocked me! And it may shock you also as you read this book, and find out what I learned.

The traditional teaching of hell being a place of eternal, never-ending torment was deeply ingrained in me. So it was impossible for me to quickly or easily accept as the truth what you will find in this book. Years have been spent praying and studying Scripture to bring me to a place of clarity on the subject.

Yet this short book will show you enough evidence from the Bible that you will see that we have been wrong about hell.

While the Bible clearly teaches punishment for wrongdoing and that everyone will give an account to God, it does not say any punishment will last for eternity.

Introduction

All my life I was taught, and accepted as a fact, that hell was a literal place of never-ending torment – a place of burning fire for all those who failed to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ. I was raised in a church that was part of a large, mainstream denomination which taught a traditional, orthodox view of hell. That is, all who did not receive Jesus Christ were doomed to spend eternity in never-ending torment in hell. While I am sure the Bible was taught in this church, I really don't remember much I was taught there. But I got the part about hell! I remember being very scared of the devil and hell at a young age, before I ever started school.

The vast majority of Christian churches today believe that all people who do not receive Jesus Christ will be doomed to spend eternity tormented in the flames of hell with no possible escape forever. Every church I ever belonged to taught this same view of hell. This is what my parents and grandparents believed. This is what my Bible school teachers taught. This is what I believed as I became a pastor of a church. And it is very likely the official teaching of whatever church group you may belong to now.

However, based on the evidence you will find in these pages, I can confidently say we have been wrong, at least in part!

This realization did not come easily or quickly. It was a struggle for me to change my thinking. Tradition is hard to overcome.

Frankly, I was so certain that the Bible taught hell as a place of eternal suffering for all who did not receive Jesus Christ, that for years I never even bothered to study the subject. The Bible seemed clear, so why waste any time on the subject?

But what I was taught is not the true teaching of the Bible. I admit that, on the surface, it seems beyond dispute that the Bible does teach an eternal hell of torment, based on what our English translations of the Bible say about hell and punishment. But the New Testament was not written in English, but in Greek. So, all English Bibles are only translations and not infallible.

Yet you don't have to become a Greek scholar to clearly see what we have been taught about hell is not entirely correct. This book, written so anyone should be able to understand it, will give you all the information you need to make an informed decision.

If we want to know the truth, we need look no further than the Bible. But to understand the Bible we must consider that all English Bibles are translations from the original languages and therefore may have some problems. But it is not that difficult for a person who only understands English to use the Bible study tools that are available to help us grasp the true meaning of the words used in the Bible.

I want everyone to know that I accept the Bible as the Word of God. So we will not look to any authority other than the Bible, and we will not ignore anything the Bible says on this subject. This study will be based completely and solely on the Bible itself.

This book will show that nothing in the Bible indicates there will be eternal, never-ending torment for anyone. This is not to say there will be no judgment, for the Bible clearly teaches there will be judgment and punishment. There will be consequences for our actions! But the Bible, properly translated, never says punishment will be never-ending torment in a fiery hell.

In this book I am not insisting that there is no hell -- only that the Bible does not clearly teach everlasting, never-ending punishment. I freely admit that I am not the judge and therefore don't claim to know all about how judgment will be rendered for anyone, or how long any individual's punishment may last, or what that punishment may be. According to the New Testament, only Jesus Christ is fully qualified to be our judge.

After I began to truly study what the Bible actually said, I finally reached a point where I had to choose between believing what I had been taught about hell, by people I respected, or to believe the Bible. Although I was not quick to make the choice, there really was never any doubt what choice I would make, for I am a Bible believer. I knew making this choice might cost me, and that I could not expect everyone to understand or agree with me, for it seems that the traditional teaching on hell is one of the biggest sacred traditions of Christianity, and anyone who dares to question it is immediately labeled a false teacher.

That same decision confronts you. Will you believe the Bible, or will you believe what you have been taught? After you read this book, you will face that decision. I hope you will choose to believe Jesus and His Word!

Preface

I don't know everything.

I certainly don't know all the answers about hell, or judgment.

This book will not answer every question, simply because I don't know all the answers.

I've never been to hell, nor has the Lord seen fit to give me any visions about hell.

In this book I share with you what seems clear to me, based only on the Bible, which I think makes a clear case we have been wrong about hell. But that does not mean I have it all figured out.

While I would love to completely understand this subject, I am content to leave the matter in the hands of Jesus Christ. He is ultimately capable and qualified to be Judge, while I am not. What His sentence for any person may be, in order to fulfill justice and righteousness, I cannot say. But I trust Him to do the job perfectly.

I realize there are many who may react to a book like this negatively. Some value their traditional teaching more than they do truth. But I believe anyone who honestly examines the teaching of this book, will have to agree that at least some of the traditional teaching about hell has been wrong.

Christian believers should walk in humility. We should not be ashamed to admit we don't know everything. And we certainly should not be quick to condemn others when they teach something from Scripture that differs from what we think -- because they could be right.

This book is incomplete because I simply don't have all the answers. But I think I should share what I have learned.

Do We Even Need A Judge?

JOHN 5:22 KJV

22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:

The popular belief among today's Christians is that immediately after death, all who "confessed" Jesus will go to Heaven to enjoy eternal bliss, and everyone else will immediately enter eternal torment in Hell, because they never made the right choice on earth: choosing Jesus. End of story! No need for any further judgment by anyone.

But is judgment really that simple? If it is, why do we even need Jesus to be the Judge?

ROMANS 11:33 KJV

33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

Romans 11:33 makes me understand that God's judgments are above my level of knowledge. So if you think you have all judgment figured out, you may need to do what Job did after the Lord confronted him, and change your thinking.

JOB 42:3 KJV

3 . . . I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

We can confidently leave all final judgment to our wonderful Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us. We don't have to figure it all out. It's not our responsibility. Jesus will handle it perfectly. I have confidence, along with Abraham, that "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25)

I hope you realize that pronouncing judgment concerning people's eternal destiny is not something we have been called or equipped to do in this life. Jesus Christ has been designated the Judge and there is no reason for us to pronounce eternal condemnation on anyone now.

1 CORINTHIANS 4:5 KJV

5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

We should quit thinking we have everything figured out about how the Lord will judge everyone. We should just do what we have been told, such as share the Good News about Jesus with people, act in love – and leave the final judgment to Jesus.

There Is A Problem With The Translations Of Eternity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Aionios," the adjective derived from aion cannot have a greater meaning than aion. Adjectives cannot take on a greater meaning than the noun from which they derive. For example, hourly is an adjective which pertains to an hour, not to a year. So, aionios can refer to no longer of a time period than "pertaining to, belonging to, or

lasting through an eon or age" and should never be translated by such words as everlasting or eternal.

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

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

Translators

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

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

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

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

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

1 See chapter on Assurance Of Living Forever.

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

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

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

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

How I Will Present The Evidence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

All the verses below are listed only to show usages of aion where the meaning makes no sense if aion means eternity. While these verses may not refer to hell, our aim here is only to establish it is wrong to translate aion by words meaning eternal. I will

examine the verses that refer to hell later. These verses are not given here to establish any point other than aion is wrongly translated by words meaning eternity.

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

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

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

I am not saying that the KJV did translate aion in all of these verses as "eternity," because it does not. I am only pointing out that the word aion is used in the Greek Bible in all these verses, and that these verses are inspired examples of using the word aion in ways that would go against the four things I said are impossible for eternity: plural eternities, time before eternity, time after eternity, and eternity that will end.

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

Plural Eternities

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

GALATIANS 1:5

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

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

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

The Greek word for aion is used twice in Galatians 1:5. Both times it is plural. Here is a clear example of what I have been talking about. The word (aion) is used as a plural word twice in this verse. This word aion is what English translations have translated by

words meaning eternal (such as for ever and ever), and that has to be wrong – because, by definition, there can be but one “eternity” according to the meaning of the word in our English language.

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

HEBREWS 1:2

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

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

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

COLOSSIANS 1:26

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

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

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

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

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

EPHESIANS 2:7

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

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

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

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

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

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

Times Before Eternity

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

1 CORINTHIANS 2:7

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

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

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

2 TIMOTHY 1:9

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

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

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

TITUS 1:2

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

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

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

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

Scripture reveals God made the different eons or ages (Hebrews 1:2), and the three verses above show that there was a time before the eons (literally, before eonian

times). This makes perfect sense. But when we try to give the Greek word aionion the meaning of "eternal," it makes no sense at all, for there can be no time before eternity.

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

Time After Eternity

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

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

EXODUS 15:18

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

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

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

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

MICAH 4:5

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

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

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

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

Eternities That End

MATTHEW 13:39

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

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

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

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

MATTHEW 24:3

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

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

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

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

1 CORINTHIANS 10:11

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

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

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

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

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

HEBREWS 9:26

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

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

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

If this verse means the “end of eternity” it makes no sense, for eternity cannot have an end.

But every “age” or “eon” does have a beginning and can have an end.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:4

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

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

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

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

GALATIANS 1:4

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

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

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

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

COLOSSIANS 1:26

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

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

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

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

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

JUDE 1:7

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Summary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What Does Aion Mean?

While it is relatively straightforward to prove, as we did in the last chapter, that aion does not mean eternity, it is entirely another matter to show you in the same manner what aion does mean.

