

“EXTERMINATION”

2 Thessalonians 1:9 seems to present a problem for those interpreting the Bible to teach God’s plan is to save ALL mankind. Speaking of those who do not know God, and who do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ ...

“Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.” ^{1 Thes 1:9 KJV}

The Concordant Version here reads:

“Who shall incur the justice of eonian extermination from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of His strength.” ^{1 Thes 1:9 CV}

We see in the more literal translation “eonian extermination” as opposed to the “everlasting destruction” found in the KJV.

EONIAN

A study of every occurrence of the Greek “aion” will reveal many cases where this word cannot possibly mean “endless” or “eternal.” The fact that we see aion (singular) and aions (plural), and phrases such as “before the eons, at the end of the eons, the eon of the eons,” and a number of other variations, displays that an aion (eon in the English) is a period of time with a beginning and an end. It may be a very long period of time, but it is nonetheless a finite period of time, and does not denote endlessness. The adjective “eonian” speaks, then, of things occurring during these finite periods of time called eons.

And so this “extermination” referred to in 1 Thessalonians 1:9 is not to last endlessly, but only for an eon, or possibly for multiple eons. We must remember that the Scriptures refer to things that will occur at the end of the eons, most notably 1 Corinthians 15 which speaks of events leading to God becoming All in all.

EXTERMINATION

The Greek word translated extermination is “olethros.” This same word occurs in several other places in the New Testament, and most notably in the following passages. Speaking of a believer in the Corinthian church exhibiting immoral behavior, Paul judges:

“... give up such a one to Satan for the extermination of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” ^{1 Cor 5:5}

Here, then, extermination is not the eternal destruction of the offender. Its repercussions affect the flesh, but the spirit is saved. Speaking of the adverse effects of riches, Paul writes:

“Now those intending to be rich are falling into a trial and a trap and the many foolish and harmful desires which are swamping men in extermination and destruction.” ^{1 Tim 6:9}

Here we observe a close relationship between extermination and destruction, which comes from the Greek “apoleia.” We see a form of this same word in Luke 19, where we read:

“For the Son of Mankind came to seek and to save the lost.” ^{Mark 19:10}

“Lost” is from the Greek apollumi, of the same root as apoleia in the 1 Timothy passage. And so the lost (or the “destroyed”) are not lost forever, for the Son of Mankind came to seek them and save them.

SUMMARY

It appears, then, that those facing “eonian extermination” are facing a physical death when the Lord returns, but this in no way is intended to state their final condition. Eonian (for an eon) seems to denote that the loss will be experienced in the eon to come. But this cannot negate that which is to take place when Christ completes His objective at the conclusion of the eons:

“For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified. Yet each in his own class: the Firstfruit, Christ; thereupon those who are Christ’s in His presence; thereafter the consummation, whenever He may be giving up the kingdom to His God and Father, whenever He should be nullifying all sovereignty and all authority and power. For He must be reigning until He should be placing all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy is being abolished: death. For He subjects all under His feet ... Now, whenever all may be subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also shall be subjected to Him Who subjects all to Him, that God may be All in all.” ^{1 Cor 15:22-28}

Writings from Unsearchable Riches Magazine

Following are some excerpts found in past issues of Unsearchable Riches Magazine, that speak to this issue.

"Universalism Refuted" - Vol 15 (1924), pg 236

THE closing argument for eternal torment consists of a collection of seven scriptures, dealing with God's judgments, not one of which deals with final destiny at all. Instead of correctly apportioning the various judgments, all are wrenched from their proper tune and forced to fill the place of God's final dealings with His creatures. All we need to do in each case is to inquire *When?* and *Who?* and we see immediately that all are special inflictions at special times. Not one throws any light on the end we are considering.

We thoroughly believe that the nations who have neglected Israel in the end time will be judged at the beginning of the day of the Lord (Matt.25:46). Their judgment is called *eonian chastening*. It will last for the whole eon. More than this, we believe that the individuals composing these nations will probably be present in the judgment at the great white throne to answer for their private sins, for assuredly their treatment of Israel is not the only part of their conduct which will call for the judgment of God. The judgment of Matt.25:46 is limited to *living nations*, for the kingdom eon, and has no bearing on the final destiny of the people who compose them.

