

# The 1<sup>st</sup> Century Concept of ‘Eternity’

I’ve covered the NT meaning of the English term ‘eternity’ many times in our investigation into salvation<sup>1,2</sup>. The word in the Koine Greek (aionios) means ‘without beginning and end’. It can be translated as ‘age-enduring’ or ‘age-during’<sup>3</sup>, not ‘eternal’ or ‘eternity’ (as in ‘for-ever-&-ever’). In that respect, it refers to lasting for the Ages of the Kingdom, not for ‘everlasting life’.

*“Secondly, the Greek language had no word for ‘eternal’. They could have invented one if they had wished to: the language was exceptionally well-suited to building new words from component parts. They did not need the word because they did not have the concept. The root of the word used here, aionios, is ‘age’. For Greek speakers, an aion could mean a lifetime, a generation, or a longer period of time – but always of finite length. So not never-ending, not forever and ever, not eternal.”<sup>4</sup>*

(Permission to quote Mike Parsons received on 20-7-2020)

Aionios should not lead us to think of eternal life. Nor should it be the foundation of the desire to go to Heaven when we die. Those are religious views of the term which were invented in Roman Catholicism and perpetuated in Protestantism.

As textual context and cultural context are critical in understanding NT expressions, it’s best that we have a look at what Jesus and Paul were actually talking about when our English Bibles state ‘eternal’ or ‘eternity’. To elucidate it, in the quote below aionios is analyzed from a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish mindset.

*“The tendency to spiritualize the New Testament message also applies to our misreading of eternal life. We tend to view life in very materialistic ways, as in a beating heart. So the popular understanding of the phrase is “living forever in heaven”.*

*Sometimes words combined can have a greater or different meaning than each word’s individual meaning. For example, the phrase “chill out” does not mean “to get cold outside”. Similarly, “eternal life” meant more to the original Jewish audience than simply “my heart will go on and on”.*

*Rather, the ancient Jews would have understood eternal life as “life in the world to come”. What is the world to come? That’s the new heaven and earth where God will rule without any disobedience or sin to get in his way. The world to come is God’s new world order. That would have been the first thing that came to mind for first-century Jews when they heard the phrase “eternal life”.*

*The emphasis, therefore, is not on the length of life—how long you will live—but on the kind of life, that is, how you live, based not on the order of this world but on God’s world order. Of course, this includes living forever since God’s new heaven and earth will also triumph over physical death. But to reduce eternal life to only a physical reality in the sweet hereafter is to lose its original breadth in translation.”<sup>5</sup>*

If we persist in using the English translation as ‘eternity’ or ‘eternal’, we are missing the intention of Father that the Kingdom takes over the Earth and that Heaven fully manifests here. This comes about through The Restoration of All Things, not by the end of the world and a new one being rebuilt for us. Religious concepts will keep us away from working in partnership with Father to see his plans eventuate.

But there’s even more...

If we persist in using the English translation as ‘eternity’, or ‘eternal’, we are missing what Jesus was

---

1 – [canberraforerunners.org/?page\\_id=6853#salvation](http://canberraforerunners.org/?page_id=6853#salvation)

2 – READ: “Separating Sheep & Goats” [canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/CHALLENGE-Is-there-a-hell3.pdf](http://canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/CHALLENGE-Is-there-a-hell3.pdf)  
READ: “22-An Important Recap” [canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/22-An-Important-Recap.pdf](http://canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/22-An-Important-Recap.pdf)

3 – e.g. John 6:68 (Young’s Literal Translation)

4 – Mike Parsons (11-5-2018) “246. Gnashing Teeth and Goats” [freedomarc.blog/2018/05/11/246-gnashing-teeth-and-goats/](http://freedomarc.blog/2018/05/11/246-gnashing-teeth-and-goats/)

5 – Shiao Chong (22-10-2017) “Reading the New Testament with Jewish Eyes”  
[www.thebanner.org/features/2017/09/reading-the-new-testament-with-jewish-eyes](http://www.thebanner.org/features/2017/09/reading-the-new-testament-with-jewish-eyes)

saying about aionios kind of life:

*“Furthermore, the central focus of “life in the world to come” is our unhindered-by-sin fellowship with God. This is why Jesus defined eternal life as knowing God: “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”<sup>6</sup>. Notice that Jesus did not say that knowing God and Jesus is the way to gaining eternal life. Rather, he said that to know God and Jesus is eternal life. This relationship with God is not only reserved for life after death, so to speak, but can be a reality here and now. Eternal life begins already in the present day when we love God and follow his ways, seeking his kingdom and his righteousness, so that the “life in the world to come” becomes a reality in us. All of that rich meaning would not make sense if we read “eternal life” only as “living forever in heaven”. ”<sup>7</sup>*

Wow! Have we been taught a furphy<sup>8</sup> with ‘eternity’ and ‘eternal life’.

Laurence

23-5-2023

([www.CanberraForerunners.org](http://www.CanberraForerunners.org))

COPYRIGHT

This document is **free** to copy, republish and distribute, but only ‘as is’. It is free to quote from at length.

All Canberra Forerunners' documents are licensed under

[Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)

Quotes are the copyright of their authors.

(Readers will need to look up for themselves any scriptures alluded to in this document)

---

6 – John 17:3

7 – Shiao Chong (22-10-2017) “Reading the New Testament with Jewish Eyes”

[www.thebanner.org/features/2017/09/reading-the-new-testament-with-jewish-eyes](http://www.thebanner.org/features/2017/09/reading-the-new-testament-with-jewish-eyes)

8 – AUSTRALIAN SLANG: A rumour, or an erroneous or improbable story. [www.wordnik.com/words/furphy](http://www.wordnik.com/words/furphy)