



# Bible Student's Notebook™

## The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XV  
Issue 371

# The Ages: God's Time Periods

## Part 1

by – Edward Henry Clayton (1887-1972)

Most of us are familiar with a time table, in some form or other. At school, the daily order of study is set out in timetable form, and, in workshop and factory, hours conform to an agreed on time pattern.

Transportation concerns all issue their timetables and endeavor to provide the services they offer in accordance with the published schedules, which have all been carefully planned beforehand.

If it was otherwise – if studies or duties followed no reasonable order or method, or if public transportation services operated haphazardly at the whim of any who cared to provide those services as and when fancy dictated – the result would be chaos.

### THE PURPOSE OF THE AGES

The thoughtful student of Scripture must readily conclude that God's dealings with mankind conform to a timetable.

God has a purpose. He has revealed it in His Word, and He is working out that purpose in accord with the counsel of His Own blessed will (Ephesians 1:11), and His counsel shall stand (Isaiah 46:10).

This purpose He has called "*The purpose of the ages*" (Ephesians 3:11). In the *Authorized (King James) Version*, it is termed "*the eternal purpose*," but a moment's reflection will show the incorrectness of this phrase.

A purpose which is "*eternal*" can have no fulfillment

– it must forever be inconclusive; but God's purpose *absolutely and certainly* will be completed and finally realized.

However, if reference is made to the *margin* of the *Revised Version* (and to the *text* of other reputable translations), it will be seen that the exact translation of this phrase in Ephesians (3:11) is: "*the purpose of the AGES.*"

This is worthy of prayerful thought, for we are thus introduced to a "time term" which indicates that, in the gradual unfolding of His vast and predetermined plan, God is working carefully according to a timetable.

Now, if a further examination is made of this verse (Ephesians 3:11), it will be discovered that God's "*purpose of the ages*" has been "*purposed*" (literally "made") in Christ Jesus our Lord. Allow this unique and blessed *fact* to grip us and to hold our minds and hearts. It is confirmed in Hebrews 1:2, where we read,

*By Whom [i.e., the Son] also He made the ages.*

In this verse, the *Authorized Version's* translation of "*worlds*" is really "*ages*," as will be readily ascertained if, again, reference is made to the *Revised Version* margin and to other versions. The *Scofield Bible* margin also indicates "*ages*" as the correct word in this (and other) passages.

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## **Bible Student's Notebook™**

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
  - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
  - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
  - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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*AGES (continued from front page)*

There is no doubt at all, of course, that in Christ, God also made the “worlds,” for without Him was not anything made that was made – the truth of John 1:3 is not for one moment questioned.

In Ephesians 3:11 and Hebrews 1:2, it is pertinent to stress the fact that the *ages* were made, or formed, in Christ, for this is an additional and most significant revelation.

GOD has a *purpose*, and this purpose is to be unfolded and realized during a period He has chosen to term “the ages” (or “the eons”), and that purpose is *centered in Christ*.

“Age” – (Gr. *aion*, or *eon*)

A correct understanding of the truth of the *ages* is based on an accurate rendering and consistent use of the Greek word *aion*. This word is used in the Greek Scriptures (the New Testament) in its singular and

plural forms over 100 times, and the adjective *aionios* occurs over 70 times.

We will not seek the meaning of these words from secular sources, but will endeavor to determine the true meaning from the living Word of God itself. Scripture is always its own best illustrator, and the internal evidence available for our consideration is by no means scanty.

Only by a careful examination of *all* of the occurrences of the Greek words *aion* and *aionios* can an understanding of their meaning be gained. In the course of such an enquiry, it will be found that the *Authorized Version* translates *aion* by the word “age” on two occasions (shown hereunder), but resorts mainly to the use of two words, *viz.*: (1) “world” and (2) “ever,” although several other terms are also employed. A few representative references are selected and quoted, in which the Greek word *aion* is used, giving the *Authorized (King James) Version* translation.

