

Part Five - Greek: Aion

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This is the last of five articles on the Greek words. We are going to study the Preterist view on the Greek word "aion," which means "age (dispensation, or indefinite time), era, or a period of time. When you see the phrase "the age" in the NT, ask yourself, which age? Or the end of which age? In Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the NT we read, "As the Jews distinguished the time before the Messiah, and the time after the advent of the Messiah" (p. 19). It describes human history as divided up into two ages. The NT writers considered themselves to have been living at a terminal point of these ages. This did not mean that history was to end in their generation but they were anticipating an age to come.

Some English Bible translations use the word "world" instead of "age." We need to carefully examine how the English word is used like "world" because there are three different Greek words with one English word that are "kosmos," "oikoumene," and "aion." We ought to check the meaning of the Greek words to get a correct interpretation of the Bible. It is very significant to understand eschatology because in this area many Futurist views have stumbled.

A critical error for many Futurists is made when the Mosaic Age is considered to be consummated at the cross. They believe the Church Age will end at the parousia of Christ or the cataclysmic and final end of the world. But what age do we call the age after the Church age? None. Many of the Futurists believe we are living in the last days. I don't think so and I will show you.

In these passages in the NT, we have two ages in contrast: "This age" and the "age to come." The expression "age to come" implies that "this age" must come to end. Will the "age to come" also have an end? If not, then the expression "last days" must apply to the closing period of "this age." So, in the end of "this age" (the Old Covenant) is when God's eschatological program will be completed or consummated. In other words, time was divided by the Jews into two great periods, the Mosaic Age and the Messianic Age. The Mosaic Age is done away and we have been in the age of the Messianic administration of the new covenant since 70 AD. Hence, from 30-70 AD (40 years = a generation), the church was in the period of transition, changing from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. It is the period of the bondwoman (Hagar is Mt. Sinai) and the free woman (Sarah is the Jerusalem above). Read Gal. 4:21-31. The bondwoman (Israel) was cast out (70 AD) and we are children of the free woman (Church).

Before we go further, I think we can look into the rabbinical writings from the early second century. It is interesting that many Rabbis believed that the period of the Messiah was to be only a transition stage between this age and the Age to Come, and opinions differed on the time of its duration. 'How long will the days of Messiah last?' R. Akiba [c. 120-140 AD] said, Forty years, as long as the Israelites were in the wilderness. ... R. Eliezer (b. Hyrcanus) [c. 80-120 AD] said, A thousand years. ... Other versions read: 'R. Eliezer [c. 80-120 AD] said, "The days of the Messiah will be forty years. ..."[quoted from Everyman's Talmud, by Abraham Cohen, pub. by E.P. Dutton & Co., 1949. Page 356]. They debate how long will this period would be. Many believe it would be a generation of about 40 years, like the wilderness wandering or the reigns of David and Solomon, even though others thought of it as a thousand years.

Also read in Luke 19:11-27 from the parable of Jesus Christ. Verse 11 says that some Jews supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. Jesus told them a parable of

the nobleman. Notice in verse 12 that the nobleman is getting ready to leave to a far country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. We know from the rest of the story that the nobleman is Jesus, the slaves are the servants of God, and the citizens that hate Jesus are the Jews. The nobleman returns in their lifetime. The point is, before Jesus went up into heaven He told the disciples to do their duty before He came back. Jesus went up to a far place (heaven) to receive a kingdom for Himself (Dan. 7:13-14). We know what happened to His disciples and what the Jews did to them. Finally, Jesus returned and slew His enemies in 70 AD. He brought His kingdom of which the saints took possession (Dan. 7:22-27; Matt. 21:43-45). Also read in Luke 19:41-44. I Hope this will give you a better idea.

We will look into the eschatological passages of the Bible with the Greek word "aion." I am using the NASB.

1. Matt. 12:32 - "And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or the age [about] to come." Why did the Lord say it shall not be forgiven, either this age OR the age about to come? Because these two ages will always have the sin of men.

2. Matt. 13:39, 40 - "And the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. Therefore just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age." Read Matt. 13:38-43. This is significant in light of Rev. 14. (C.f. Rev. 20) and the imminence of the harvest. Jesus said the harvest was to occur at the end of the age in His generation. This is CRITICAL because you will see the phase "end of the age" in the NT. Read Matt. 24:3 and 34 which is very helpful to understand the timeline in the eschatology study. This is a real dilemma for the Futurist's views.