To prove aion does not mean eternity, we only had to use a small number of verses. But to show you the full range of what aion means, we would have to examine and analyze all the occurrences of the word in the New Testament.⁵ Aion is found in 102 verses in the New Testament, and its adjective aionios is found in 69 verses. So this task is well beyond the scope of this book, and is not necessary to achieve our purpose.

So to keep it short, in this chapter, I will be giving you my opinion, and the opinions of others. I know many of you want an answer to the question of what aion does mean, so this chapter is here to satisfy that curiosity, not because it is important for the theme of this book.

Aion basically means an age: an indefinite or unknown period of time. It can be longer, or shorter, depending on what it is applied to. It could be a generation, a person's lifetime, or it could be an entire age, like the church age.

For instance, if it is applied to a human, it will be longer than if it is applied to a dog, since the normal human life-span is longer than that of a dog. If it is applied to God, then it would be reasonable to think of it as eternal, not because the word itself means eternal, which we have proven it cannot, but because God Himself is eternal. But when aion is used with other objects, such as man, or the fire that burned up Sodom, or the time Jonah was in the belly of the great fish, it has a different duration.

I can refer to a tall dog, a tall man, and a tall mountain. But the word "tall" has to be understood in the context of what it is describing. So when aionian is used in reference to God, it can mean a longer time period, than when aionian is used in reference to something else.

From this basic meaning of "an age," a meaning developed for the adjective aionios, which could be described as something that "pertained to an age" or that was "distinctive to an age."

Messianic Life

5 All these verses are listed online at www.WrongAboutHell.com.

So when the writers of the New Testament spoke of believers having "aionion life" now as a present tense possession (1 John 3:15 for example), they meant the kind of life which will be distinctive when Jesus rules on earth. Another way of saying it would be "Messianic life" or even "Divine life." It does not refer to the duration of the life, but to the quality or kind of life.

Many Christians today believe there will be a future literal, physical reign of Jesus Christ on earth lasting 1,000 years. They refer to this time as The Millennium. If someone today were to speak of "millennium life," these believers would not think it meant literally living 1,000 years. Instead they would think it meant "pertaining to life in the millennium" or "life as it will be in the millennium."

Probably this is similar to what the term "aionion life" meant to the people Jesus was speaking to in His earthly ministry. They expected a future age where the Messiah would set up His kingdom and rule on earth. They considered that the aion to come, just as we today think of The Millennium as the age to come. So "aionion life" probably caused them to think of the life belonging to another age, a future, perfect time.

The Translator's New Testament is a version specifically for those who translate the Bible into new languages. It contains a note which says, "In the New Testament eternal life is that kind of life which is given to all true believers in Christ. The word `eternal' draws attention to the quality of that life, not to its duration in a temporal sense. Thus eternal life can be experienced by believers even while subject to the temporal conditions of earthly life. Translators should be careful to avoid expressions which mean no more than a timeless continuation of life after death."

Most scriptures refer to "eternal life" as a present possession instead of a future possession. For example:

1 JOHN 3:14-15 KJV

14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

From this passage, we see that eternal life is a present-tense possession which affects the nature of a person. So it is clearly not talking about how long the life lasts, but how it changes us. This meaning was a natural outgrowth of thinking about the kind of life people would enjoy under the reign of the Messiah in the age to come: aeonian life, or we could say Messianic life. The idea was that this life will be the kind of life enjoyed in the perfect age when the Messiah ruled.

So aionion life, or as it is normally translated in our English Bibles, eternal life, is the life that the One has who will rule in the coming aions, that is God. So aionion life can be said to mean the kind of life God has, which is the life of the age to come.

The Bible clearly says those who believe in Jesus Christ have this life inside them right now. And it will continue to be the possession of believers in the age to come without any interruption.

JOHN 5:24 KJV

24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

JOHN 6:47 KJV

47 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

When we read these verses we need to think of having God's kind of life in us, and enjoying perfect life, instead of thinking they mean that we will live forever. Note that the three verses above clearly refer to "aionion life" as the present possession of believers who will all at some point still die physically. So these words, translated in our English Bibles as "eternal life" could not possibly mean living forever.

There Is Another Greek Word For Eternal

One other Greek word is translated as eternal or everlasting in the KJV: aidios. It is used only twice, in the following verses.

ROMANS 1:20 KJV

20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his **eternal** power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

JUDE 1:6 KJV

6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in **everlasting** chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

This word aidios does mean eternal and everlasting. However, like our English word eternity, it can be limited by its context. For example, someone may say, "I waited for what seemed like an eternity, it took 24 hours to finally happen." When we hear this, we understand that the meaning of "eternity" in this statement is limited to the actual waiting time of 24 hours.

Jude 1:6 is a similar case. There the "everlasting chains" of the angels also have a limit, which is until the judgment.

This word aidios was used by other (non-Biblical) writers in Jesus' day to convey the idea of endless punishment of the wicked. But we have no record of Jesus ever using the word.

Neither do we have any record of Jesus' disciples using the word aidios in connection with any punishment except the angels (Jude 1:6), which is limited by its context to lasting only until their day of judgment.

If Jesus had meant to express the idea of endless punishment, He could have used the Greek word aidios -- but Jesus never did.

Assurance Of Living Forever

A frequent response by people who think "aionios" should mean "eternal" is that the word "aionios" in the Bible describes both punishment and life. So they say, "If hell is not eternal, then heaven is not eternal either." This is only speculation and is not correct. Assurance that we will ever be with the Lord is not dependent on "aionios" meaning eternal.⁶

Yet the Bible does assure us that our salvation and life will last forever. Here are a few Scriptures assuring followers of Jesus Christ they will live forever with the Lord.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:17 KJV

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

The word translated "ever" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is "pantote" which means "at all times" and "always."

JOHN 3:15-16 KJV

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

It is the words "should not perish" in John 3:16 that tell us the life we receive from Jesus will not be brought to an end. Remember that "eternal" or "everlasting" life in these verses refer to the quality or kind of life, not the length of time it will last, as they are the translation of "aionios."

1 PETER 1:3-4 KJV

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

The word translated "incorruptible" in 1 Peter 1:4 is "aphthartos" which means literally "no corruption," or "im-perishable." It is the state of being incapable of corruption, of being incapable of perishing.

The word translated "that fadeth not away" in 1 Peter 1:4 is "amarantos" which means "not fading" or "un-fading."

6 For evidence that "aionios" cannot mean "eternal" see the chapter, We Have A Problem With The Translations Of Eternity.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-54 KJV

51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

The word translated "incorruptible" in 1 Corinthians 15:52 is also "aphthartos" which means literally "no corruption," or "im-perishable."

The word translated "immortality" in 1 Corinthians 15:53 and 54 is "athanasia" which means literally "no death." It is the state of death-less-ness or being incapable of death.

This is what we have been promised!

Hallelujah!

Words Translated As Hell

Four different words are translated as hell in the King James Version, one in the Old Testament (Sheol) and three in the New Testament (Hades, Gehenna, and Tartarus). On careful examination it will be found that none of these four words has the meaning of our modern word "hell," which is a place of eternal torment.

I am not suggesting that the translators tried to deceive us, but that the word "hell" has changed meaning over time. The English word hell grew into its present meaning. Originally, it only meant a covered or hidden place.⁷ It denoted only what was secret or concealed, but gradually came to have the meaning of a place of eternal torment.

All more recent English Bible translations testify to this by the fact that they use the English word "hell" less and less. Not because all translators have turned liberal, or don't believe the Bible, but merely because they realize the English word "hell" does not convey the correct meaning to modern readers.

In the King James Bible, the term "hell" is used 54 times, 31 times in the Old Testament, and 23 times in the New Testament.⁸

By contrast, not one of these newer translations mentions "hell" in the Old Testament:

American Standard Version

Amplified Bible

Complete Jewish Bible

English Standard Version

Holman Christian Standard Bible

Jewish Publication Society Bible

Jewish Publication Society Tanakh

New American Standard Bible

New English Translation

New International Version

New Living Translation

New Revised Standard Version

Revised English Bible

Revised Standard Version

7 A word example which helps understand this is “helmet” which is derived from the same word, and means a covering for the head.

8 To see a "List Of All Bible Verses With Hell Words" go to www.WrongAboutHell.com.

A similar thing has happened with more recent translations of the New Testament. While the King James Version used the word hell 23 times in the New Testament, all the following translations use the word 14 times or less:

American Standard Version
Amplified Bible
New American Standard Bible
New Century Version
New International Version
New King James Version
New Living Translation
New Revised Standard Version
Revised English Bible
Revised Standard Version

Here are a few of the English translations that do not use the word hell at all:

New American Bible
Rotherham's Emphasized Bible
Weymouth's New Testament in Modern Speech
World English Bible
Young's Literal Translation

Now let's look at each of the four words that have been translated as hell in the Bible.

Tartarus

Tartarus is only mentioned once in the Bible, 2 Peter 2:4, where a verb form of the word is translated as "cast down to hell" in the King James Version.

2 PETER 2:4 KJV

4 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;

However you interpret this verse, it gives us no reason to think Tartarus has anything to do with humans or their judgment.

While this and the following verses in Second Peter chapter two warn people not to think they can escape judgment, the passage gives no indication what judgment will be. There is no reason but tradition to think Tartarus should be translated as "hell."

Sheol

The word Sheol is used in the Old Testament 65 times. The King James Version translates it as grave 31 times, hell 31 times, and pit 3 times. Can you imagine the same word being translated as both grave and hell?

