

## **Auxiliary Sense Files | Senses of the Word Everlasting**

An Auxiliary Sense File of the End Time Prophecy Website *Jesus and the End Time*

### **Introductory Notes**

Both the Old and New Testaments of the KJV Bible use the word "everlasting" in a number of different senses. These senses are described in the headings shown in Part A below. In each case these headings are followed by examples of Bible verses that illustrate their use in these senses. In order to keep this file to a reasonable size, the writer will include after each heading two or three verses from each Testament that use the word "everlasting" in that sense --- if there are that many. Because these verses have been chosen on the basis of their ability to illustrate the senses in which they use the word "everlasting", and not on the basis of their association with End Time teachings of Jesus, these verses may or may not appear among the End Time texts shown in the Auxiliary Text Files of this website.

To assure that at least the most important of the senses of the word "everlasting" are covered, the writer will also show and discuss other words or phrases that the KJV Bible uses to convey the idea of very long or endless expanse(s) of time. Examples of words or phrases like these include: eternal, for ever (forever in American English), for ages (or aeons), etc. Because the books of the New Testament were originally written in Greek and convey this idea using the Greek word that is often shown in anglicized form as "aion" (an age or aeon), he will briefly discuss what the Bible suggests about how this and similar words ought to be interpreted. Similarly, because the books of the Old Testament were originally written in Hebrew and convey this idea using the Hebrew word that is often shown in anglicized form as "olam", he will briefly discuss what the Bible suggests about how this and similar words ought to be interpreted. Discussions of both of these kinds are included in Part B below.

### **Part A - Senses of "Everlasting" as an English Language Word Used in the KJV Bible**

The senses of the word "everlasting" shown and discussed below include those senses of this word that are suggested by literal or figurative readings of the passages in which they appear. These readings take into account the contexts in which this word appears, but not the effect of questions about how it might or should have been translated from the Greek or Hebrew words that underlie it. Discussions of both of these kinds will be included under the headings of Part B below.

**1.) The temporally infinite sense:** That sense of the word "everlasting" in which it refers to an amount of time that is temporally infinite or, equivalently, infinitely long. When the KJV Bible uses the word "everlasting" in this sense it may use it in a strong sense in which it applies to an expanse of time which had no beginning and will have no end. The KJV Bible may also use this word in weaker senses in which it applies to any expanse of time which had no beginning, but which has ended or will end in the future, or to any expanse of time which extends from the present or any future time into a future that will have no end. While the strong sense of everlasting correctly applies only to God Himself, His attributes, his powers, etc., its weaker senses *may* apply to anything that God wants to exist for a temporally infinite amount of time. Examples of verses that use the word "everlasting" in these senses are shown below.

#### **1.1 - Texts That Use Everlasting to Describe God Himself , His Attributes, His Powers, etc:**

##### **(A.) Examples from the Old Testament:**

Ps. 100:5 For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

Is. 40:28 Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

Jer. 10:10 But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation.

##### **(B.) Examples from the New Testament:**

Rom. 16:26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

1Tim. 6:16 Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

#### **1.2 - Texts That Use Everlasting to Describe an Infinite Expanse of Time That is Associated With God:**

##### **(A.) Examples from the Old Testament:**

Ps. 41:13 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen.

Ps. 93:2 Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting.

Ps. 103:17 But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;

##### **(B.) Examples from the New Testament:**

The New Testament does not include any texts of the above-described kind.

**2.) The temporally finite but indefinitely long sense:** That sense of the word "everlasting" which the KJV Bible uses to describe periods of time which (for humans) are indefinitely or unknowably long, but which are not or are unlikely to be infinitely long. When the Bible uses the word "everlasting" in this sense it uses it in a figurative or hyperbolic sense in which it conveys the idea that a period of time is long, but does not reveal how long that time is. As a result, this sense of everlasting can reasonably be regarded as a substitute for longer statements like "lasting for a time known only to God" or "continuing until God decides that particular conditions are met". Importantly, there are many other words or phrases that the Bible uses in this sense, e.g., from the beginning of the world, world without end, throughout all your generations, perpetual, eternal and, most frequently of all, the phrase "for ever" (forever in American English) and variants of it, such as "for ever after" and "for evermore".