World	Matthew 13:39	<i>The harvest is the end of the <b>world</b>.</i>
	Matthew 13:40	<i>So shall it be in the end of this <b>world</b>.</i>
	Mark 10:30	<i>In the <b>world</b> to come, eternal life.</i>
	Luke 1:70	<i>As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets which have been since the <b>world</b> began.</i>
	John 9:32	<i>Since the <b>world</b> began was it not heard ...</i>
	I Corinthians 10:11	<i>They are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the <b>world</b> are come.</i>
	Ephesians 3: 9	<i>The mystery, which from the beginning of the <b>world</b> hath been hid in God ...</i>
	Ephesians 3:21	<i>Throughout all ages, <b>world</b> without end.</i>
	II Timothy 4:10	<i>Demas ... loved this present <b>world</b>.</i>

	Titus 2:12	<i>We should live soberly ... in this present <b>world</b>.</i>
	Hebrews 1: 2	<i>By Whom also He made the <b>worlds</b>.</i>
	Hebrews 11: 3	<i>Through faith we understand that the <b>worlds</b> were framed by the Word of God.</i>
Ever	Matthew 21:19	<i>Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward <b>for ever</b>.</i>
	John 8:35	<i>The servant abideth not in the house <b>for ever</b> but the Son abideth <b>for ever</b>.</i>
	Philippians 4:20	<i>Now unto God and our Father be glory <b>for ever and ever</b>.</i>
	Hebrews 5: 6	<i>Thou art a priest <b>for ever</b> after the order of Melchisedec.</i>
	II Peter 2:17	<i>To whom the mist of darkness is reserved <b>for ever</b>.</i>

	Jude 13	To whom is reserved the blackness of darkness <b>for ever</b> .
	Revelation 22: 5	They shall reign <b>for ever and ever</b> .
Ages	Ephesians 2: 7	That in the <b>ages</b> to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace ...
	Col. 1:26	Even the mystery which hath been hid from <b>ages and generations</b> , but now is made manifest to His saints.

If the foregoing passages are examined with the thought always in mind that the words “world,” “ever” and “ages” (bold typed in each reference verse) are *all* translating the *same* Greek word (*aion*), the question will present itself:

How can the *one* Greek word (*aion*) bear the meaning “world” with its definite time limits, for the world has a *beginning* (John 9:32, Ephesians 3:9) and an *end* (Matthew 13:39-40), and “ever” which indicates endlessness?

Face the matter squarely with honesty and courage, and, once this is done, it *must* be admitted that the single Greek word (*aion*) *cannot* carry meanings which are so completely opposed to one another. Remember always that God is not the Author of confusion (I Corinthians 14:33), and He would not and does not use a term which means, in one instance, one thing and, in another, its antithesis.

Thus, there is a problem presented. Is there a solution to it? There is, and it is quite straightforward – the consistent use of a *single term* which meets the requirements of *all* of the occurrences.

Is there a word which will meet such a demand and will conform to the needs of each context? There is – it is the word “age” which is used in two instances cited in the foregoing list (*i.e.*, Ephesians 2:7; Colossians 1:26), and which is the word so frequently suggested in the margin of the *Revised Version* and by Dr. Scofield in his notes, and used by other translators also.

Let the reader who is anxious to know the mind of God in this vital matter of His truth follow all of the occurrences of the Greek word *aion* in a reliable concordance – it is a splendid spiritual exercise – and substitute the word “age” (or, simply, the transliterated word “*eon*”) throughout.

Consider every reference in its context carefully and prayerfully, and the time devoted to such a study will bring, assuredly, its own reward. The discerning student will give thought to such a verse as Matthew 13:39 which speaks of the “*end of the world*” and find that it cannot be reconciled with Ephesians 3:21 which indicates the world as being “*without end*.” These two verses consistently translated, read:

Matthew 13:39	Now the harvest is the <b>conclusion of the eon</b> [or, the end of the age].
Ephesians 3:21	To Him be glory in the ecclesia and in Christ Jesus for all the generations of the eon [single] of the eons [plural] – [or age of the ages].  (In this verse, the use of the singular and plural – age and ages – is entirely obscured in the <i>Authorized Version</i> ).

There is no conflict now, for there *cannot* be contradiction in the truth of God. It is with *us* that confusion belongs (Daniel 9:8).

Or, again, when reading of the withering of the fig tree (which was in itself an act of *national significance* to Israel – Matthew 21:17-22), we learn that no fruit is to grow on the fig tree “*henceforward for ever*.” Yet, the Lord Himself, parabolically, tells us of the *future resurgence of the fig tree* when replying to His disciples’ question,

*What shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age?* (Matthew 24:3, 32).

If the phrase in Matthew 21:19 is consistently translated, it will be at once recognized that there is no discord, but complete concord:

*Let no fruit be coming on you **for the age*** (Matthew 21:19).