Today, no widely used English version of the Bible ever translates Sheol as hell, except the King James Version and the New King James Version.

By its usage we see that Sheol was considered the place or state of all the dead -- whether they were good or bad. When used figuratively it could mean the consequences of wickedness in the present world, likened to death.

To the Hebrew mind Sheol was the unknown place all people go after death. To simply equate it with the grave is probably not sufficient. There is another Hebrew word for grave. Also, Jacob said he would go to Sheol where his son Joseph was (Genesis 37:35), yet he had just been told that Joseph was eaten by a wild animal, so he did not think Joseph was in a grave.

Jesus said in Matthew 8:11 that Jacob will feast in the Kingdom of Heaven, so Jacob did not end up in a place of torment or separation from God after his death. Therefore Sheol, as used for the first time in the Bible by Jacob, could not have our meaning of "hell."

Sheol is never spoken of in the Bible as a place of punishment after death. In fact, it is spoken of as a realm of unconsciousness in Psalm 6:5, Isaiah 38:18, and Ecclesiastes 9:10. Job even expressed a desire to go to Sheol in Job 14:13.

The word sheol cannot mean a place of punishment or torment as it is used to designate the place where the righteous dead are. Clearly, Sheol cannot have the modern meaning of "hell."

Hades

Hades is found 11 times in the Greek New Testament. The King James Version translates it ten times as hell and one time as grave.

Hades seems to have the same meaning as the Old Testament word Sheol.

The Septuagint is the Greek version of the Old Testament which was the commonly accepted Bible used during the ministry of Jesus and the early years of the Church. The Septuagint uses Hades to translate Sheol. This makes it very clear that in Jesus' day, the Hebrew word Sheol and the Greek word Hades had a very similar, if not the same meaning.

The New Testament follows the Septuagint in translating Sheol as Hades as can be seen by comparing Acts 2:27 with Psalm 16:10.

Hades comes from two words, the first word meaning "not" and the second one meaning "to see." So Hades originally meant the unseen, or what is concealed.

Originally the English word "hell" also only meant something that was secret or concealed. So in 1611 when the King James Version was translated, "hell" may have been a good translation for the Greek word Hades and its Hebrew equivalent Sheol. But as we all know, the meaning of hell today is very different.

It would seem that Hades means more than death or the grave in the New Testament, because there are other Greek words used for those terms. Of course a language can have more than one word with the same meaning. We call them synonyms.

Whatever Hades means, it will not last forever. For Revelation 20:13 shows both death and Hades will give up their occupants.

Revelation 20:14 seems to indicate Hades will be destroyed. It says that death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death. The verse seems to be saying this will be the end of both death and Hades (which is what Hosea 13:14 prophesied: the destruction of Sheol/Hades and death). First Corinthians 15:55 also quotes from the Septuagint translation of Hosea 13:14, where Hades' destruction is prophesied. Therefore Hades is temporary.

So the rich man of Luke 16, being in Hades, was in a place of only temporary detention. Whether this is a literal story or a parable, his confinement is not an endless one, based on these Scriptures.

Jesus said in Revelation 1:18 that He now has the keys of Hades and death. So no one who calls on Jesus must remain imprisoned by either of them.

Gehenna

The Greek word Gehenna (also spelled Geenna) occurs 12 times in the New Testament, and is always translated "hell" in the King James Version. The word is used only one time in the New Testament outside the first three Gospels, in James 3:6 where it is used metaphorically about the harm caused by a vile human tongue.

Whether Gehenna was used by Jesus to typify what a true Hell is like may be debated. What is beyond debate is that Gehenna was a known place on the south side of Jerusalem familiar to all who heard Jesus speak.

The word Gehenna is the Greek spelling of the Hebrew words ge hinnom, meaning "valley of Hinnom." A quick search of a concordance for the word Hinnom will find the 11 verses referring to this location in the Old Testament. From these verses you will readily see the evils that happened in this valley, and understand how it became thought of as a horrible place by Jews.

The valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, was the place in ancient times where idolatrous Israelites burned their children alive as sacrifices to Molech and Baal. (Molech is sometimes spelled Moloch). It was also referred to as Tophet, which means a place of fire. Gehenna is never used in the Old Testament to mean anything other than the place outside Jerusalem with which every Jew was familiar.

After they returned from exile in Babylon, the Jews reportedly turned the Hinnom valley into their city dump where garbage and anything considered unclean was burned. This included the bodies of executed criminals and dead animals. Fires continually burned there consuming the garbage frequently being cast into it. And there were always worms feeding on any unburned remains. (Today the valley of Hinnom is nothing like this. In modern times it was transformed into a garden.)

The worst sentence a Jewish court could give a criminal included discarding his unburied corpse amid the fires and worms of this polluted valley. Being thrown into the trash of Gehenna, instead of having a proper burial, would have been a most abhorrent thing for a Jew of that day. It would mean that his life and his works were completely worthless, fit only for the dump.

In Matthew 5:29-30 Jesus clearly refers to the physical body being cast into Gehenna, and not just the soul. This indicates that the meaning of Gehenna, as used by Jesus in these verses, was not a place of punishment after a person had left their body.

When the Jewish nation was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Roman army, many thousands of Jews literally experienced Gehenna, as their dead bodies were discarded there, fulfilling warnings given by Jesus to the Jews who rejected Him.

Gehenna is never mentioned by Peter, Paul, or John. Surely this fact is worthy of note that not one time did any of these apostles of Jesus even mention the subject. Would they not have warned sinners concerning it, if there were a Gehenna of torment after death? Paul even says, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God," yet his writings never mention Gehenna (or any word meaning hell). If Gehenna were the final home of unhappy billions surely he would have warned us to avoid it.

If Jesus did use Gehenna to refer symbolically to a place of future eternal torment, would not His disciples have understood that is what Jesus meant? After all, they were the closest to Him and were entrusted with spreading His message to the entire world. Yet they never spoke of it.

Doesn't it seem absurd that only Jesus and James would ever mention something so vital for humans to know, if indeed Gehenna does refer to hell? And clearly, James only used the word Gehenna one time in a figurative sense, having nothing to do with punishment.

No letters to the church even mention Gehenna as a place. If Gehenna is indeed the place of future eternal torment in fire for all the unsaved, should this not be a major

topic? If Gehenna really reveals the terrible fact of endless woe, how can we account for this strange silence?

After reading this, can you believe that Gehenna was used by Jesus to mean a place of endless punishment in fire after death, and that this is a part of His divine revelation that was to be given to the entire world? Or does it not make more sense to take the Bible literally and realize that Gehenna was a valley outside Jerusalem, and not Hell.

Unless the context requires us to attach some other meaning to Gehenna, why not accept that Jesus used it referring to a literal valley outside Jerusalem?

All Gehenna Verses

Listed below are all the verses from the New Testament that use the word Gehenna. These verses are the King James Version, with the words "the valley of Hinnom" substituted for the word "hell."

After you read them I think you will agree that using the literal English meaning of the Greek word Gehenna (which is the valley of Hinnom), in these verses makes perfect sense. The one possible exception is Matthew 10:28, which I will discuss after listing the verses.

Matthew 5:22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of **the valley of Hinnom** fire.

Matthew 5:29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into **the valley of Hinnom**.

Matthew 5:30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into **the valley of Hinnom**.

Matthew 10:28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in **the valley of Hinnom**.

Matthew 18:9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into **the valley of Hinnom** fire.

Matthew 23:15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of **the valley of Hinnom** than yourselves.

Matthew 23:33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of **the valley of Hinnom**?

Mark 9:43 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into **the valley of Hinnom**, into the fire that never shall be quenched:⁹

9 For more on fire that is never quenched, see the Appendix article "Fire That Is Never Quenched?"

Mark 9:45 And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into **the valley of Hinnom**, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

Mark 9:47 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into **the valley of Hinnom** fire:

Luke 12:5 But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into **the valley of Hinnom**; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.

James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of **the valley of Hinnom**.

More on Matthew 10:28

MATTHEW 10:28 KJV

28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

At first glance, Matthew 10:28 seems unlikely to make sense by translating Gehenna literally as “the valley of Hinnom” instead of “hell.” After all, when we think of “soul” we usually think of the part of us that will continue living after we leave our body. If this verse refers to someone “able to destroy a soul” then we immediately think that humans could not do that – so it must refer to God.

However, I find it interesting that only eleven verses later in Matthew 10:39, the exact same words translated "destroy" and "soul" in Matthew 10:28 are instead translated "lose" and "life."

MATTHEW 10:39 KJV

39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Also the word “him” is not actually in the Greek text of Matthew 10:28. Also note that in Matthew 10:28 Jesus was speaking to His disciples, not to those who were rejecting Him. It seems possible, based on the same words being used in the same context only eleven verses later, that Jesus was telling His disciples not to fear those who could only cause them physical death, but to fear those who would be able to steal from them their very life-mission and purpose of being – causing them to lose their “life” as Matthew 10:39 indicates.

To paraphrase this possible meaning of the verse, it would be something like, “Don’t fear physical death alone, for all people will face death. What you should be fearful of, and thus avoid, is allowing anyone to keep you from fulfilling your purpose and thus really stealing from you the “life” God intended for you to live. Don’t let your life be wasted because of fearing physical death, even one as horrible as being cast out from Jewish society by the religious leaders and thrown in the garbage dump. So don’t be intimidated by anyone, but be faithful to fulfill God’s will. It is more important to make sure what you accomplish in life is not just garbage – that you fulfill God’s will so your life is not wasted.”