(A.) Examples from the Old Testament:

Gen. 48:4 And said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession.

Exod. 40:15 And thou shalt anoint them, as thou didst anoint their father, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office: for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations.

Ps. 24:7 Lift up your head, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

Hab. 3:6 He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.

(B.) Examples from the New Testament: (In this section "for ever" is treated as synonymous with "everlasting")

Matt. 21:19 And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

Luke 16:9 And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

2Thes. 1:9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

Jude 1:6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

**3.) The absolutely final or irreversible sense:** That sense of the word "everlasting" which the Bible uses to describe divine judgments, decrees, promises, etc. that will never be changed, reversed or undone --- no matter how much time passes. KJV Bible texts are especially likely to use everlasting in this absolutely final sense if they use it in judgments, decrees, promises, etc. which mention an intended end result or outcome. This is because there is nothing about the finality or irreversibility of a judgment or decree which requires that its implementation continue for an infinitely long time or, in other words, that it be interminable.\* Instead, the reasonable implication is that the implementation of an irreversible judgment may occupy either an infinite or a finite amount of time, depending on who or what they affect and the nature of the intended outcome. If, for example, a judgment relates to a person and the intended outcome is that he be rewarded with everlasting life, then the nature of life as an ongoing process suggests that his reward will continue for an infinitely long time. If, on the other hand, a judgment relates to a person, and the intended outcome is that he be punished by being utterly destroyed, then the nature of destruction suggests that this destruction will continue only for the time necessary to complete it. In spite of these differences, both of these judgments can be described as everlasting because, once implemented, they both have outcomes that will endure or "stand" for an infinitely long time.

\* See, for example, p. 107 of the 2008 edition of *Christ and the Judgment of God: The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought*, by Stephen H. Travis.

Editorial Note: Interestingly, the word "everlasting" has ambiguities which enable it to describe both punishments which are absolutely final and infinitely long, and punishments which are absolutely final but not infinitely long. As is explained more fully in Part B below, St. Augustine (354 - 430 A.D.) argues that there is no such ambiguity, and that all divinely decreed punishments that the Bible describes as everlasting are temporally infinite.

(A.) Examples from the Old Testament: (In this section "for ever" is treated as synonymous with "everlasting")

Num. 24:20 And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, and said, Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever.

Ps. 52:5 God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living. Selah.

Ps. 92:7 When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever:

Obad. 1:10 For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever.

#### (B.) Examples from the New Testament:

Matt. 25:46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. [In the writer's opinion, this verse equates not having everlasting life with perishing.]

2Thes. 1:9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

### **Part B- Senses of Everlasting as Translations of Foreign Language Words Used in Pre-KJV Bibles**

Unlike the senses of the word "everlasting" shown and discussed in Part A above, the senses of the word "everlasting" shown and discussed in Part B are senses which take into account the meanings of the words of the foreign language texts from which the KJV Bible was translated. Unfortunately, these senses cannot be shown and discussed using the same approach that the writer used in Part A. One reason is that these senses cannot be meaningfully discussed without taking into account that translation is a process which is more of an art than a science because it involves making choices between multiple terms in multiple languages which may not have senses that clearly correspond to one another. Another reason is that translation is not an objective process, and can be strongly affected by translators' personal opinions and group affiliations. Still another is that the writer has only that limited understanding of the foreign language words and phrases which he has been able to acquire from his use of well-known sources, such as *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (1890) and *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (1990), among others.

#### **Senses of Words Like Everlasting in the KJV New Testament**

The most important thing to understand about the senses in which the New Testament of the KJV Bible uses the word "everlasting" is that this word is one of a family of four English words and phrases that the KJV Bible uses as ways of translating Greek words or phrases that convey the idea of an expanse of time that is long, but that may or may not be infinitely long. Two of these, the words "everlasting" and "eternal", are adjectives which the KJV Bible uses more or less interchangeably to modify the meanings of a large number of different nouns, e.g., fire, punishment, destruction, and consolation. A third, the phrase "for ever" (forever in American English), is an adverb phrase that the Bible uses to describe the length of the time during which the action or state called for by a text will continue. A fourth is made up of a number of differently worded phrases, such as "the world to come" and "since the world began", all of which describe times that the New Testament describes in terms of the past or future world ages with which it associates them.

