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The Herald of His Grace

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The Ages: God's Time Periods

Part 2

by – Edward Henry Clayton (1887-1972)

EONIAN LIFE

Of the 71 occurrences of the adjective *aionios*, 44 of them qualify the noun “*life*” in the familiar phrases “*eternal life*” and “*everlasting life*.” It will be at once protested: If *aionios* is that which is of *age-duration* only, having a beginning and an end, is the promised *life*, then, not eternal?

In this connection, it will be of interest to note that Sir Robert Anderson in his book *Human Destiny* (page 65) states:

The solemn language of Scripture, which declares aeonian life to be the peculiar blessing of the believer, loses all its significance, unless we understand the word to describe the quality of the life, and not duration merely.

This is a most interesting observation, and one worthy of careful thought. Aeonian (eonian) *life* is that life which will obtain *during the ages* (eons), and it is that *life*, the quality and nature of that *life*, which will be enjoyed as God's gracious gift in the future two ages or eons which are to follow this present “*evil eon*” (Titus 2:12, etc.)

It may be pressed, what of the *duration* of the *life* that God has promised for faith? The “UN-endingness,” or future endlessness of the *life* in Christ Jesus, God's gracious gift to the believer, is a blessed *fact* and vital truth, and it results from the fact that all believers shall be “*made alive*” or “*vivified*” in Christ in His Presence (cf. I Corinthians 15:23). Christ abolishes death and illuminates *life* and incorruption through the evangel and will ultimately abolish the last en-

emy: death (I Corinthians 15:26; II Timothy 1:10).

This glorious *life*, from its inception, will be without end, although, in the first place, it is termed “*aeonian*” or “*eonian*” life, for it will last *throughout the eons* (or ages) yet to come, but its continuance will not be limited to the eons (or ages).

This will be ensured *beyond the eons*, because we are “*vivified*” in Christ (I Corinthians 15:22-23). Eonian life, then (may we repeat and stress), is the nature and quality of life appertaining *to the eons yet future*, and is the gracious gift of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

THE AGES (EONS, AEONS)

In the foregoing an effort has been made, very simply but earnestly, to direct attention to the value of a sound and consistent rendering of the Greek words *aion* and *aionios* and, in the course of so doing, reference has been made to the truth of the ages. Some thoughts in this connection are now offered in the hope that further interest may be stimulated and understanding gained.

An *aion* (eon, aeon, age) is a period of time and is the name given to the longest segment of time mentioned in the Scripture. That there is *more* than one eon or age is discerned from several passages in Scripture, for example:

(see AGES, page 3339)

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- 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);
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- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
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AGES (continued from front page)

Ephesians 2: 7	<i>That in the ages to come</i>
Ephesians 3:11	<i>According to the purpose of the ages</i>
Hebrews 11: 3	<i>Through faith we understand that the ages were framed by the Word of God.</i>

It is the sum of these ages, their duration in totality, that form the *eonian times* (cf. Romans 16:25; II Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2). This is what we know as, and generally call *time*.

The infinity of duration which *preceded*, and will *succeed*, time – to which no time-term can be applied – is referred to in Scripture in the following passages:

I Corinthians 2:7	<i>God's wisdom in a secret, which has been concealed, which God designates before the eons for our glory (Concordant Version).</i>
I Corinthians 15:28	<i>That God may be All in all (Concordant Version).</i>

From these Scriptures (and others) we learn that there are ages (eons) and, as there is mention of Divine activity *before the ages*, the *ages* or *eons* must, of necessity, have had a definite beginning.

Scripture also tells us of an *end* or *consummation* of the *ages* (eons):

I Corinthians 15:24	<i>Thereafter the consummation (Concordant Version).</i>
I Corinthians 10:11	<i>To whom the consummations of the eons have attained (Concordant Version).</i>
Hebrews 9:26	<i>At the conclusion of the eons, for the repudiation of sin through His sacrifice, is He manifest (Concordant Version).</i>

Although *each* age varies in its length, and the duration of time (or *eonian times*, Romans 16:25 etc.) will span many millenia, the ages have a *commencement* (beginning) and they will have an *end* (consummation, conclusion) *individually* and *collectively*.