I think this is what Jesus meant. But even if you don’t agree, remember that we should never base an important doctrine on just one verse which we are not sure about its meaning, while there are many clear verses on that subject which we do understand.

Why Did God Not Warn Of Hell In The Old Testament?

If eternal torment in a place of suffering called "hell" is the destination of all those who reject God, then why did God never mention that fact in the entire Old Testament?

The Old Testament period covers approximately 4,000 years. Yet God never uttered a word about people going to a hell of torment after death for all that time.

Are we to believe that God is so callous that He did not care and would not warn the people of this disastrous consequence of not doing His will? Or could our modern idea of "hell" possibly be just a tradition invented by man?

You may think hell is mentioned in the Old Testament. But that is only because the King James Version (KJV) sometimes translates Sheol as hell. The KJV translated Sheol as grave 31 times, hell 31 times, and pit 3 times in the Old Testament. Clearly, even the KJV translators did not believe Sheol meant hell in the modern sense.¹⁰

Recent translations remedy this error. Modern translations never translate Sheol, or any other word in the Old Testament, as "hell." (The one exception is the New King James, whose stated goal was to simply update the KJV while conforming as closely as possible to it.)

In fairness to the KJV translators, the meaning of the word "hell" has changed in the last four centuries. Previously, it could mean any place that was covered or hidden. Today, hell has no such meaning. That is why modern translations never use "hell" even once in translating the entire Old Testament.

Even those who teach an eternal hell of torment for all unbelievers have to admit the Old Testament is silent on the issue. To maintain their position they have to teach that Jesus introduced this new revelation. (And this is all based on their supposition that Jesus did not use Gehenna in a literal sense, meaning the valley of Hinnom, but as a place of torment in the afterlife.) They may try to read back into the Old Testament some ideas that hint at some indication of hell. But any honest person will have to admit the Old Testament does not teach it.

If God is like Jesus of Nazareth, and Scripture says He is, it is simply inconceivable that God would fail to warn people of hell during the entire Old Testament period – if hell is a place of punishment by never-ending torment in fire.

10 See Words Translated As Hell chapter for more information.

Apostle Paul

Paul never mentioned hell! I repeat: nothing written by Apostle Paul in the New Testament mentions the word "hell" in either the Greek or the English.¹¹

This is beyond amazing when you consider that Paul claimed he was caught up into heaven and given the Gospel directly by Jesus, that all men would be judged according to his gospel, that he had declared to people the whole counsel of God, that he kept back nothing profitable from the people he taught, and that he was the apostle to the gentiles (meaning all who are not Jews).

Here are the verses to support what the previous paragraph states.

GALATIANS 1:11-12 KJV

11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:2 KJV

2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

ROMANS 2:16 KJV

16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

ACTS 20:27 KJV

27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

ACTS 20:20 KJV

20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,

ROMANS 11:13 KJV

11 The one time Paul uses the Greek word "Hades" is 1 Corinthians 15:55, where it is translated "grave."

1 CORINTHIANS 15:55 KJV

55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:

1 TIMOTHY 2:7 KJV

7 Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.

Get the picture? Paul was caught up to Heaven and given the responsibility by Jesus to communicate His message to the world. Yet he never mentions hell to anyone -- let alone everyone. Why would Paul do that?

If the future for those who fail to have faith in Jesus Christ is never-ending torture, don't you think that information should be included if you are going to say you have declared the whole counsel of God and kept back no profitable information? Paul seems to clearly say, "I told you everything you need to know." How could that possibly be -- when he NEVER mentioned hell -- if hell really is a place of never-ending torture for those who do not believe in Jesus?

The only verse in Paul's writings that someone might point to as possibly applying to hell (although the word hell is never mentioned) is found in 2 Thessalonians 1:9.

2 THESSALONIANS 1:9 KJV

9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

Here is the whole passage, so you can read this verse in context.

2 THESSALONIANS 1:6-10 KJV

6 Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

What does "everlasting destruction" mean in verse nine? It could mean the kind of "destruction" that will happen to those who reject the Lord, an "eonian type of destruction" -- possibly like saying a "divine destruction." Or, it could mean destruction that will last for an age. Maybe it means both. But we have already proven that *aiōnios* -- the word used in verse nine -- does not mean eternal or everlasting.

Young's Literal Translation of verse nine says, "who shall suffer justice -- destruction age-during -- from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of his strength."

The verse seems to state the type of "destruction" they will experience -- a separation from the glorious presence of the Lord. Certainly the passage warns of judgment. But no mention is made of hell, and everlasting is not an accurate translation for *aionios*.¹²

Possibly Clarence Jordan got it right in his Cotton Patch Version which reads, "They'll be sentenced to spiritual exile from the presence of the Lord and from the mighty display."

Whoever believes Paul referred to punishment in hell in verse nine should give us a satisfactory reason why Paul never mentioned hell in any other writing. All the other churches should have been warned of hell if Paul was teaching that to the Thessalonians.

If you were Paul writing to different churches, would you not include a warning about hell in each and every letter -- if hell is eternal torment? Paul, who claimed Jesus Christ gave him the responsibility to proclaim the Gospel to all non-Jews, and who said he fully proclaimed everything the Lord gave him to tell us, is strangely silent on the subject of hell. Why? Could it be that our idea about hell has been wrong, and that it was not a part of the teaching and preaching of the apostles in the first century? If they did not preach it, should we?

GALATIANS 1:8 KJV

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

It was not only Apostle Paul who failed to mention hell in his writings. Only one verse in any writing specifically directed to the Church (from the book of Acts through the book of Revelation) mentions hell in relation to punishment or wrong-doing. That is 2 Peter 2:4 and it specifically applies to angels -- not people! Note also that the word translated hell (*tartaroo*) is found only here in 2 Peter 2:4 and nowhere else in the New Testament.

2 PETER 2:4 KJV

4 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;

Nowhere in the entire Gospel of John is the subject of hell mentioned. It is also quite astonishing that not even once in the book of Acts do we find any mention of hell being the destination of those who do not believe. Clearly, those closest to Jesus, His apostles, are not on record as preaching or writing about hell.

12 Read the chapter "We Have A Problem With The Translations Of Eternity" for evidence that *aionios* should not be translated as eternal.

If I believed in a hell of eternal torment of fire for all unbelievers, and I was given the responsibility directly by the Lord to tell the Gospel to the nations, I would make sure I warned everyone about hell. In every letter and every message, I would give a clear warning so people would avoid hell. If I failed to give that warning, and it was my responsibility to clearly communicate the Gospel to the world (which Paul said the Lord had given to him), then I would expect to be labeled the greatest criminal of all time because of my failure to mention such a horrible calamity awaiting those who did not believe what I preached.

Failing to warn people about a hell of eternal torment for those who don't believe would be the worst criminal neglect of all time, if one exists, and if you were designated by the Lord to write the Gospel message down for distribution to the whole world, as Paul was! To put it plainly, if there is a hell of eternal torment and Paul failed to warn us clearly, then he committed the greatest crime in history and deserves to suffer in hell more than anyone.

Visions Of Hell

I delayed publishing this book for years because this subject bothered me. Mostly because there are godly people I respect greatly who have had visions of hell. And while their particular experiences were short on details, they did portray hell as a bad place that does exist.

There are many published accounts of people who believe they have visited hell, or seen a vision of hell. Being deeply interested in the subject, I have read or watched all of them I could find, and there are many.

These stories vary greatly. Some may be excused as simply a bad dream, a nightmare. Others probably involved out-of-body or even life-after-death experiences.

One thing can be said for certain -- not one of them stayed in hell, but came back to tell us their experience -- whatever it was they saw or experienced!

Several of these people claimed to have died. Yet when they called on God, even if they were in a place of torment, they were delivered.

God gave His Word as our standard, so we could judge concerning truth. His written Word is what we must use to judge all visions, dreams, revelations, prophecies, or messages of any kind.

2 PETER 1:18-19 KJV

18 And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

Peter experienced a heavenly visitation, hearing a voice from heaven, yet he says the written Word of Scripture is more sure.

So even what may be given to us by a messenger from Heaven must still be judged by the written Word of God.

GALATIANS 1:8 KJV

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

REVELATION 12:9 KJV

9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

The Bible says the devil is a deceiver, and even that he deceived the whole world. Some of the accounts of hell I have heard are no doubt demonic deceptions, for they do not line up with God's Word and God's character as revealed in Jesus Christ. The Bible says the devil can appear as an angel of light, so every vision is not of God.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:14 KJV

14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

The word translated angel is also translated as messenger. So that verse could include the idea of satan impersonating Jesus. I met a pastor who told me this happened to him. He said a deceiving spirit had appeared, claiming to be Jesus Christ. What the deceiving spirit spoke mostly agreed with the Word of God, but not completely. It was a little twisted. But if this pastor had not been familiar with the Bible, he could have been deceived.

Our only real defense against deception is a clear understanding of and adherence to the written Word of God.

No doubt most of the people who had visions of hell and came back telling us it is a place of eternal torture are sincere. It is possible some of them truly experienced a supernatural visitation. But no matter how sincere they are, or how supernatural their experience may have been, it does not prove they were not deceived. The devil is clearly labeled a deceiver in Revelation 12:9, so we should not be surprised at the idea.