Our expositions of the Revelation are witnesses to the fact that we believe fully in the great judgments which attend the unveiling of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess.1:8,9). If they are "punished with *everlasting destruction*," it is difficult to see how they can appear before God at the later judgment, as God has sworn they shall. They, unlike those nations who survive, but did not succor Israel, suffer the justice of eonian **extermination**. Yet they, too, shall rise in the resurrection of judgment. Their final destiny is not in view in Thessalonians.

Eonian Extermination - Vol 22 (1931), pg 254

SOME of our friends are still stumbled by Scriptures dealing with the destruction of the wicked, during the eons. Not one of these passages deals with God's ultimate. Not one of them more "utterly destroys" sinners than burning at the stake destroyed the martyrs. In no case is there more than death, which is to be abolished.

Malachi 4:1 deals only with the judgments of Jehovah's days. In that day the arrogant and wicked will have no place at all. No term, except annihilation, can be too strong to describe their fate. But they will be roused for judgment at the great white throne, and vivified at the consummation, for God says this is true of *all*, beyond "the day" of Malachi.

Obadiah 1:16 deals with the same period. But it seems clearly to teach annihilation, "they shall be as though they had not been." This rendering has deceived many, for there is no better way of defining

annihilation. The translation of the Hebrew verb has been very vague, especially so in the case of the word which is repeated in this sentence. It may be rendered *be*, or *become*. All that we need to know, however, is that it is *exactly the same* in both occurrences. If we translate "they shall be," then we must finish with "as though *they shall not be*." The result is that it *denies* annihilation, instead of asserting it.

Psalms 104:35 seems to teach that the wicked shall "be no more." This is just a trick of English idiom. There is no word for *be*. It reads literally, *and-wicked further none-are-of-them*, i.e., there are no more wicked.

In no case does the earlier revelation supersede or contradict Paul's final unfoldings. They deal with the process, not with the consummation.

From Vol 22 (1931), pg 341

All men shall be justified to life, but only those who receive righteousness in the present era will reign in life. All are not promised eonian life. Some shall suffer eonian **extermination**. Life cannot be theirs till their age-long term of punishment is ended.

From Vol 26 (1935), pg 186

In the first chapter of First Thessalonians Paul takes up the times and the eras. The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. It will bring **extermination** which cannot be escaped. Such would be the lot of believers among the nations at the time of the end, apart from this new revelation. But, he insists, God did not appoint us to indignation, but to the procuring of salvation. Even if we are drowsing, and act like those who are the subjects of God's indignation, we shall be living together with Him. *This consolation is the first opening wedge which distinguishes the truth for the present from "the hope of Israel."* The saints of Israel will *not* be taken away before the era of God's indignation. They will be *saved* through it. Their dead will be raised *after* it. It is God's great wisdom which has kept Thessalonians out of the Acts. Let us not join together what God has sundered.

From Vol 26 (1935), pg 267

As the eons are to terminate, it follows that all that is eonian must finish, or be swallowed up in that which follows. Even dooms, which are described as eonian, such as the fire of Matt.18:8, the **extermination** from the face of the Lord, of 2 Thess.1:9, and the eonian judgment of Heb.6:2

From Vol 27 (1936), pg 361

We are now given a passage in Paul's epistles to substantiate the idea that "unrepentant sinners," one and all, now and for ever, are to be eternally damned. It reads: "And to you who are being afflicted, ease, with us, at the unveiling of the Lord Jesus from, heaven with His powerful messengers, in flaming fire dealing out vengeance to those who are not acquainted with God and those who are not obeying the evangel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall incur the justice of eonian **extermination** from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of His strength, whenever He should be coming to be glorified in His saints..." I am sure you are disappointed, for, once more, we find ourselves at that special crisis in this world's history when evil is at its full, and Christ comes in judgment on the earth. It affects no one except the comparatively few who will live on earth at the era of the end.