Israel as a *nation*, typified in the fig tree, from then on could bear no fruit until the *end of the age*, when Israel's Lord will come and bring about His nation's rejuvenation.

There are other similar instances which could be cited where apparent conflict will be at once resolved by a consistent translation of *aion*, but the two selected passages quoted will suffice to indicate the value of *concordant* translation.

Isn't it evident, then, that *aion* is not a word used in Scripture indiscriminately of a vague, shadowy endlessness, but rather is clearly indicative of a limited (albeit lengthy) period of time – a period with a definite beginning and marked by as definite a termination?

This truth is further confirmed for us by the inspired precision with which we find the word used in the following varying phrase combinations:

1. The eon (singular) of the eon (singular): Hebrews 1:8.
2. The eon (singular) of the eons (plural): Ephesians 3:21.
3. The eons (plural) of the eons (plural): Romans 16:27, Galatians 1:5 and nineteen other references.

The spiritual significance of these distinctive combinations (all of which are carefully regarded and preserved in the *Concordant Version*) is completely lost to us in most other versions by simply and quite indiscriminately translating these phrases in terms which indicate endlessness, e.g. “*for ever and ever.*”

We will consider later the import of these three remarkable phrases, but in the meantime will remark that, if the Greek word *aion* by itself is “*for ever*” (that is, without end), *why* should it be necessary to use the phrase “*for ever and ever*” in several instances where there is the dual occurrence of the word?

If it is “*for ever*” – which is undeniably endless – it is surely redundant to accord further endlessness to endlessness. It is not only redundant to do so, it is silly.

The alternative explanation, that this is scriptural

idiom to express, in the original, the idea of “eternity” or “unendingness,” is not at all satisfactory to the careful student of the Word of God. Holy spirit is not lacking in the ability to express itself clearly at all times.

Scripture is *God's* revelation and is expressed in words, terms and structure seven times purified, as silver, in the crucible of God (Psalm 12:6). Any variation in the use of a word or term – such as we find in the three phrases presently before us – is not without adequate and valid reason; and these fine discriminations should, at least, arrest attention and induce enquiry.

Briefly, at this point, let it be said that these three phrases refer to the last, or the last two, of the sequence of five eons (ages) which, together, constitute the “*eonian times*” (Romans 16:25 etc.), and which follow this third or present “*wicked eon*” (Galatians 1:4).

Phrase “3” is in connection with the fourth and fifth eons *together*, while phrases “1” and “2” refer to the fifth eon only – the final and most glorious of all of the five eons, which is the Day of God (II Peter 3:12).

The singular beauty and vital significance of these distinctions is hopelessly obscured from us when these phrases, pregnant with the truth of God, are, without regard, classed together by translators as varying forms all expressing but the single idea of endlessness.

The saddest feature of it all is, perhaps, that the truth – and the joy which is always inseparable from the realization and appreciation of God's truth – are lost to His saints.

The well-known words used so frequently in the Tabernacle and Temple context, “*the holy of holies*” (cf. Numbers 4:19), are very readily understood to mean the *most* holy of the two sacred compartments. They are not thought to be terms meaning some hazy, abstract idea of holiness.

Likewise, the phrase “*King of kings and Lord of Lords*” (Revelation 19:16) is not construed to mean some indeterminate form of monarchial autocracy, but is at once recognized as pointing to *the* King of all kings, *the* Lord of all lords. ►



There should, then, be no difficulty in grasping and appreciating the truth that the Eon of the eons (or Age of the ages) is that final eon, or age, fraught with the transcendent glory of the accomplishment of the Beloved and Obedient Son of God, in which the “*purpose of the eons*” will be realized (Ephesians 3:11), and not a chance combination of words, slovenly handled by translators and thought to indicate some dim, cloudy and indefinable “eternity.”

**“Age-Lasting” – (Gr. *aionios*, or eonian)**

Up until now we have confined our consideration to the Greek NOUN *aion* and its proper English equivalent *age*, or *eon*. Perhaps we might now give some thought to the adjective form *aionios* which, as has been mentioned, occurs some 70 times.

The adjective has been translated mainly as “*eternal*” or “*everlasting*” in the *Authorized (King James) Version*, once “*for ever*” and three times “*world*.” A measure of inconsistency is, therefore, apparent, and this the *Revised Version* has done little to correct, for although that version gives frequent marginal alternatives for *aion* (age) (as has already been mentioned), no such correction is suggested for the *adjective*.