God gave His Word to protect us from deception, but our English Bible translations have failed us in this area because of the translation of aion with words meaning eternal. So when sincere believers had supernatural experiences that seemed to line up with the teaching of their English Bibles on hell being a place of eternal torture, they had no reason to suspect it of being a deception. This wrong understanding of what the Bible says, based on an imperfect translation of aion, has left even sincere believers vulnerable to deception in this area.

Is There No Possibility Of Repentance After Death?

All my life I was taught, and believed, that our place in eternity was completely determined by our choices in this life. I believed that if any person did not receive Jesus Christ before they died, it was then too late for them to ever do so. As I studied the Bible, I searched for Scripture to support this view. But I found only one verse in the Bible that could be used to support the idea that once a person dies, there is no further chance for them to change: Hebrews 9:27.

HEBREWS 9:27 KJV

27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

Does this verse actually say we cannot repent after death, or even after judgment? Or is it possibly just telling us that we will only die once, and not multiple times.

If the intent of this verse was to clearly communicate there is no possibility of change after death -- then the verse fails. It could have said, "it is appointed unto men once to die, but immediately after death is the one and only final judgment that determines your eternal destiny after which you have no chance of ever changing for eternity." That would be clear. But when I read this verse, while trying to lay aside the tradition I was taught, all it says to me is that we only have one life on earth, and that judgment comes some time after our death. To say this verse means anything more, would be adding to Scripture.

Can Death Separate Us From God's Love?

The Bible seems to say the opposite -- even death cannot separate us from God's love!

ROMANS 8:38-39 KJV

38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What is it about death that would cause God to lose His compassion and willingness to save people willing to repent?

Scripture tells us death is an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26) which will be abolished some day. The devil is associated with death (Hebrews 2:14). Are we to believe that God would turn His back on people because of the work of His enemy?

Scripture indicates death is not a barrier for God, but only for us. He is God of those we classify as dead just as much as those we know are alive.

LUKE 20:37-38 KJV

37 Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

38 For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.

In this passage Jesus makes it clear that no one is “dead” from God’s perspective. Death is a barrier to us that we cannot see past clearly. But to God, a human’s death is just their transition from one state to another.

Jesus Preached To The Dead

1 PETER 4:6 KJV

6 For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

1 PETER 3:18-20 KJV

18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;

20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

If no possibility exists for anyone to change after death, why does the Bible say Jesus preached the Gospel to the dead? And if these people who were dead at that time had the Gospel preached to them, how do we know that all people will not have a similar opportunity?

Please do not misunderstand me. I believe we should do our best to share the Gospel with everyone while we are alive on Earth. Jesus commanded us to do that. But, if we are honest, we realize we are not now reaching, and never have effectively reached everyone with our message. Will God condemn those we failed to tell about Jesus, simply because of our failure?

God Does Not Play Favorites

Six times the Bible tells us God does not play favorites. The KJV translates it as "respect of persons" but the meaning is clearly shown by looking at any modern

translation which will say something like "God does not show favoritism" or "there is no partiality with God."

2 CHRONICLES 19:7 KJV

7 Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.

ACTS 10:34 KJV

34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

ROMANS 2:11 KJV

11 For there is no respect of persons with God.

EPHESIANS 6:9 KJV

9 And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

COLOSSIANS 3:25 KJV

25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

1 PETER 1:17 KJV

17 And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:

If the eternal destiny of every person is determined only by the choices they make in this life, then God is guilty of "respect of persons" or favoritism, because many have never even had the chance to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, let alone be able to have, study, and understand a copy of their own Bible. If people like this, who have never seen a Bible nor ever heard the Name of Jesus, get no chance to repent after death, then surely they will be able to rise up in judgment and justly accuse God of favoritism.

How can it be true that God does not play favorites, if there are people who never hear the Gospel, yet after they die there is never any chance for them to repent and accept the Lord Jesus Christ? If people like this are to be condemned to eternal torture, then these assurances of God's impartiality in the Bible have no meaning, for no honest, reasonable being could say that was fair. It would truly be the most notorious example of showing partiality or favoritism in the history of the world!

Somehow we have come to accept the idea that death is the end of any opportunity for a human to change. It may be true, or it may not be true. Only God knows. But I cannot find it taught in the Bible. It is only a human tradition. And the more I think about it, the

more it seems silly to think death would be a reason for God to change His attitude toward people.

Yet if someone were to take this information and decide to live in sin, thinking they will repent after death, they would be greatly deceived. Sin harms us. It is the devil's lie that sin will make us happy. Jesus came to save us from sin, and we can rejoice that we are now free so we don't have to sin. Not only does sin kill, steal, and destroy lives, but the Bible clearly teaches we will be judged by God for what we do in this life. With one hundred percent certainty, I can assure you that you will greatly regret any decision to turn away from Jesus and embrace sin. So don't use this information as an excuse to live in sin now, thinking you will repent later. Only a fool would think like that.

Holy Fire

HEBREWS 12:29 KJV

29 For our God is a consuming fire.

The Bible has many interesting verses about fire.¹³ As we examine these verses, it becomes clear that fire in Scripture is not always bad.

When the Bible says God is a fire, we understand it is not a literal statement any more than when it says God is a rock. These figures of speech are not to be taken literally, but do convey a literal truth.

We realize God is strong and dependable like a big rock, always there and able to support us. But what literal truth should we understand from, "God is a consuming fire?"

What does fire do? It changes something into another form. Fire also purifies. In fact, the English word "pure" likely comes from the Greek word for fire, which is "pur."

So one possible meaning is that God "burns" away all that is not good, and changes all that is not like Him which He contacts. Yet there are many verses where God, or His messengers, are described as having the appearance of fire. So God and His surroundings may actually look like fire to mortal humans.

After you consider the following Bible passages you may need to reconsider your interpretation of other passages about fire.

Isaiah speaks of those who will dwell with "devouring fire" and "everlasting burnings." But, instead of it being the enemies of the Lord, it seems to refer to those who walk in righteousness!

ISAIAH 33:14-15 KJV

14 The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?

15 He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil;

Revelation chapter 15 tells of people standing in a sea of fire, but they are not sinners – they are God's overcomers!

13 A larger list of interesting fire Scriptures can be found at www.WrongAboutHell.com.

REVELATION 15:2 KJV

2 And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

In Zechariah God says He will bring His people -- not people He will reject -- through fire.

ZECHARIAH 13:9 KJV

9 And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

When Ezekiel saw a vision of God on His throne, he said His appearance was like fire. (Daniel and Revelation also describe the Lord and His throne as having the appearance of fire.)

EZEKIEL 1:26-28 KJV

26 And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.

27 And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about.

28 As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.

Ezekiel describes the holy mountain of God as having "stones of fire."

EZEKIEL 28:14-16 KJV

14 Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.

15 Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.

16 By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.

Scripture tells us Jesus will baptize us with fire. That means placing us into fire! (This is not done to His enemies, but to those who come to Him in faith!)

LUKE 3:16-17 KJV

16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:

17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.

(Chaff is part of the wheat – the outer hull -- not a part that is valuable once it is harvested.)

The Book of Revelation is full of symbolic figures of speech. Stars in a hand are not physical stars. Candlesticks are not real candlesticks (Revelation 1:20). Frogs coming out of a prophet's mouth are not physical frogs. There is not a dead lamb on a throne in Heaven, nor a literal sword coming out of Jesus' mouth.

The "lake of fire" is mentioned in the Bible only in Revelation 19, 20, and 21. Whether there is a literal "lake of fire" or whether it is symbolic we don't know for sure. Being called "the second death" seems to give us a clue that it could be figurative. Whatever the lake of fire is, we know that hades and death are thrown into it. Since the Bible clearly tells us death is an enemy which shall be eliminated (1 Corinthians 15:25-26), it seems that "the second death" could be the death of death. So, if death is done away with by being thrown into the lake of fire, it is possible hades will also be done away with by the same action.

REVELATION 20:14 KJV

14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Once the disciples of Jesus asked whether some people who were rejecting Him should be punished with fire. Jesus rebuked them for yielding to such a thought!

LUKE 9:54-56 KJV

54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?

55 But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.

Why Serve Jesus?

If there is no eternal hell, then why live a Christian life now?

Is the threat of eternal torment necessary to cause us to turn to Jesus? Is being a "fire escape" the only value Jesus has?

NO!

1. Jesus is wonderful. Jesus is perfect. No one compares to Him. It is a privilege and a joy to know Him, to spend time with Him, to do His will. Jesus knows everything, yet loves us with a perfect love. So if we are wise, we will trust Him and His guidance above our own thinking. Jesus knows more than we do, and He loves us more than we love ourselves. To even consider not following Jesus demonstrates that you don't yet know Him.

2. There are blessings, benefits, and rewards promised to those who obey the Lord and follow the instructions of His Word. Blessings right now in this life on earth: forgiveness, acceptance, peace, joy, help, good standing with God, and so much more. And also living with God forever and ruling with Jesus in the age to come – just to name a few. Even if those who fail to follow Jesus now have a future opportunity to repent, we have no guarantee they will receive the same blessings or rewards.

3. Just because someone may not suffer eternal torment, does not mean they will escape all consequences for their actions. God is a God of justice. No one gets away with anything. While we may not know exactly what the consequences may be, it would be very foolish indeed to ignore God's instructions.