Thus neither an age (eon) nor the *sum* of the duration of

all of the ages, is the equivalent of “eternity.” If we really desire a proper understanding of the truth of God in this matter (as in others), the period of the ages (eons) – although lengthy – is *limited*, and *must never be construed* in our minds to mean that infinity of duration which is implied by, and required by, the NON-Scriptural terms “eternal” and “eternity.”

Before the Eons (ages)	Eonian Times (age-times)	God the Father All in all
I Corinthians 2:7	Romans 16:25	I Corinthians 15:24-28
II Timothy 1:9	II Timothy 1:9	
Titus 1:2	Titus 1:2	The Son Himself subject.

THE NUMBER OF AGES (EONS)

The mention of the truth of the *eons* will naturally raise in the mind the question, “How many ages are there in the Divine Calendar?”

As we have already seen, there is more than one. A painstaking study of the Scriptures will reveal that there are five in all. We will devote some time in presenting references to these eons (ages), commencing with those relating to the *present* or current eon (age), that in which we live.

THE PRESENT AGE

II Corinthians 4:4	<i>In whom the god of this eon blinds the apprehensions of the unbelieving so that the illumination of the evangel of the glory of Christ (CV).</i>
Galatians 1:4	<i>So that He might extricate us out of the present wicked eon (CV).</i>
Ephesians 1:21	<i>Up over every ... name that is named, not only in this eon, but also that which is impending (CV).</i>
I Timothy 6:17	<i>Those who are rich in the current eon be charging not to be haughty (CV).</i>

II Timothy 4:10	<i>Demas, loving the current eon, forsook me and went to Thessalonica (CV).</i>
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It is this *same* present, current eon (age) which is referred to in such well-known verses as Matthew 13:39-40; Luke 16:8; and 20:34, etc., and as to the end or conclusion of which the disciples enquired of the Lord (Matthew 24:3; in the *Authorized Version*, the word “world” is used, but this should be age or eon, the correct rendering of *aion*).

The present eon (age) is distinguished from *all* others by reason of the cross¹ of Christ. In it – this present evil age – the rulers or chief men of *this age* crucified the Lord of Glory (I Corinthians 2:8) and cast out its Prince (John 12:31).

As the cross is at the very *center* and heart of God's purpose of the ages (eons) – for upon the cross the realization of the purpose depended – this *present* eon (age) may be considered the central of five.

Two eons preceded the *present* eon and two are yet to follow it, and these *two future* eons (ages) are referred to collectively as “*the eons of the eons*” in such passages as:

Romans 16:27	<i>To the only wise God ... be glory for the eons of the eons (CV).</i>
Galatians 1:5	<i>God and Father, to Whom be glory for the eons of the eons (CV).</i>
Ephesians 2:7	<i>That, in the oncoming eons, He should be displaying the transcendent riches of His grace (CV).</i>
I Timothy 1:17	<i>Now to the King of the eons ... be honour and glory for the eons of the eons (CV).</i>
II Timothy 4:18	<i>To Whom be glory for the eons of the eons (CV).</i>

Paul wrote these words from the vantage point of this *present* eon (age), looking forward to these *two “ages to come”* (ONcoming EONS) (Ephesians 2:7), which will by far transcend in excellence the three eons which by then will have gone before them.

1. *i.e.*, “An upright stake or pale, without any crosspiece.” – A.E. Knoch (*Concordant Keyword Concordance*, page 63). For more information read **THE “CROSS”**: *Was Christ Nailed to a “Cross” or a “Stake”?* by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

THE AGES (EONS) TO COME

All Scripture is inspired of God (literally “God- breathed), and the inspired terms used of the eons (ages) are employed with the greatest precision. A few selected passages referring to the *combined two future eons* (ages) have just been quoted in the foregoing, but these two ages are also referred to *singly* and *individually* in the following references:

(1) *The Fourth Age (Eon) i.e., the eon following the present*

Matthew 12:32	<i>It shall not be pardoned him, neither in this eon nor in that which is impending (CV).</i>
Mark 10:30	<i>In the coming eon, life eonian (CV).</i>
Luke 18:30	<i>In the coming eon, life eonian (CV).</i>
John 10:28	<i>They should by no means perishing for the eon (CV).</i>
Ephesians 1:21	<i>Not only in this eon, but in that which is impending (CV).</i>
Hebrews 6:5	<i>Tasting the ideal declaration of God, besides the powerful deeds of the impending eon (CV).</i>

The inception of the fourth eon (age) is marked by the promised return of Christ to the *earth*, and its thousand years' course by the righteous and glorious reign of Christ, the subject of so much of prophetic Scripture. The Great White Throne judgment session will terminate the fourth eon.