3. Matt. 13:49, 50 - "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Read Matt. 13:47-50. The same idea as previously mentioned (#2). Jesus spoke another parable about the kingdom of heaven. This is important in light of Matt. 25:31-46 (c.f. Mark 8:38 - 9:1) where Jesus was speaking of the first-century generation. Specifically, Jesus was speaking to His disciples of when He would come in the glory of His Father with the holy angels at the end of the age.

4. Matt. 24:3 - "And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age.'" Most Bible interpreters think that the disciples wanted to know about the end of the planet. However, the disciples did not ask about the end of the "world" (Gk: kosmos or oikoumene). So, they asked about the end of the aion (age). As Jesus' disciples had just heard His prediction of "desolation" for the temple and city, they no doubt felt bewildered and wondered, "Lord, you cannot mean this temple!" Read Matt. 23:31-38. They must have been astonished when Jesus told them that the temple was going to be destroyed, with not one stone left upon another (Matt. 24:1-2). According to the eyewitness, Josephus, after the temple was destroyed, "Caesar [Titus] gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and temple, ...which the Roman valor had subdued; but for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited" (Wars of the Jews; VII.1.1).

Compare two parallel passages in Mark 13:4, 'Tell us (disciples), when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?' and in Luke 21:7, 'And they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, when therefore will these things be? And what will be the sign when these things are [about] to take place?"' In Matt. 24, the Lord answered to the disciples'

questions that all of these events will be upon "this generation" (v. 34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:31). No argument and case closed.

I want to emphasize that anytime you see the term "the end," it does not mean the end of the physical universe or the end of our earthly life. It means the end of the Mosaic Covenant. In this context of Matt. 24, you will notice "the end" three times in verses 6, 13, 14. The question is, when would "the end" be? Clearly Jesus answered that question with the phrase, "this generation" in verse 34. It means within 40 years, which would fall sometime between 30-70 AD. Check the other passages with the term "the end" in Matt. 10:22; 13:39, 40, 49; 28:20; Mark 13:7, 13; Luke 21:9; 1 Cor. 1:8; 10:11; 15:24; Heb. 3:6, 14; 6:11; 9:26; 1 Peter 4:7; Rev. 2:26. Hopefully this will make sense to you.

5. Matt. 28:20 - "Teaching them to observe all that I command you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Read Matt. 28:18-20. Jesus told His disciples He will always be with them even to the end of the (Old Covenant) age. Our Lord did not mean to teach or imply that after the age ended, He would no longer be with them. The end of that age was a goal in eschatology or the scheme of redemption. Jesus was assuring His disciples that He would be with them without fail and of course, continue after 70 AD.

6. Mark 10:30 (Luke 18:30) - "But that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life." Read Mark 10:28-31. This one may not be clear but I think Matt. 19:28 would be helpful. It says, "Truly I say to you that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." What a statement! Jesus was saying they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:28-30; Rev. 20:4-15) during the destruction of Jerusalem in 66-70 AD. That was the end of the Jewish age and we are in the age to come, the eternal life.

7. Luke 20:34-36 - "And Jesus said to them, 'The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.'" Jesus knew the Sadducees were testing Him. He was talking about the age to come in the first century when the resurrection would occur and the people would not marry or die anymore. They would be like angels. This is what Paul explains in 1 Cor. 15:35-50. At death the elect shed their physical bodies, and continue living in their spiritual immortal bodies with God in heaven forever. It is not raised a physical body and then changed. Those of us who are in Christ have passed out of death and judgment into life and resurrection in the presence of God. That is why the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. But the Pharisees believed in the physical, fleshly resurrection as many Futurists do.

8. 1 Cor. 2:6-8 - "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Paul was saying that if the rulers of this age (those who crucified Christ) had understood, they would not have killed Jesus. But God already predestined from the ages past that that would occur. At that time of writing, THIS (Old Covenant) AGE IS PASSING AWAY!

9. 1 Cor. 10:11 - "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." Read 1 Cor. 10:1-11. Paul admonished the Corinthians church to avoid the same mistakes as Israel did while they were in the

wilderness with Moses. They were written for their instruction because the ENDS OF THE AGES HAVE COME in their generation.