4. To reject Jesus is to be under the dominion of Satan by default. The devil is a lying thief who hates you because you are loved by God. Rejecting Jesus is choosing the devil, which is not wise. Jesus came that we might have life in its fullness, as God intended, but the devil comes only to steal, kill, and destroy.

5. Jesus created the world and He knows how it functions. Not following the manufacturer's handbook (the Bible), can only cause misery, heartache, and pain. God's way produces happiness and success. God did not give us His Word to put us in bondage but to share truth that would set us free.

6. Jesus came to deliver us from sin, its power and its effects. Sin is deadly. Sin produces death and all the misery that accompanies death. Sin is a problem, and without Jesus we have no escape from its power. No one but Jesus can set us free. There is no true freedom outside of Jesus Christ.

7. Jesus loves you! And He proved it by dying for you, so you could live. He paid the price for your sins so you could be completely forgiven and go free. He took the

punishment you deserved, and graciously offers to you all that He deserves -- as a free gift!

Jesus' kingdom is the kingdom of love. His commandment is to love others as He loved us. Nothing attracts like love. The Body of Christ is built up by love, not by fear. People will not sacrifice out of fear to the extent they will sacrifice for love.

I am extremely glad that Jesus Christ is my Lord. It is a blessing, not bondage, a privilege, not a burden. I encourage you to enjoy my wonderful Lord by turning your life over to Him, too!

Another Question

A related question some ask is "Why should we even bother preaching the Gospel if there is no eternal hell?" In answer to that question, here are some reasons.

1. Obedience to Jesus Christ who commanded us to proclaim the Good News to everyone.
2. So that Jesus can enjoy the fruit of the tremendous price He paid to redeem people. Jesus deserves to get what He paid for.
3. So that people can enjoy the benefits of knowing Jesus which are listed above.

In summary, we should preach the Gospel because of our love for Jesus and because of our love for people. Do we need any more reason?

Jesus Is The Only Savior

What I was taught about hell was not accurate. Tradition, not the Bible, is the true source of teaching that hell is a place of eternal torment. Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't, but it can't be proven from the Bible. The Bible teaches that Jesus is the Judge, and we can trust Him to judge right.

But we have not been wrong about Jesus. He is the only Savior. I need Jesus. You need Jesus. Everyone needs Jesus.

Without Him we are hopeless and helpless. Not just for the afterlife, but now, too. No matter how strong and capable you are, you will eventually face challenges you cannot handle without Jesus.

Perhaps the biggest challenge most of us face is our own selfishness. Have you realized that all it would take to turn Heaven into a place like people have thought about Hell is selfishness? We all need to come to Jesus Christ and let Him change us into what we should be.

JOHN 14:6 KJV

6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Without accepting the Lord Jesus Christ, no human being will go to Heaven, or enjoy life in God's presence after they depart this earth.

No one can be, or ever will be, saved apart from Jesus Christ. It's just not possible. There is no other cure for our problem. We all truly need Jesus.

To exist in the realm of God, we must be born into His family. Otherwise we would be like a fish out of water. Not only would we not enjoy it, we could not survive.

Asking if someone can be saved without faith in Jesus Christ is like asking if someone can live without breathing. It just can't be done. Every human being needs Jesus. The sooner they learn of Him and accept Him, the better off they will be.

Reducing the message of Jesus to only being about where you go when you die is a major error. Jesus' plan for you starts right now.

Accept Him

If you have not accepted Jesus Christ yet, I strongly encourage you to do so now.

Jesus knows more than you, He's more capable than you, and He loves you more than you love yourself. After all, He already died for you. Why not trust Jesus? Why not follow His way? Why not enjoy the wonderful privilege of having Jesus Christ as your Lord? Who else loves you enough to die for you?

God now invites you into His family to enjoy His divine love and forgiveness as His free gift. God's gift comes packaged in a Person -- the Lord Jesus Christ. When you receive Jesus into your life, you are accepting all that God has provided for you out of His great love.

Jesus gave Himself for us, so that whosoever would believe, trust, and rely on Him, would be delivered, saved, and set free.

JOHN 3:17 KJV

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

If you think you've been too bad for God to forgive and love, it's NOT TRUE! God loves you! God has already forgiven you and invites you now to accept His forgiveness and love.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:19-20 KJV

19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

There is no formula you must follow to receive Jesus and walk with Him. Jesus is a person, a divine person, but also a human person who understands you completely. Jesus is not asking you to just change religions, join some group, or perform some ritual. Instead He invites you into an intimate daily relationship with Him.

Jesus' desire and plan is to be involved in every detail of your life. He wants to help you and train you to succeed. The Bible describes this as fellowship -- sharing -- even comparing it to a marriage relationship.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:9 KJV

9 God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Just turn to God with your whole heart and call out to Him now. He is listening.

ROMANS 10:13 KJV

13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Your Next Step

Your next step is to become familiar with the New Covenant you now have with God. If you have never read the Bible before, start with John's Gospel to get better acquainted with Jesus. Then read the letters (also called epistles) to the Church, starting with the letter to the Romans. Although these letters were written many years ago, they still speak to you as a member of the true Church because of your belief in Jesus Christ.

By receiving Jesus you became a member of the family of God. Now that you are in God's family, you have many brothers and sisters who can help you in your new walk as a child of God. But never allow others to keep you from reading and acting on the Bible yourself.

The Lord will help you find brothers and sisters you can encourage and who will encourage you.

No church or group is perfect. We are all learning and growing up to become like Jesus. So don't be critical of others, for Jesus has called us to encourage and help people, not to cut them down. But don't join any group that does not help you to become more like Jesus. For fellowship seek out those who believe and honor the Bible, and who emphasize the command Jesus gave to His followers to love as He loved.

JOHN 13:34 KJV

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

Be cautious not to accept every teaching that may be offered to you. Others know things you don't, but that does not mean you should accept everything they say, just because they have been followers of Jesus longer than you have. Continue to read the Bible for yourself, and talk with Jesus about everything. He will teach you and guide you into all truth!

What If This Book Is Wrong?

The message of this book is that the Bible does not teach that hell is eternal. It offers no opinion on what any individual's punishment or final destination may be. It attempts to show that the teaching of hell as never-ending torment is a human tradition added to the inspired God-given Scriptures. While most English translations do clearly teach hell is never-ending torment, this book shows that the idea is not in the original inspired Hebrew and Greek Scriptures.

But what if this book is wrong?

Do you think it will seriously harm people to tell them punishment may not last for eternity? Do you think the multitudes would serve God if hell is eternal, but if it only lasts for some shorter period of time they would refuse to serve God?

Personally, I would want to avoid hell just as much whether it lasted for one month or for eternity. I cannot see how insisting that God will allow people to spend eternity in torment does anything to draw people to love Him and serve Him.

Therefore, if the message of this book is wrong, it seems unlikely to do great harm. On the other hand, if this book is right, a good case can be made that the traditional teaching of eternal torment in hell has been very harmful to the spread of Christianity. Untold numbers of people have turned their backs on God because of this false understanding of hell which the Bible does not teach. Our message of Good News has not rung true to many. We preach that God is love, but people know eternal torment is not an act of a loving being. Therefore many have rejected our message as not believable. Many others have decided they want nothing to do with a God who would torment people eternally.

This subject is important because our view of God affects everything. If we picture God as someone who will torture people for eternity, there is no way we can really trust Him completely. Nor can we truly love God, if we think He is like that.

How can anyone truly believe God loves them, if they think He will torture them, or their friends and family, in never-ending fire if they fall short of God's requirements?

Is it really necessary for us to convince people they will otherwise be tormented eternally to get them to turn to Jesus Christ? Do you think Jesus is that unattractive? And do you think Jesus is thrilled about someone "loving" Him only as a way to escape eternal torment in hell?

So let's guard against thinking we need to add to what God said in the Bible, in order to be effective in reaching the world with the Gospel.

At its heart, the teaching of eternal torment in hell is an attack on the character and nature of God -- on His justice and love. The Bible teaches, and everyone intuitively understands, that all punishment should fit the crime. Some theologians have attempted to tell us why someone not accepting Christ (even if they never heard of Him) should deserve a penalty of eternal, never-ending, conscious torture in burning fire. But every human being knows that is not fair or just. Yet, because of the tradition that has crept in to our English Bible translations, we who believe the Bible have had no better answer we could offer.

But if you spend the time necessary to dig beyond the English translations of the Bible to see what God actually said, you will find nothing in the Bible that teaches hell is eternal. The Bible clearly teaches punishment for wrongdoing, but it never says any punishment will last for eternity.

I expect there will be those who condemn a book like this without ever reading it for themselves. Some may even accuse me of misleading people. I fervently desire not to mislead anyone. So I previously thought it seemed safer just to keep quiet about the subject of hell. But God gave us the Bible to reveal truth to us, and protect us from error. We are to study the Bible, and teach it. When we find we have departed from what the Bible actually teaches, we need to change. And we need to tell others.

Finding out what the Bible actually says may be dangerous to human tradition and human institutions. But the truth of the Bible poses no danger for the cause of Christ and the spread of His Gospel.

All this book attempts to do is get people to examine the Bible. I tried to avoid human opinion as much as possible and focus on what the Bible says. This book is an honest and sincere attempt to follow the Bible. It was produced out of love and honor for God's Word, not because of ignoring or disbelieving the Bible.

So, you may ask, "Is there a hell where people are tormented after they leave this life?"

Since I am not the Judge, and since I have never been past this life, my answer has to be, "I don't know."