The *Weymouth* version, however, makes frequent use of the phrase “*of the ages*” as a rendering of *aionios*, and the *Scofield Version* notes to the *Authorized Version* indicate “*ages*” on three occasions. Other versions translate the adjective by such phrases as “*age lasting*,” “*age enduring*” and “*eonian*.”

We learn, therefore, that the words “*everlasting*” and “*eternal*” are *not* considered by all to be the exact equivalents of the Greek word *aionios*. Nor can they be, for they imply *infinity of duration* and must, therefore, *extend backwards* into the past, as well as *project* into the future. This must be borne in mind at all times when we think of this subject – “*eternity*” is *not a term related to the future only*. The human mind just cannot cope with such a concept.

Many of the occurrences of *aionios* are connected with *life*, and the *Authorized Version* gives “*eternal life*” or “*everlasting life*” in these instances. The recipients of the promised life have *not* enjoyed it “*eternally*” or “*everlastingly*” *in the past*. Life will come as the gracious gift of God in the *future*. More will be said of this matter later.

The same observations apply in the instances where “*punishment*,” “*damnation*,” “*habitations*” and “*fire*” are qualified by the adjective *aionios*. None of these existed eternally with that infinity of duration which knew no beginning and can have no end, as the word “*eternal*” *must* imply. These judgments are future, and having a *beginning* they cannot be correctly termed “*eternal*” or “*everlasting*.”

In three passages in the *Authorized (King James) Version*, the translators were forced to *abandon* the use of “*eternal*” or “*everlasting*” as the translation of the Greek adjective *aionios* and substitute the word “*world*.” The three passages are listed below; the renderings of two other versions being given along with those of the *Authorized*:

Reference	KJV	Rotherham	Concordant
Romans 16:25	<i>the mystery which was kept secret since the <b>world</b> began.</i>	<i>sacred secret, in <b>age-past</b> times, kept silent.</i>	<i>a secret, hushed in times <b>eonian</b>.</i>
II Timothy 1:9	<i>according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the <b>world</b> began.</i>	<i>according to the peculiar purpose and favour — which was given us in Christ Jesus before <b>age-during</b> (or <b>age-past</b>) times.</i>	<i>in accord with His own purpose and the grace which is given to us in Christ Jesus before <b>times eonian</b>.</i>
Titus 1:2	<i>In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the <b>world</b> began.</i>	<i>In hope of life age-abiding: which God, who cannot lie, promised before <b>age-during</b> (or <b>age-past</b>) times.</i>	<i>In expectation of life eonian, which God, Who does not lie, promises before <b>times eonian</b>.</i>

(see *AGES*, last page)



I happened on your site a couple of months ago and have been making time in my busy schedule to exhaust the many articles and web pages. I have been in this mode of understanding since 1998 increasing in knowledge and leaving behind the Pentecostal upbringing that had only sabotaged my efforts to be near our Christ Jesus, Lord and Savior of ALL. – **AZ**

I wanted to express my gratitude and appreciation to you for your ministry. It has proved to be a blessing. By the grace of God I believed on the Lord Jesus Christ from my youth. I was raised in a fundamentalist Pentecostal based faith. I thank God that in my youth I acquired a love and reverence for God, love for the Scriptures and a genuine desire to live uprightly in the Lord. I thank God that in my congregation I was surrounded by loving and kind people and that I learned many valuable principles. All of these blessings did God give me through His Spirit. But as I grew older the youthful simplicity gave way to thoughtfulness in regard to what I was being taught and what fruit or lack thereof those teachings produced and how it caused my understanding of who God is and how he perceived me.

The way in which God was represented by the tone and manner in which teachings, discourses and studies were given produced in me confusion instead of increasing clarity, fear instead of love, mistrust instead of confidence in God and in regard to my being able to live in genuine uprightness the motives and basis for it were completed wrong because of erroneous beliefs and understandings. It was a mix of love and hate, grace and works, and the pressure to perform and conform for a costly salvation that could easily be lost robbed me of my peace and youthful outlook on the character and person of God.

The system did its work and I was conditioned by a way of thinking and relating to God that sabotaged my confidence and love for God and my ability to meet His reasonable demands. This set me on a journey that took me to many denominations and denominational understandings that, for some time brought a measure of relief, but was basically a variation on what I had been taught. To find relief for my hunger for God and peace

of mind I ventured to look outside of “Christianity” into other non-biblical faiths, yet by the grace God I always knew in my heart that the truth is and always will be in Christ. Yet I could find no solace in the “God” and “Christ” that was presented to me. God seemed harsh and arbitrary. The sacrifice of Christ seemed basically useless since in the end “you have to pay your way” to earn a salvation. You were by default condemned to torment simply because you were born, unless God “saved” you. What made it more confusing was that there was a “good news” that somehow this “God” sent his Son to save you from Himself. How strange, confusing and frightening was this “good news.”