10. 2 Cor. 4:4 - "In whose case the god of this world [age] has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." This seems to me that Satan had blinded many unbelievers in that age (before 70 AD). In Rom. 16:20 Paul says that shortly Satan would be crushed (Gen. 3:15). His power to oppose the consummation of redemption is over.

11. Eph. 1:21 - "Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one [age] to come." Notice how Paul's anticipation can be seen in his recognition of the supremacy of Jesus Christ - far above all things, every name that is named, not only in THIS AGE, BUT ALSO THE ONE (AGE) TO COME. Every name that is named in all generations, ages without end. Phil. 2:9-11 says, "Therefore also God highly exalted (past tense) Him, and bestowed (past tense) on Him, the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (emphasis mine - DWH).

12. Eph 2:7 - "In order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Paul was saying after the consummation of all things (the scheme of redemption, not of the creation) Jesus Christ would show the surpassing riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness toward us. In other words, we can see in the Bible from the Fall of Man, God clothed Adam and Eve with the garments of skin, a type of Christ and He made a promise. We can see that the meaning of the sacrifice and the atonement was progressively given by OT revelation. Then, finally at the end of the age God delivered us from sin, death, Hades, and Satan through His Son. We can see the grace of God throughout history. The scheme of redemption is completed. So is the Bible.

13. Heb. 1:1-2 - "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world [ages]." Since God spoke in the OT in many parts and in many ways, finally in the LAST DAYS He had spoken in the first century generation through His Son. Jesus was in the last days of the Old Covenant period. The New Covenant age is "the eternal covenant" (Heb. 13:20) and an everlasting age has no "last days." So, the Old Covenant age has become obsolete and it passed away in the 70 AD judgment and destruction of Jerusalem (Heb. 8:13). The "world" is not the correct term in the English translation and it might cause some confusion or misunderstanding. The word should be "ages." God made two "ages," the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

14. Heb. 6:5 - "And have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age [about] to come." Clearly, the writer knew that the age was about to come when Jesus returns.

15. Heb. 9:26 - "Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Read carefully because it is CRITICAL. Notice it says, "But now once at the consummation of the ages He has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Obviously Jesus was in the last days of the Old Covenant or Mosaic Age when He died on the cross.

16. Heb. 11:3 - "By faith we understand that the worlds [age] were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible." Again, the word "worlds" is not the correct term in Greek and it should be "ages" that were prepared by the Word of God.

In conclusion, we have studied five articles with the Greek words with some historical background, and let the Scripture interpret the Scripture. In my opinion, the Preterist view is the most simple and straightforward of all the eschatology views, if we let the Scripture speak for itself. Otherwise we will face out the hermeneutic gymnastics or dividing the Word of God that can confuse us.

The Preterist perspective only seems strange to many Christians today because they have not done any serious study or "homework" on their own. Most of time they receive their instruction from "Christian" preachers, books, or television. Many people in the churches, and the pastors alike, would rather read the footnotes from the Bible (like Ryrie or Scofield or any "Study Bible") than study the scriptures for themselves. Some of them are very ignorant in the history of the Church, the Greek words, or the sound biblical interpretation. That is a shame!

I urge you in the presence of God, study to show yourself approved to God by handling accurately the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15) as the Bereans did (Acts 17:11). Examine everything carefully; hold fast what is good (1 Thes. 5:21). If you do that, be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you with gentleness and reverence (1 Peter 3:15). If some of you are teachers or want to become a teacher, we shall incur a stricter judgment (James 3:1). We are accountable before our Lord. This is our duty.

The Bible is concerned with redemption history, not world history or the destruction of the creation world. I like the way Ed Stevens wrote, "Bible prophecy can be understood, but Futurist views have fallen far short for many reasons: their extreme physical/literalizing approach, their seeming inability to distinguish between figurative and literal language, and their failure to properly take into account the historical-grammatical-cultural context of the prophecies (specifically what they meant to their original audience). Even the most difficult prophetic passage comes alive when approached properly. It is time to look at some alternatives, and the Preterist view is a great place to start."

I pray that these five articles I wrote will help you to understand the Scripture better and cause you to reexamine your eschatology view.

In the Beloved (Christ), we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, Amen (Eph. 1:7).

Soli Deo Gloria!

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