(2) *The Fifth (and Final) Age (Eon)*

Ephesians 3:21	<i>To Him be glory in the ecclesia and in Christ Jesus for all the generations of the eon [singular] of the eons [plural] (CV).</i>
Hebrews 1: 8	<i>Thy throne, O God, is for the eon [singular] of the eon [singular] (CV).</i>

The *fifth age* (eon) is called the *age of the age* (the eon of the eon), or *the age of the ages* (or the eon or the eons) and it bears the fruit of Christ's righteous reign in the fourth age.

It is the only age (of all five) which will not conclude in catastrophe or judgment. In this *fifth age* there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and the tabernacle of God will be with mankind and He will tabernacle with His people



(Revelation 21:1-3). This is the *Day of God* (II Peter 3:12).

The need for the child of God to give close attention to the *precise* terms of Scripture in this matter of the truth of the ages (as in *all* truths of Scripture), cannot be overstressed. The value to the saint is inestimable. In this section, we have seen a *combined* reference to the *fourth* and *fifth* ages and *individual* references to each. We should always be careful to distinguish between them – the benefit to the student will be apparent.

THE FIRST TWO AGES (EONS)

From the several passages quoted earlier, it will be realized at once that there are numerous references to the *present* (i.e., the *central*) and the two *future* eons (ages). There is no direct reference to the *first two eons, as such*, but an understanding of the *fact* of their *existence* can be gleaned from consideration of the following verses, which should be read with care:

(1) Ephesians 2:2

Wherein in time past, ye walked according to the course of this world.

The phrase “*the course of this world*” is of considerable interest, but the truth it would convey is concealed from us by the use of the word “*course*” as a rendering of the Greek word *aion* in the *Authorized Version* above quoted.

The correct rendering is, simply, “*age [eon] of this world,*” and reference to the *margin* of the *Revised Version* (1881) will confirm this. The *Concordant Version* and *Rotherham’s Emphasised New Testament* give this phrase, respectively, as follows:

Eon of this world

Age of the world

When the correct rendering of the phrase is given its due weight, the truth stands revealed, *viz.*, that each *aion* (i.e., eon, or age) has, and synchronizes with, its own particular *kosmos* (i.e., world system).

This Ephesian verse under notice connects the *present, central eon* (age) or time segment with the world order of things obtaining *from* the deluge of Noah’s time (which terminated the *second eon* as indicated below), *until* the judgments and events leading up to the return of Christ to the earth.

The “*eon of this world*” is the eon and the world in which Paul (and we) once walked in accord with the “*prince of the power of the air*” (Ephesians 2:2).

If, as is now suggested, each eon (age) has its corresponding world-system, and each world-system its particular eon (age), then the discovery in Scripture of reference to “*worlds*” *before* the present world in which we live, will also determine for us the existence of the *related eons* (ages) prior to the present. With this suggestion, this thought, in mind, may we consider the following verses penned by the Apostle Peter as he was “*led on by Holy Spirit*”:

(2) 2 Peter 3:5-7

For they want to be oblivious of this, that there were heavens of old, and an earth cohering out of water and through water, by the Word of God: through which the then world, being deluged by water, perished. Yet the heavens now, and the earth ...

Here, then is a powerful reminder of the fact (when in these days there is such willful ignorance of it) that there was a *world* which perished in a primal deluge. This was the *world* (the heavens and the earth) created by God “*in beginning*” and which ultimately *became* “*chaos and vacant*” as a result of a deluge, which was an *earlier* inundation than that of Noah’s days (*cf.* Genesis 1:1-2; Isaiah 45:18).

This *world* is distinguished by Peter by the significant phrase “*the then world*” or the “*the world that then was,*” and the very *first* eon (age) would correspond with that *first world* and run concurrently with it.

(3) II Peter 2:5

And spares not the ancient world, but guards Noah, an eight, a herald of righteousness, bringing a deluge on the world of the irreverent.

The first chapter of Genesis from the second part of verse 2 is the inspired account of the rehabilitation, or restoration, from the chaos which had resulted from a primeval cataclysm, which is referred to in later Scriptures as “*the disruption*” (e.g. John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; I Peter 1:20; etc. – *Concordant Version*).

The verse from II Peter (2:5), quoted from the *Concordant Version* immediately above, relates to that world-system which Peter terms the “*ancient*” or “*old*” world, which was the world-order existing from the *restoration of* ►



the **first** world until the world-wide flood of Noah's time which swept degenerate humanity from the earth, on which it had corrupted its way.

This flood (of Noah's time) is not to be confused with the deluge to which Peter refers (II 3:6). These two passages from Second Peter should be carefully studied and distinguished.

This "ancient" or "old" world is, then, the *second* world, or world-system. In the light of the truth derived from Ephesians 2:2, this world would have its related *eon* (age) – the *second eon* – occurring simultaneously with it.

In all of God's works there is law, order and arrangement, and it is in accord with the faultlessness which characterizes His designs to find in the *order* of the eons the beauty and harmony of perfect symmetry.

The central of the five eons (unique by reason of the fact that, during its course, Christ took upon Himself the form of a slave, came to be in the likeness of humanity – Philippians 2:7-8 – and endured the cross – Hebrews 12:2) is bounded by *two preceding* and *two succeeding eons*.

The complete *structure of the eons* – with the *cross* at the very heart and center and God's purpose running its destined course throughout – is thus seen to be in perfect equipoise. The structure may be indicated very simply as follows:

IN BEGINNING (Genesis 1:1)

1st EON

DISRUPTION (Genesis 1:2, etc.)

2nd EON

DELUGE (NOAH) (Genesis 6-8)

3rd EON

(Present. The Cross.)

DAY of WRATH (Revelation 6:16-17)

4th EON

(Coming or future eon.)

GREAT WHITE THRONE (Revelation 20:11)

5th EON

(Eon of eons.)

CONSUMMATION (I Cor.15:24, etc.)

GOD ALL IN ALL (I Corinthians 15:28)

THE PURPOSE OF THE AGES (EONS)

The references which have already been given in relating to the five eons (ages) by no means exhaust the passages concerning them, but sufficient have been cited to bring into prominence the truth of the ages (eons), a very vital truth which has been, for too long, neglected or disregarded by many who love the Lord. It is the *privilege*, as well as the *duty*, of each child of God to become acquainted with the truth of God.

Thy Words were found, and I did eat them: and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart (Jeremiah 15:16).

We are nourished and rejoice in the measure we partake of the living Word. *All of God's Word* brings joy to the heart and not the least the truth of the ages (eons) and their related *purpose*.

The glorious theme or doctrine of the truth of the ages has, of course, as will be readily appreciated, a direct and powerful bearing on matters pertaining to "*judgment*," "*punishment*" and "*human destiny*."

It is beyond the scope of this present work to deal with these subjects which are, in themselves, extensive. Suffice it here to say that such matters, viewed in the glorious light of the truth of the ages are seen in sharp focus and correct perspective.

The God dishonoring dogma of "*eternal punishment*" (Matthew 25:46) and its associated belief "*tormented for ever and ever*" (Revelation 20:10, etc.) are tenets foreign to Scripture, and which the *consistent* and *concordant* translation of *aion* (eon) and *aionios* (*eonian*) must force us to discard.

Unending punishment, never ending torment, apart from being foreign to the very nature of God Who is love and light (I John 1:5; 4:8, 16), would rob God of His ability to consummate His purpose. That could *never be*.

Throughout the ages (eons), saturated as they are (and will yet be) by the varied events which combine to form
(see AGES, last page)



I have just finished reading [World Affairs & National Politics](#) ... WOW! is all I can say. I do have a strange peace about all of this! I do thank God our Father that it is all in His hands, that I can rest in Him watching all that He has planned come to be, in myself and everyone else. He is my supply in every sense of the word. – **NM**

Thank you so much for your [Daily Email Goodies](#). I really, really appreciate you, and love you. Brother, keep sending these. I don't know how much feedback you get, but I love it. – **OH**

I just wanted to say what a wonderful time we had visiting with your family. The love that was shared and expressed during our visit will leave a joy in our hearts for a long time to come. We enjoyed the fellowship beyond words and were edified like we have not been in a long time. The conversation and discussion of Scripture sure uplifted us beyond measure. We are looking forward to another visit in the future. – **PA**

You are Father's love messenger. – **LA**

A great read: [World Affairs and National Politics](#). Thanks brother. – **Internet**

I am in the process of rereading your book [World Affairs and National Politics](#). I would like to thank you and give glory to God for placing in your heart the information for this book. I find it informative and well written with a lot of helpful information from God's Word. No longer do I have to go to the [voting] polls with a close pin on my nose. As a matter of fact I don't have to go to the polls at all, for I know God is in charge even in the very smallest of the details of our lives. Once again, God bless you and keep you writing. – **IL**

In my retirement I have had more time to read and study. [What is Truth?](#) by Don Bast is presently getting my attention. [Due Benevolence](#), [The Bible in Brief](#), [God's Plan for Man](#), [The Plowboy's Bible](#), have all been helpful. Along with A.P. Adams' [[The Purposes of God](#) and [The True Basis of Redemption](#), and A.E. Knoch's [What is the Soul, Spirit, Death](#), etc. Keep up your good work. – **CA**

Your book on politics [[World Affairs and National Politics](#)] is the most wonderful, uplifting book my sister and I have read in a while. Thank you so much for all the time, prayer and work that went into it. – **TN** ■

LIVING IN THIS INSANE ASYLUM

Every single item of history today is certainly in accord with God's *intention*, even though it seems that almost all of it is contrary to His *will*. Only if that is true can we have universal reconciliation. God can save all mankind eventually only if He keeps the reins in His hand. All will not simply be saved, but will be reconciled, glorifying God. All of this is fulfilling God's intention. ...

So let us give thanks for it, no matter how bad it seems to be. When we realize this, then we can live in this insane asylum, and we will not quarrel with the inmates. ...

We acknowledge that all is *out* of Him, as well as *through* Him and, consequently will be *for* Him in the great consummation.

A.E. Knoch
Unsearchable Riches
Volume 38, 1947



AGES (continued from page 3342)

what man is pleased to term “human history,” “*the purpose of the ages*” – which God makes in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3:11) – has moved and will continue to move undeviatingly towards its complete and satisfactory fulfillment. In spite of so much that is apparently to the contrary, the working out of that purpose is in strict and irresistible accord with “*the counsel of His Own will*” (Ephesians 1:11).

No power, nor any combination of powers, can thwart the reaching of the *goal* God has in view or the ultimate realization of *His intention* (Romans 9:19).

What is that *goal*? Has God confined to us, His saints, the *ultimate* He has in mind and towards which His *purpose* is directed? He has. He did so through His inspired penman, Paul, the beloved Apostle to the Nations.

In all wisdom and prudence making known to us the secret of His will (in accord with His delight, which He purposed in Him) to have: an administration of the complement of the eras, to head up all in the Christ – both that in the heavens and that on the earth (Ephesians 1:9-10, CV).

In these sublime words, *God* has declared to us *His intention: to head up all in the Christ*. Through *Christ* God made the ages (Hebrews 1:2); in *Christ* God formulated the *purpose* of the ages (Ephesians 3:11); in *Christ* God is going to *head up the all*, for, at the conclusion of the

ages, *all* will be subject to the Son of God (I Corinthians 15:25-27). When that is accomplished, as assuredly it will be, then the *Son Himself* will *also subject* Himself to His God and Father, that *God* may be *All in all* (I Corinthians 15:28). Not part in all, or all in part, but *All in all*.

God’s purpose, formulated in Christ before the ages, *required the ages* for its unfolding and realization. The concept of the ages required a correlating reason, and that reason, adequate and satisfying, was the *purpose of God*, which had its source in the *will* and *love* of *God*. The *ages* and the *purpose* required *God’s Son* – He did not fail His God and Father.

To our God and Father be glory for the Eons of the Eons (Philippians 4:20).

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.

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