"Well, if there is a hell, will people who go there stay for all eternity?"

Again my answer has to be that I don't know because I am not the Judge. But I can say that I see nowhere in the Bible, correctly translated, that says hell, or any punishment, will be eternal. I believe the Bible, and encourage you to do the same.

If this book is wrong, then I sincerely desire to be shown from Scripture. Please show me where I am wrong. My desire is simply to know the truth, and follow Jesus my wonderful Lord.

Appendix I

God Is Just And Fair

JEREMIAH 9:24 KJV

24 But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

PSALM 97:2 KJV

2 Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.

Most recent translations render the word "judgment" in the verses above as "justice." So if you know and understand God, you will realize that God delights in justice. The very foundation of God's rule is righteousness and justice.

PSALM 89:14 KJV

14 Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

God is the author of justice. It all stems from Him. God is the source from which we got the very idea of justice.

The reason why all humans -- even little children -- naturally feel that fairness and justice are right is because we were created this way -- in the image of God.

The idea that God would ever commit any act of injustice is unthinkable.

Fairness, justice, righteousness. They all have a similar meaning. They mean doing what is right.

JOB 37:23 KJV

23 Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict.

PROVERBS 21:3 KJV

3 To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

DEUTERONOMY 32:4 KJV

4 He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.

ROMANS 2:6 KJV

6 Who will render to every man according to his deeds:

ISAIAH 45:21-23 KJV

21 Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me.

22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

23 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.

In Isaiah 45:21 God specifically says He is a just God. And yet, if all we got was justice, we would all be in big trouble, for as the Bible declares, we have all fallen short of God's perfect standard. How wonderful it is to know that not only is God just, but He is also a Savior!

God also is merciful, so His justice is affected by His mercy, without being diminished by it.

MICAH 7:18 KJV

18 Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

LAMENTATIONS 3:31-33 KJV

31 For the Lord will not cast off for ever:

32 But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

33 For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

God's Laws

God's desire for justice and fairness for all people is demonstrated in the laws God gave to the Israelites. Here are a few examples.

LEVITICUS 19:35-37 KJV

35 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure.

36 Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.

37 Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD.

LEVITICUS 24:19-20 KJV

19 And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him;

20 Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again.

DEUTERONOMY 16:20 KJV

20 That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

In Righteousness Jesus Judges

REVELATION 19:11 KJV

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

Oh, what a wonderful verse! Jesus is faithful! Jesus never lies! And "in righteousness he doth judge"!

Jesus can be trusted to judge in fairness, justice, and righteousness.

ACTS 17:31 KJV

31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

ISAIAH 9:7 KJV

7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

JEREMIAH 23:5-6 KJV

5 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

6 In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

HEBREWS 1:8 KJV

8 But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

There are those who claim Jesus will sentence untold millions to a fiery pit of torment for eternity simply because they never heard the Gospel message before their death.

But any child knows that is not just. And now that you have been shown the Bible does not teach that, I trust you will quit believing it. The proper response to this knowledge is to love Jesus and desire to obey Him -- and to share the Good News about Him with everyone.

Not Like God

JEREMIAH 7:31 KJV

31 And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart.

In Jeremiah 7:31 God seems to indicate that such a horrible thing as burning sons and daughters never even entered His mind. If God thought it was horrible for the people to burn their sons and daughters in fire, would God think it was acceptable for Him to do the same?

No one truly believes eternal suffering in hell is a just and fair punishment for someone who had no chance in this life to even hear about Jesus. So at its heart, the traditional teaching about hell being a place of never-ending torment is an attack on God's character.

Appendix II

Are Dictionaries Reliable?

Generally, we think of a dictionary as being the final authority on the meaning of words. Usually that is true. However, dictionaries can have an ideological bias, especially when certain theological truths are involved.

How are dictionaries made? (Another name for dictionary is "lexicon.")

Dictionaries, no matter who does them, are compiled by examining how words are used by people. The meaning of words is always determined by how they are used.

Just because a dictionary says a word has a certain meaning does not mean it is correct. A dictionary can be wrong, just as any human work can be in error. Humans make mistakes!

Only God is infallible. In the Bible we have the words God gave His prophets. These words were originally written in the Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament) languages.

The Holy Spirit, who is the real Author of the Bible, knows the meaning of words. There is no higher authority than the Bible itself for determining the meaning of a word used in the Bible. The way the Holy Spirit directed men to use certain words and the context they were used in, is the best way to determine what meaning a word was meant to convey to us.

Why would anyone compiling a dictionary provide a definition that was not true, or at least not the whole truth? It's not too difficult to understand one possible reason. Until recent times, it was very expensive to publish a book. Unless you could depend on good market demand for a book, you simply would not bother. With a Bible translation or a dictionary of Biblical words, you would understand that if the established Church did not support your publication, you would not be able to publish profitably, for you would have few buyers.

I'm not saying that all publishers of Bible dictionaries made conscious decisions like this. But once a few "authorities" agreed on a certain meaning of a word, then it was accepted and reasonable to go along with tradition, especially once a definition had been "accepted" for several centuries.

What we are dealing with here is the Bible: God's revelation to man. We should not consult some man to tell us what the words mean when we can examine how the Holy Spirit Himself used the words in Scripture. That is how we can and should determine the meanings of the words used in the Bible.

So in this book when we examine the words used in our Bibles for hell and eternity, instead of looking mainly to human works like dictionaries, we will look directly to the Word of God to determine the meaning of these words.

Appendix III

Bible Words For Endlessness

The Greek language uses prefixes meaning "not," "no," or "un" in words that describe conditions that never end. So in the New Testament when the idea of something lasting forever is expressed, it normally uses a negative particle before a Greek word to denote this.

Un-ending, in-corruptible, un-fading, in-destructible are a few examples of using a prefix to make a word express endlessness or not being exposed to the corruption of death.

In the following Scriptures, the words in bold are the KJV translation of the words being examined.

Athanasia

Athanasia (Strong's #110) means literally "no death." It is the state of death-less-ness or being incapable of death.

Here are the verses where athanasia is used, always translated as immortality.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:53-54 KJV

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on **immortality**.

54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on **immortality**, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

1 TIMOTHY 6:16 KJV

16 Who only hath **immortality**, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

Aphthartos

Aphthartos (Strong's #862) is an adjective translated as incorruptible, uncorruptible, immortal, and not corruptible. It means literally "no corruption," or "im-perishable." It is the state of being incapable of corruption, of being incapable of perishing.

ROMANS 1:23 KJV

23 And changed the glory of the **incorruptible** God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:25 KJV

25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an **incorruptible**.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:52 KJV

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised **incorruptible**, and we shall be changed.

Aphtharsia

Aphtharsia (Strong's #861) is the noun form of aphthartos (Strong's #862) which we just examined.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:42 KJV

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in **incorruption**:

2 TIMOTHY 1:10 KJV

10 But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and **immortality** to light through the gospel:

Amarantos

Amarantos (Strong's #263) is an adjective meaning "not fading" or "un-fading." It is used once in the New Testament.

1 PETER 1:4 KJV

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and **that fadeth not away**, reserved in heaven for you,

Akatalutos

The thought of permanence is also expressed by akatalutos (Strong's #179), which literally means "not destroyed" or "in-destructible." It is used one time, translated as endless.

HEBREWS 7:16 KJV

16 Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an **endless** life.

All the above passages describe conditions of endlessness or incorruptibility in the Bible. Yet none of them use aion or its adjective aionios. Each of them is a word starting with the particle "a" which means "not" when placed in front of Greek words.

From these verses you can see that the Bible promise of believers living forever with Jesus does not depend at all on the word aion being used.

Ouk Telos

LUKE 1:33 KJV

33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be **no end**.

This verse uses two words: ouk (Strong's #3756), and telos (Strong's #5056), meaning literally "no end" or "never finished."

This verse does use the word aion, translated as for ever (which we have shown is an improper translation.) A possible meaning of this verse is that Jesus will reign over the house of Jacob for the whole age, that is the Messianic age. But that will not be the end of His kingdom. For His kingdom will never have an end. Ruling over the house of Jacob for the Messianic age to come is only the beginning of His kingdom.

Appendix IV

Fire That Is Never Quenched?

Some may wonder about the verses that mention fire that “never shall be quenched.” So let’s look at those verses.

But before we examine the New Testament verses, two passages from the Old Testament will help illuminate the New Testament uses of “unquenchable fire.”

One in Isaiah 66:24 speaks of looking upon dead bodies. Whatever it refers to, one thing is clear -- living beings in torment are not being viewed, but dead bodies.

ISAIAH 66:24 KJV

24 And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.

The second Old Testament passage we want to examine referred to national judgment on Israel which involved the burning of Jerusalem with fire that “shall not be quenched.” In Jeremiah 17:27 God said that unless the people repented He would, “kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.”

Fulfilling what Jeremiah spoke, 2 Chronicles 36:19 says, “they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire.” Then verse 21 says, “To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah.” So we know 2 Chronicles 36 is the fulfillment of the “fire that shall not be quenched” God promised in Jeremiah 17:27. Here is proof Scripture calls fire “unquenchable” when it refers to fires that only burned until what they were burning was finished burning. Certainly those fires in Jerusalem are not still burning.

Jesus and His listeners would have been familiar with these Scriptures from Isaiah and Jeremiah. So they provide the background for the New Testament use of “unquenchable fire.”