Importantly, the thing that is responsible for the fact that the writer treats the above-described words and phrases as members of a family is that all four are English language renderings of Greek words which are based on the Greek root word "aion", a word which simply means an age or aeon, i.e., a long period of time. Rather than trying to discuss the meaning and significance of this fact in the abstract, the writer will present a series of entries that illustrate what this actually means for each of the four above-described words or phrases. In the entries which follow the writer will show and discuss the most important of the words and phrases that appear in the Greek version of the texts from which the KJV New Testament was translated. In these entries the writer will show these words and phrases in forms which approximate the anglicized forms in which scholars often show them in their writings. In all cases these anglicized versions have been adapted from Greek words shown in the 1990 edition of *The New-Greek English Interlinear New Testament*.

#### **aionos and aioni – Greek noun variants based on root word "aion"**

Aion is the root of Greek nouns like aionos and aioni which are commonly used to mean an age or other long period of time. The letters "os" and "i" are different endings of these words; which is used depends on the Greek words with which they appear. When used as nouns the words "aionos" and "aioni" can be translated either as the word "age" or the as the word "world". This is because the latter two words can be used interchangeably, as they are in the two modern English phrases, "the age of the dinosaurs" and "the world of the dinosaurs". When used as nouns the words "aionos" and "aioni" are ambiguous enough that they can be used to mean periods of time that have very different durations, as they do in the two modern English phrases "the stone age" and "the Jazz age". It therefore seems that the thing which differentiates one age from another is not time per se, but rather the transition from a time when one set of conditions characterizes human existence in the world to a time when a very different set of conditions characterizes human existence in the world.

There follow three examples of English phrases that appear in the KJV Bible, together with anglicized versions of the corresponding Greek phrases. In all cases the color red is used to show how the root and ending portions of each Greek word together correspond to the word "world".

Matt. 13:39: end of the **world** = sunteleia **aionos**

Mark 10:30: in the **world** to come = en to **aioni** to erchomeno

Luke 20: The children of this **world** = Oi uioi tou **aionos**

While the KJV New Testament uses the word "world" as such over 200 times, only 36 of these uses are based on the use of the word "aion" in the sense described above. The remaining uses of the word "world" use it in more common,

geographical senses in which it translates other Greek words, such as "kosmos" or "oikoumene". As a result, care must be exercised to distinguish Bible passages that use this word in a sense that is of End Time significance from passages that are not. Once this distinction is taken into account, it becomes clear that the number of occurrences of world-based variants of the above-described four member family of variants is roughly comparable to the number of occurrences of the remaining three variants, namely, everlasting (26), eternal (43) and "for ever" (53).

Interestingly, the KJV Bible favors the world-based translation of the word "aion", while the NRSV Bible favors the age-based translation thereof. Matt. 13:39 of the KJV Bible, for example, shows the words "end of the world" where the NRSV Bible shows the words "end of the age". This is interesting not only because the former has a more apocalyptic sound than the latter, but also because it can mean the difference between whether the world will literally come to an end during the End Times or will go on after undergoing a radical transformation.

### **aionion, aionios** and **aioniou** – Greek adjective variants based on root word "aion"

Aionion, aionios and aioniou are Greek adjectives that are used to describe a thing by describing the length of the time that it has lasted, endured, stood, etc., or that it will last, endure, stand, etc. (As above, "ion", "ios" and "iou" are different endings of these words; which is used depends on the Greek words with which they appear.) Since these adjectives are based on a root that means an age or ages, this length of time may be translated literally using terms like "age-long" or "ages-long" or, less literally, using terms like "long standing" or "ancient". For especially long expanses of time, this time may be translated using terms like "everlasting" or "eternal". Often the latter two words are used interchangeably, as they are in Biblical phrases like "everlasting life" and "eternal life". Because the words "everlasting" and "eternal" are the words that are of the greatest interest for present purposes, the writer will limit the rest of this entry to them.