About 1-2 years ago I came in contact with your site and ordered some literature that opened my eyes. I also pondered many of the studies and articles on your site. It presented the true God as I knew Him to be in the depths of my heart, yet the conditionings of my upbringing were there. It was a struggle to embrace the new and to let go of the old. It was strange to me that it was difficult for me to let go of something that only inspired fear and insecurity, but it was the only thing I knew. That’s what fear does, it binds you; but thank God that on this present day the living God has triumphed and I have by His grace embraced the truth.

I know this day that the Heavenly Father alone is God. I know that Jesus Christ is God’s Son, and not God. I know that I am not immortal, but completely mortal and that only the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ alone currently enjoy immortality, but that through Christ, the hope of immortality and life are mine. I know today that God has never even thought of “eternal torment,” but that death is the penalty for sin and that Jesus Christ died for our sins!

I was happy to discover that what I believed in my heart about a loving God who does save all in His own due time is a genuine Bible truth. The heavenly hope and the resurrection now make sense in light of the above truths.

I wanted to express my gratitude to you for your ministry and service. I have a loving spouse and two wonderful children whom I have intentionally not introduced to church systems where their simple faith could be distorted and undermined. – **MD**

How I adore the opportunity to see more and more into His truth, to explore and trust, to have the incredible blessing of learning from those whom God has led to research the Word and to teach/share that wealth with others. I am grateful beyond words for your work. – **WY**





*AGES (continued from page 3334)*

At once the question which arose in connection with the *Authorized Version* translations of the word *aion* (age) recurs and presents itself in regard to the ADJECTIVE “*aionios*”:

How can the one Greek word (*aionios*) indicate endless or infinite duration in some contexts, while in others there is a finite connotation? Why did the translators of the revered *Authorized (King James) Version* reject terms expressing endlessness and use the word “world” with its time and physical *limits* in the three instances cited above?

In each of the three instances (Romans 16:25; II Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2) the Greek adjective *aionios* qualified the Greek noun *chromos*, “*times*,” and therefore, as it could not be phrased “eternal times,” resort had to be made to the expedient “*world*.”

Again, it has to be stressed that God does not use a word to mean that which is contradictory in its several occurrences. The difficulty with which we are confronted is resolved simply by using a term indicative of *age-duration*, and there is none better than the simple translation “*eonian*,” which is a transliteration of the Greek term.

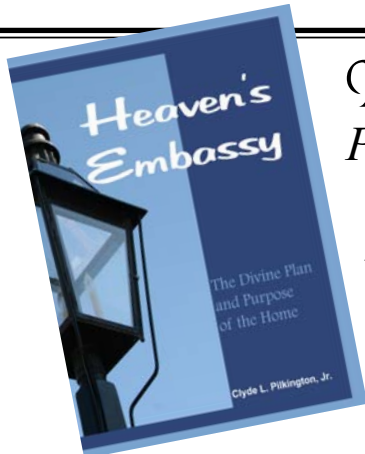
If these passages have been read carefully, it will not have escaped notice that, in the third of the above three references (Titus 1:2) the word *aionios* occurs *twice*. In the *Authorized Version* it is translated in the first instance “eternal,” and in the second “*world*.” To say the very least, such rendering cannot lay any claim to consistency and is, therefore, suspect in this very matter.

The truth of the ages requires the understanding and recognition of that fact that an *aion* (age), or that which is described as *aionios* (eonian, or age-lasting), has limited duration – it has a beginning and an end. Neither term expresses endlessness, but refers to a period of time, even though such periods may be of considerable duration.

*(Continued in the next issue.)*

E.H. Clayton of Sheffield England was a great scholar of the Greek and Hebrew languages. His close association with A.E. Knoch dated from the very earliest days of the *Concordant Publishing Concern*.

Clayton did substantial work in the long and involved process of compiling the *Concordant Greek Scriptures*. He then spent half of his life working full time on the *Concordant Hebrew Scriptures*. He was the author of many articles that were printed in *Unsearchable Riches* and *Grace and Truth* magazines.



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