Only two verses in the New Testament, both from the same passage, mention “hell” and fire that is not quenched. In both verses, “hell” is the translation of Gehenna, the literal valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem.¹⁴

MARK 9:43, 45 KJV

¹⁴ For more information read the section on Gehenna in the chapter “Words Translated As Hell.”

43 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the **fire that never shall be quenched**:

45 And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the **fire that never shall be quenched**:

In both verses above, I have placed the words in bold that are used in the KJV to translate two Greek words: **pyr asbeston**. The Greek word “pyr” (also spelled “pur”), is the normal word for fire. The Greek word “asbestos”¹⁵ is only used two other times in the New Testament.

Here are the other two verses that use the Greek word “asbestos” in the New Testament.

MATTHEW 3:12 KJV

12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with **unquenchable fire**.

LUKE 3:17 KJV

17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with **fire unquenchable**.

In both these verses, which refer to Jesus, the words in bold are the translation of the Greek words “**asbesto pyri**” which are different forms of the same words used in Mark 9:43 and Mark 9:45 (listed above). In all the New Testament, the Greek word “asbestos” (Strong's #762) is used only four times. So we have only these four verses to see how God used this word.

To understand these verses it helps to know what the “chaff” is which will be burned. Chaff is not weeds or bad wheat. Chaff is the outer husk covering the wheat kernel. Chaff is not something separate or different from good wheat. Chaff is a necessary part of good wheat, but a part that becomes unnecessary after harvest. Until harvest time the chaff protects the wheat kernel. After harvest the chaff is separated from the wheat kernel by threshing and discarded.

So saying Jesus will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire could not be talking about burning bad people. Instead it must refer to burning off unnecessary things and refining those people the Lord refers to as His “wheat” which He gathers to keep.

If the Bible intended to picture for us two types of people, the good who were pictured as wheat, and the bad being pictured as chaff, then it chose a bad example. The farmers Jesus spoke to would not think of wheat and chaff as two separate varieties – like good and bad people. So these two verses must apply to what Jesus does with the unnecessary and detrimental stuff of those who belong to Him – not His enemies.

¹⁵ Asbestos, asbesto, and abeston are different forms of the same Greek word, Strong's #762.

Another point not to be missed is that natural “chaff” from wheat is not burned with fire that is “never” put out. Once the chaff is burned, the fire will go out. But not before it has finished its job of burning up what is referred to, the chaff. All this is to say that it is unwarranted to insert the word “never” in Mark 9:43 and 45. The word “never” is not in the Greek text. The same Greek words are used in Matthew 3:12 and Luke 3:17. If they mean “never” in one place, they should mean “never” in all four verses. But it would be absurd to talk of chaff being burned with fire that “never” goes out. So they don’t.

In summary, Matthew 3:12 and Luke 3:17 contain the same Greek words used in Mark 9:43 and 45 to translate “fire that **never** shall be quenched.” But they use those words to describe the Lord “burning” the outer protective husks (chaff) from the wheat kernels. And the wheat kernels are obviously a type of God’s people.

There is no justification for using the word “never” in Mark 9:43 and 45. Especially because the Old Testament occurrences of “unquenchable fire” cannot refer to fires that are still burning.

There are three more verses in the New Testament that mention a fire that is not quenched – all from the same passage in Mark 9 we have been examining above.

MARK 9:44,46,48 KJV

44 Where their worm dieth not, and the **fire is not quenched.**

46 Where their worm dieth not, and the **fire is not quenched.**

48 Where their worm dieth not, and the **fire is not quenched.**

These verses would obviously cause the hearers to think of Isaiah 66:24, quoted above, which contains the same wording. Isaiah clearly refers to dead men (carcasses), not living people in continuing torment.

By simply doing a word search through the whole Bible for verses that contain both the English words “not” and “quenched” you will easily see that God used this terminology referring to things that obviously do not have to last forever.

There is nothing in the Greek New Testament that requires, or justifies, adding the qualifier “never” in any of these verses from Mark. It simply means fire that will not be put out until it burns up completely whatever it is burning. It is a fire that cannot be quenched until its purpose is accomplished.

It is also important to remember that no one in the Bible ever talked about “fire” and Gehenna but Jesus when He was talking to Jews who lived nearby and were familiar with this literal valley of Hinnom. There is no reason we should not take the Bible literally and realize that Jesus was speaking to Jews about a literal garbage dump outside Jerusalem where unburied bodies of criminals were thrown. In that garbage dump were always worms and fires burning continuously.

Appendix V

Translations & Tools

One solution for translating *aion* and *aionon* into English is to simply not translate them, but just transliterate them. That means the word is just spelled in English letters. This is the choice made for the Concordant Literal New Testament. Every time it translates *aion* as *eon*, and every time it translates *aionion* as *eonian*. This approach does not give any interpretation, but allows us to judge from the context what the meaning is, rather than have someone else decide for us what they think the meaning should be. The downside of this approach is that, while it provides accuracy and makes it easier for us to use in study, it does not always make for easy reading. In other words, the language may not always seem to flow and sound like our normal speech.

A different approach is taken by Young's Literal Translation (YLT), which usually translates *aion* and *aionios* as "age" and "age-during."

It can be wise to have more than one Bible translation. Some are more useful for doing in-depth word studies, and some are better for every day reading.

By using a Strong's Concordance, or a free computer Bible program like e-Sword¹⁶, anyone can easily look up and see what Greek word is behind the English translation of any Bible word. So, it does not require a lot of money or a lot of education to be able to see what Greek word was used in any verse of the New Testament. Of course, this does not mean you will understand everything by using this approach -- far from it. I am simply pointing out that everyone can, if they desire, at least "look under the hood" and see which Greek words were translated into our English Bible verses.

e-Sword is a great tool if you have a computer. It comes with several Bible translations, including Young's Literal Translation. If you search for them, you can also find free copies of the Concordant Literal Version and Rotherham's Emphasized Bible to use with e-Sword. These three translations are still in print. You may not enjoy reading them, but they can be beneficial for study.

There are other translations that did not translate *aion* by words that meant eternity. I have 15 in my possession. But the only ones still in print are the three listed in the previous paragraph.

Another helpful study tool to have if you desire to do more extensive study is "The English-Greek Reverse Interlinear New Testament: English Standard Version." It

¹⁶ e-Sword is a free Bible software program for Windows found at www.e-sword.net. Macintosh and Linux users require additional software that must be purchased to run the program.

combines a modern translation with the Greek text, a transliteration of the Greek words, and the Strong's number of each word so you can do further study.

Appendix VI

Sodom Is An Example

2 PETER 2:6 KJV

6 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly;

JUDE 1:7 KJV

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

Sodom has become a byword or synonym for depravity and utter sinfulness. The story of Sodom is found in the Old Testament where God visits His covenant friend Abraham in Genesis 18, telling Abraham how sinful the people of Sodom have become. It ends with Sodom and the surrounding cities being destroyed by fire from heaven in Genesis 19.

In the New Testament Peter and Jude both tell us that Sodom is an example. Jude 1:7 in the King James Version even tells us that Sodom is "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."¹⁷ Yet it is beyond any dispute that the fire that destroyed Sodom those centuries ago is not still burning in Sodom. (Sodom is generally accepted to have been located in the Dead Sea area.)

Sodom is a type, or a picture, of judgment to come, according to the verses above. Therefore it is worthwhile for us to consider the final end of Sodom. You might think it was extinction – being wiped out of existence. But God in Ezekiel 16 tells us that Sodom will one day be raised back to its former estate! This shows that a place mentioned in Scripture as an example of judgment does not have judgment that will last forever.

Will Sodom really come back? You can bet your life on it! Any Word that God has ever spoken WILL come to pass. It does not matter how long ago God said it, He never forgets.

Note what God promises in Ezekiel concerning Sodom.

EZEKIEL 16:53,55 KJV

¹⁷ The word translated as eternal is 'aionios'. See the chapter on We Have A Problem With The Translations Of Eternity for evidence this is a poor translation.

53 When I shall bring again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, then will I bring again the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them:

55 When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate, then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate.

Here is the whole passage from Ezekiel, so you can see the whole context.

EZEKIEL 16:46-63 KJV

46 And thine elder sister is Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at thy left hand: and thy younger sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand, is Sodom and her daughters.

47 Yet hast thou not walked after their ways, nor done after their abominations: but, as if that were a very little thing, thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways.

48 As I live, saith the Lord GOD, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters.

49 Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.

50 And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.

51 Neither hath Samaria committed half of thy sins; but thou hast multiplied thine abominations more than they, and hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done.

52 Thou also, which hast judged thy sisters, bear thine own shame for thy sins that thou hast committed more abominable than they: they are more righteous than thou: yea, be thou confounded also, and bear thy shame, in that thou hast justified thy sisters.

53 When I shall bring again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, then will I bring again the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them:

54 That thou mayest bear thine own shame, and mayest be confounded in all that thou hast done, in that thou art a comfort unto them.

55 When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate, then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate.

56 For thy sister Sodom was not mentioned by thy mouth in the day of thy pride,

57 Before thy wickedness was discovered, as at the time of thy reproach of the daughters of Syria, and all that are round about her, the daughters of the Philistines, which despise thee round about.

58 Thou hast borne thy lewdness and thine abominations, saith the LORD.

59 For thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant.

60 Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant.

61 Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant.

62 And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD:

63 That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD.