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Volume XIX
Issue 452

A Reply to R.A. Torrey's

The Exact Truth Regarding an Eternal Hell

Part 2 of 4

by — A.E. Knoch (1874-1965)

GEHENNA IS IN THE KINGDOM

If by "hell" *Gehenna* is meant, we would be tempted to reply "Yes" to the question, "Will there be a literal hell?"

There is a literal *Gehenna*. It is a literal place; it will have literal fire which will burn continually, with literal worms feeding on the carcasses of those who will be cast into it. It has its place in the kingdom of God (Mark 9:43-49). The Son of Man will gather out of His kingdom all things that cause stumbling (Matthew 13:42). This, however, continues only during that kingdom age. It is displaced by the Lake of Fire in the next age (Revelation 21:8).

Yet if by "hell" *Gehenna* is meant and we are asked, "Is there a literal hell?" we would say, "No." It is not a place of punishment. A friend of mine took a walk through it a few years ago. He saw no fire, no worms, no wailing and gnashing of teeth. At that time *Gehenna* was no "hell" except in the old Anglo-Saxon sense of "hole" or valley.

If we call the Lake of Fire "hell," we cause still further confusion. If *Gehenna* is future, the Lake of Fire is still more so, so far as most men are concerned. Except the beast and the false prophet, no one has any part in it until after the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15).

DESTRUCTION

In this connection, the argument is diverted to a discussion of death and destruction as the usual fate of the wicked.



The word "destruction" is twice defined by the author as "a portion in the Lake of Fire." The reason given is that, in Revelation 17:8, 11 we are told that the beast goeth into "destruction," so if we can find out where the beast goes, or into what he goes, we shall know what "destruction" means in the Bible usage.

The claim of some that destruction means annihilation is indeed mistaken; but neither can we countenance the conclusions to which the above-quoted definition drives us: namely, that the ointment which Mary "destroyed" (Matthew 26:8; Mark 14:4, *wasted*), and Simon the sorcerer's money (Acts 8:20), have no "portion in the lake of fire."

This points us to the false principle on which the whole argument rests. The ointment, the money, the saint (Acts 25:16), the vessels of wrath (Romans 9:22), Judas Iscariot (John 17:12), and the wild beast (Rev.17:8,11), all suffer destruction, but not necessarily the same in character, duration or intensity.

What right have we, or any other, who wishes to be exact, to insist that the judgment which befalls "the rest of the dead" (Revelation 20:5) be the same as the fate of the beast, false prophet or the devil? This is "adding" to the things which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18).

(see *REPLY*, page 4019)

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Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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- 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);
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SPECIAL JUDGMENTS ARE NOT UNIVERSAL

God's judgments are not vengeful and indiscriminate. He will render to each according to his deeds (Romans 2:6). The deeds of the wild beast and the false prophet call for their own special judgment. This they receive. Why, their case is so special that they are thrust into the Lake of Fire over a thousand years before the rest without even being brought before the bar of judgment.

Shall we "reason" from this that destruction means a casting into the Lake of Fire without appearing before the Great White Throne, and thus deny that august session entirely? No. What God says of them should not indiscriminately be applied to others.

The worshipers of the beast are marked out for a fate corresponding to their deeds. What is said concerning their judgment should be applied to them alone:

If anyone is worshiping the wild beast and its image, and is getting an emblem on his forehead or on his hand, he, also, is drinking of the wine of the fury of God, blended undiluted in the cup of His indignation, and he shall be tormented in fire and sulphur in the sight of the holy messengers and in the sight of the Lambkin. And the fumes of their torment are ascending for the eons of the eons. And they are having no rest day and night, those worshiping the wild beast and its image, and if anyone is getting the emblem of its name (Revelation 14:9-11, CV).

The [phrase] "fumes ... ascending for the eons of the eons" (Revelation 14:11) is a figure of speech similar to the one used in Jude 7, "a specimen ... [of] the justice of fire eonian."

When sulphur and fire rained from the heavens on Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them, the inhabitants were killed and the fumes ascended from the land (Genesis 19:28). This event is well remembered. The Israelitish worshipers of the wild beast are the supreme sinners of mankind. They have no rest day and night while they are worshiping the wild beast and its image and shall be tormented until they die (Revelation 14:9-12; 16:2, 8-9; 18:8), some of them by the blade (19:21). Their fate will be remembered through the eons of the eons.

THE MEANING OF "DESTRUCTION"

Briefly, then, what does "destruction" mean? A few examples in the past will help us to see the breadth of the term and the true usage of the Scriptures. The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was "destroyed" (Matthew 18:11; *lost, AV*).

He bade them go to the "destroyed" sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6; *lost, AV*).

The sheep, the coin and the prodigal were all "lost" or "destroyed" (Luke 15:4-32). Were they suffering in the lake of fire beyond redemption?

In the author's second sermon, it is claimed that those who know not God and obey not the gospel shall be punished with everlasting destruction (II Thessalonians 1:9; *eonian extermination, CV*).

"Extermination" (*olethron*, WHOLE-RUIN) may have a common root with "destruction" (*apōeian*, FROM-WHOLE-LOOSING, which is the word used in Revelation 17:8, 11 of the judgment of the wild beast), but its meaning is distinct. Timothy is told of the desire for riches "which drown men in destruction and perdition" (I Timothy 6:9; *extermination and destruction, CV*). Here both terms are used in such a way that they must have separate significations – and, even if one should become wholly ruined ("extermination") and suffer all possible disintegration or "loosing" ("destruction"), it does not follow that any such ongoing or "eonian" judgment is therefore an "everlasting" judgment.

CONFOUNDING FIGURE AND FACT

Surely we ought to gather the meaning of a word from all of its occurrences, not from one special set of Scriptures which suit our purposes. Surely we ought not to attempt to fasten that meaning on another word altogether.

"Destruction" in itself conveys neither the thought of annihilation nor of conscious suffering. This each one can prove to his own satisfaction by considering all of the occurrences in a concordance based on the Greek text.

DEATH

Two passages in which death is used figuratively are brought forth to define death. "Dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1) and "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (I Timothy 5:6) do not refer to ►

literal death. They tell us what death is only when we recognize their figurative force.

As the dead are oblivious to the things of this world, so were we to God. She who liveth in pleasure is not oblivious to the world. Her death is Godward. The “conscious existence” is limited to that in which she lives. She has no consciousness toward God.

The attempt to define death by the judgment of the beast and false prophet or the worshipers of the beast is illogical. The judgment of the worshipers of the beast is only until their death, and the judgment of “*the rest of the dead*” (of mankind) in the Lake of Fire is not necessarily the same as that of the beast and false prophet themselves. Why wrench the truth out of its place when this only causes confusion?

Death is fully defined in the Scriptures. “*Soil thou art and unto soil shalt thou return*” (Genesis 3:19) cannot be improved. The man returns to the soil, the spirit to God Who gave it, and the soul to *hades*.

We conclude, then, that there is no “literal hell” now. The soul, at death, returns to *hades*, the *unseen* (which is usually translated *hell*). *Gehenna*, also translated *hell*, is a literal spot near Jerusalem. It has some of the characteristics of a “hell,” but is used only of human corpses. The Lake of Fire is also future and ought not to be misnamed “hell.”

In the author’s second sermon, *Is Future Punishment Endless?* is an appeal to prejudice. It begins with stating the undoubted fact that “majorities are often wrong,” and then seeks to prove the supposition that the word *aiōnios* means without end by giving instances of its use in the Greek Scripture. These respective instances are given and concluded with an assertion that it means

everlasting here, “no one questions it.” It means it here, “by universal consent”; “beyond a question” it means it here. Or simply: “Certainly,” or “of course” it means never ending (pp. 25-27).

Then some objections are considered, only two of which (Philippians 2:9-11; I Corinthians 15:22) have any real bearing on the point raised. These are followed by four passages (II Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27; John 5:28-29; 8:21), “any one of which settles the question.”

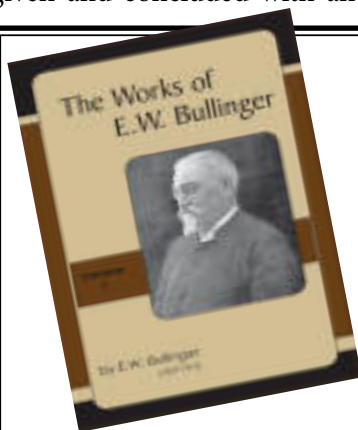
The conclusion is personal.

THE EONS OR AGES

The whole question of the duration of God’s judgment of the ungodly (Romans 2:3) depends on the doctrine of the eons or ages. If ages are “tumbling upon ages in endless procession,” all of the passages which tell of the consummation or “end” when God will be All in all, are not to be relied upon. What we wish to know is: Did the eons have a beginning? Will they have an end?

Paul tells us of a secret “*which God designates before – before the eons*” (I Corinthians 2:7, CV). In the same epistle he speaks of the “*ends [i.e., “consummations”] of the eons*” (10:11). The time occupied by the eons is called the “*eonian times*.” God’s purpose and grace was given to us “*before eonian times*” (II Timothy 1:9, CV). God promised eonian life “*before times eonian*” (Titus 1:2, CV).

With this evidence, who can doubt that the eons (ages) are a distinct portion of time, with a definite beginning and end? Hence, that which is *eonian* (usually translated “*eternal*” or “*everlasting*”) cannot refer to time before the eons or after they have run their course, but only to time in the eons.



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BEFORE "ETERNAL TIMES"!

Who has not wondered why some things in the Scriptures last "forever" and others last "forever and ever"? We would naturally suppose that there could not be any "and ever" added to "forever." And this mystery deepens when we discover that "for ever and ever," to be consistent, ought to be translated "forever and further." If we wish to be exact, we must allow that "forever" is not endless.

FOREVER AND EVER

An experience fell to my lot in my investigations of the difference between "forever" and "forever and ever" in the Hebrew Scriptures which impressed their force on my mind most powerfully. It may serve to help others and, at the same time, show the extreme accuracy of the distinction between them.

I had tentatively made up my mind that "forever" ends with the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21,22) while "forever and ever" goes on to the consummation. The former was associated with the present earth, the priesthood and so forth, all of which do not find a place in the new earth; the latter is always used in reference to the kingdom, which continues for an "ever" longer.

Being pressed for time, a helper kindly went over all of the passages of "forever and ever" to test this conclusion; but, to my confusion, some were found (Jeremiah 7:7; 25:5) which overthrew my theory.

I determined, however, to make sure. My helper worked from the English, so I would check it by the Hebrew. I turned up the first offending passage and found to my surprise that a different phrase, which the Greek LXX usually translates "from the eon and till the eon" was used. This was perfectly in line with my assumption, and when I found the second instance of the same I feverishly turned to the others and, to my delight, they, too, proved to be an error of the translation!

My "theory" was truth! It not only stood the test but was so accurately correct that it ferreted out the only instances in which our translators had added an "ever" without warrant. Since then no one has been able to convince me that "forever" and "forever and ever" are equivalents.

THE THREE TEST PHRASES

My investigations into the New Testament Greek phrases for "forever and ever" were much more prolonged

and difficult, but the results were, if possible, more exact and satisfactory than in the Hebrew. There are three different phrases, as follows:

The Eon of the Eon
The Eon of the Eons
The Eons of the Eons

I made up my mind that, until I was able to give a sure and satisfactory reason for each variation, I would hold my tongue. For several years I was kept off of the track by the introductory connective, which literally means "into." "Into the eons of the eons" was "Greek" to me until a thorough canvass of every occurrence of its usage in connection with time revealed the fact that, idiomatically, it corresponds to our "for."

"Take, therefore, no thought **into the morrow**" (Matthew 6:34) means "for the morrow." This simplified matters. The Hebrew "forever," when used of the epochal eons, now corresponded with the Greek "for the eon," and "forever and ever" with "the eons of the eons." It was evident that the single eon of the second phrase came before the new earth; but what of the other phrase, "for the eon of the eon"? This is the most conclusive and interesting of all.

"The eon of the eon" occurs only once (Hebrews 1:8), and defines the time in which the Son is on the throne. Mark that this is said to the Son. ▶

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Speaking of the consummation (which comes at the end of the eons) when all sovereignty and authority and power are abolished, Paul tells us,

then shall the Son also Himself be subject ... (I Corinthians 15:24-28).

Does the Son reign when all sovereignty and authority and power are abolished? Does He rule when He is subject? No! He rules so well that He rules rule out! The kingdom continues without end (Luke 1:33) in the hands of the Father; but Christ's kingdom is limited to the "eons of the eons" (Revelation 11:15), during which He puts all enemies under His feet (I Corinthians 15:24-25).

CHANGE IN FORM, NOT IN MEANING

The author's following admission is worthy of repetition:

It is frequently said that the word *aionios* according to its derivation means age-lasting, and therefore may refer to a limited period. *Even admitting this to be true* [our italics], we should bear in mind that the meaning of words is not determined by their derivation but by their usage, and the most important question is not what the derivation of this word may be, but as to how it is used in the New Testament.

All of this is very good if the word *aionios* were not such a close relative that we may hardly speak of one as a derivative of the other; but rather one is the name or noun, the other the adjective of the same thing, more closely allied than "destroy" and "destruction."

What does our author think that we may deduce from their relation? He bases his meaning of "destruction" not on this form of the word, but on the verb, for,

the verb from which the noun commonly translated "destruction" and "perdition" is derived, is the one translated "to perish."

He would have us go with him and deduce the meaning of the noun from the verb, which we cheerfully and confidently do; but if we invite him to consider the noun of *aionios* as a help to its meaning, he shrinks back.

"The meaning of words is not determined by their derivation" – *except* when it helps to consign the human race (with a few exceptions) to "an eternal hell."

Yet he is quite right in his position that "destroy" and "destruction" have the same meaning. The grammatical form does not affect that. It simply shows its relation to the other words in the sentence. So always, die and death, rise and resurrection, suffer and sufferings, make alive and life, reconcile and reconciliation – each pair has the same meaning, but not the same grammatical force.

In English the noun "resurrection" does not even differ in form when used as an adjective. We speak of the resurrection (noun) and the resurrection body (adjective). How much more reason, then, have we for believing that the noun *aiōn* and the adjective *aiōnios* have the same meaning.

To be exact, the following list is taken from my grammatical analysis of the Greek Scriptures and are all the forms exactly like the one we are studying.

Ouranos, heaven; *ouranios*, heavenly; *epouranios*, celestial; *kataxthonios*, subterranean (noun *xthoon*, not used); *makrochronios* (from *chronos*, time) long-timed; *aion*, eon; *aionios*, eonian.

Is not heavenly that which relates to heaven? Does not long-timed relate to time? Is not eonian that which relates to the eons?

(To be continued.)



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