Partition the administrations and many perplexities will disappear. Grace is being dispensed now and it has been free for nearly two thousand years. Soon this may change, for judgment will be dispensed when God commences to clean up the earth for the coming kingdom. But this will be as brief as it will be terrible. We know of only seven years. During this short period this passage has its fulfillment. It is not likely that one per cent of all who have lived since Adam will be present on earth when these terrific judgments occur. Those who are represented by the sheep and the kids (Matt.25:31-46), as well as those who are invited to the marriage festivities, must be subtracted from these, for they are not exterminated, but live on in the thousand years.

Our zealous translators have overshot the mark when they speak of "everlasting destruction" in this passage. The word is stronger than destruction. Our English term **extermination** is nearer the mark, for the idea is to rid the earth of their presence during the kingdom. But it cannot be everlasting annihilation,

because God has sworn that every tongue shall confess to Him, and all the dead are roused for judgment before the great white throne.

From Vol 29 (1938), pg 247

"Eonian extermination from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His strength," when Christ comes to establish His kingdom, needs a great deal of human reasoning to convert it into endless punishment. See 2 Thessalonians 1:9. It will take place more than a thousand years prior to the judgment before the white throne. Like the judgment of the nations, it is extermination in relation to the kingdom. It means death, since unbelievers, as individuals, cannot have eonian life apart from faith; but it is death, not for eternity, but during the period when others shall be seeing the face of the Lord and the glory of His strength. I repeat, it is in relation to the kingdom.

From Vol 84 (1993), pg 189

Paul pronounced an anathema upon those who distorted the evangel he was bringing (Gal.1:7-9). He gave Hymeneus and Alexander up to Satan and declared that the Lord will pay Alexander in accord with his acts of evil (1 Tim.1:20; 2 Tim.4:14-16). He saw the consummation of the enemies of the cross as one of destruction (Phil.3:18,19), and concerning those who are not acquainted with God at the unveiling of the Lord Jesus, he prophesied eonian extermination (2 Thess.1:8,9).

But this severity must be understood in its context. If David beseeches Yahweh to send forth His hand against the enemies, he also prays that "all the kings of the earth" might acclaim Yahweh (138:4,7). The extermination of the wicked spoken of in Psalm 145:20 is followed by the concluding prayer, "May all flesh bless His holy Name" (v.21). Is it ominous or hopeful that David sings concerning those who commit evil deeds: "When they are released into the hands of Our Crag, their Grand Judge, then they will hear my sayings and see that they are pleasant" (Psa.141:6)?

To be judged by Yahweh, even to be effaced and exterminated is no roadblock to the good end God has in view. The final word is: "Yahweh is good to all, and His compassions are over all His words" (Psa.145:9). This must determine the force of the words "destroy" and "exterminate." There is no support for ideas of everlasting torment or annihilation in these psalms if the descriptions of God are taken literally. If David is right in presenting God as benign and righteous and worthy of highest praise, then it is well to take this psalmist at his word when he announces that all kings will acclaim and all flesh will bless Yahweh.

Paul agrees with this, and again he goes beyond David in describing the glory of God's ultimate achievement. It was because Paul looked back at the cross that he could write (and indeed, sing) "that in the name of Jesus every knee should be bowing, *celestial, and terrestrial and subterranean*, and every tongue should be acclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord, for the glory of God the Father" (Phil.2:10,11). In understanding that every enemy will become subject under the feet of Christ, Paul saw this as eventually meaning that God will be All in all (1 Cor.15:25-28). It is through the blood of the cross that all will be reconciled to God, whether those on the earth or those in the heavens (Col.1:20).

It is true that when all are reconciled there will be no enemies, for enmity will have been removed from the universe. And perhaps the inspired writers had this in mind when they spoke of extermination: Ultimately, it is not the creature who will be exterminated but the enmity within the person, so that this one is no longer an enemy. If king Saul was especially in view when David spoke of "the haughty one from afar" in Psalm 138:6, it seems especially forceful that David should have pleaded, "May all the kings of the earth acclaim You, O Yahweh!" in verse 4. Yahweh, exults David, gives salvation to kings (Psa.144:10), and this does not include David alone. Similarly, but more remarkably, are we told that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim.1:15), and this does not include you and me alone.

- Bob Evelyn -