There follow four examples of English phrases that appear in the KJV Bible, together with anglicized versions of the corresponding Greek phrases. In all cases color is used to show how the root and ending portions of each Greek word work together to render the English word "everlasting".

Matt. 25:46: everlasting punishment = kolasin **aionion**

John 12:50: life **everlasting** = zoe **aionios**

2Thes. 1:9: **everlasting** destruction = olethron **aionion**

2Tim. 2:10: with **eternal** glory = meta doxes **aioniou**

The KJV New Testament uses the words "everlasting" and "eternal" in rather different ways than it uses the previously discussed member of the four member family of variants, the word "world". Specifically, it uses these words more or less interchangeably as two different members of this four member family of variants, and uses everlasting less frequently (26 times) than eternal (43 times). In addition, the KJV New Testament includes only two verses that use other terms as apparent synonyms for these words: Jude 6, which uses the word "aidios" in place of the word "everlasting" and Jude 7, which uses the word "aidios" in place of the word "eternal". Finally, while the KJV New Testament uses both the word "everlasting" and the word "eternal", the NRSV New Testament uses the word "eternal" in all of the places where the KJV New Testament uses the word "everlasting", thereby effectively eliminating the latter from the New Testament.

The word "aion" has long been recognized as being broad and indefinite enough that it can be used to mean not only expanses of time which are long but finite, but also to mean expanses of time that are or may be infinitely long. This, in turn, suggests that both of the adjectives "everlasting" and "eternal" are equally broad and indefinite. If this is correct, this fact could hardly be more consequential. This is because it means that, notwithstanding the connotations of these words in English, no New Testament passages that use them with reference to anything other than God or His attributes ought to be regarded as meaning an infinitely long time unless the Scriptural background and context of that passage supports that meaning --- including the everlasting punishment that Jesus speaks about in v. 46 of Matt. 25:31-46. In other words, it suggests that a person's afterlife punishment may not last an infinitely long time. This possibility was recognized by St. Augustine (354 – 430 A.D.), who argued that, in spite of the ambiguity of the noun "aion", adjectives based on it are free of such ambiguities\* and *must* be interpreted to mean infinitely long. The historical background of his argument will be discussed further in a Historical Note included at the end of this section of Part B.

\* See, for example, pages 319-320 of the 1993 edition of *The Formation of hell*, by Alan E. Bernstein.

### **aiona and aionas** – Greek adverb variants based on the root word "aion".

Aiona and aionas are Greek adverbs that describe the length of time for which (or during which) the action specified by a verb will go on or continue, although they are properly used only when this length is very long, e.g., for all or part of an age, or for ages. (As above, "a" and "as" are different endings of these words; which is used depends on the Greek words with which they appear.) When these words are used in Greek versions of the Bible, they are not used as single words, but rather as parts of adverb phrases that include introductory prepositions much like those included in adverb phrases in English. In Biblical usage these phrases typically have forms like "eis ton aiona" and "eis tous aionas", which can be literally translated into English as "into the age" and "into the ages", respectively. The KJV Bible translates phrases of this kind less literally using the adverb phrase "for ever", in which "for" corresponds to the Greek introductory preposition

"eis" (or "into") and its definite article, and in which "ever" conveys the idea of a long but indefinite amount of time. An example of a modern statement that uses *for* in this way is, "I will love, honor and obey you *for* the rest of my life.".

There follow three examples of English phrases that appear in the KJV Bible, together with anglicized versions of the corresponding Greek phrases. In each case green is used to show the introductory preposition of the adverb phrase and red is used to how the root and ending portions of the Greek words work together to render its object.

Luke 1:55: to his seed **for ever** = to spermati auto **eis ton aionā**

Rom. 1:25: blessed **for ever** = eulogetos **eis tous aionas**

Gal. 1:5: To whom be glory **for ever** = O e doxa **eis tous aoinas**

The KJV Bible uses the phrase "for ever" more frequently (53 times in positive forms and at least 7 times in negative forms like "never") than any of the other three members of its family of variants. The fact that the word "ever" can mean generally the same thing as the equally indefinite word "always" may explain why the KJV Bible shows the words "for" and "ever" as two separate words. This is because its English translators may have regarded the merging the words "for" and "ever" into the single word "forever" to be as awkward as the merging of the words "for" and "always" into the non-word "foralways". American translators take the opposite view and conflate "for" and "ever" into the single word "forever". Unfortunately, by doing this, American translators effectively conceal the close parallelism between the English and Greek wordings and, with it, the indefiniteness that is inherent in the use of the Greek word "aion". In any event, the conflated form "forever" is the form that is used throughout the NRSV New Testament. As a result, in the writer's opinion, the latter seems to take the side of St. Augustine in the argument mentioned in the previous entry, but without leaving any obvious trace of having done so.

In order to help readers more clearly understand the significance of the ways in which the KJV Bible typically translates forms of the Greek root word "aion" into the English words everlasting, eternal and forever, the writer includes Fig. 1 below. In this figure he collects specific examples of phrases that actually appear in this Bible, and shows them next to anglicized forms of the Greek phrases from which they were translated. From these examples the writer believes that it is clear that, in spite of apparent differences in the connotations of the English words everlasting, eternal and forever, all of these words have meanings that are based in one way or another on the Greek concept of 'an age'. This is not, however, the same as saying that the word 'aion' means the same amount of time, without regard to differences in the words with which it is used. It need not, for example, mean the same thing when it is used with a word that refers a person rather than to a thing, or with a word that refers to human beings rather than to God. In the writer's opinion this difference is of critical importance when Jesus uses the word 'aion' in Matt. 25:46 to describe the duration of the 'everlasting punishment' to which the king will condemn some human beings. This is because, *when used in the context of that verse*, the most reasonable interpretation of the meaning of the word everlasting as a translation of the term 'an age' is one in which the age referred to is 'the age of man'. If this is correct, then the true meaning of everlasting punishment is one in which this punishment will end no later than the end of the Age of Man or, in other words, with the death of the last human being.

<b>Everlasting, Eternal and For Ever as Translations of Forms of the Word 'Age'</b>	
<b>aion (αἰών) = an age, or long period of time</b>	
<u>English (KJV) Bible Phrase</u>	<u>Greek Phrase (Transliterated)</u>
Matt 25:41: <b>everlasting</b> fire	pur <u>aionion</u>
Matt 25:46: <b>everlasting</b> punishment	kolasin <u>aionion</u>
John 3:15: <b>eternal</b> life	zoen <u>aionion</u>
Hebrews 9:12: <b>eternal</b> redemption	<u>aionian</u> lutrosin
Luke 1:33: over the house of Jacob <b>for ever</b>	epi ton oikon Iakob <b>eis tous aionas*</b>
John 6:51: he shall live <b>for ever</b>	zesei <b>eis ton aiona**</b>
<small>*eis tous aionas = into the ages   **eis ton aiona = into the age</small>	
<small>Greek words are adapted from <i>The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament</i></small>	
<b>Image/Text Credit: <a href="https://www.jesusandtheendtime.com">https://www.jesusandtheendtime.com</a></b>	

**Fig. 1 – Aion as a Greek Word That Underlies the English Words Everlasting, Eternal and Forever.**

#### Editorial Note:

As stated earlier, it seems likely that the thing which differentiates one age from another is not time per se, but rather the

transition from a time when one set of conditions characterizes human existence in the world to a time when another very different set of conditions characterizes that existence. If this is correct, then the longest amount of time that it takes for the consequences of human choices to play themselves out is not a time that is infinitely long, but rather the time that separates these choices from the end of the age in which these consequences actually do play themselves out. This reason is that the latter time is, for all practical purposes, the time that most meaningfully answers to the idea of "for ever" for the people who lived in that age. This possibility may, in turn, explain the seeming peculiarity of the translation of the phrase "into the age" (*eis ton aiona*) into the phrase "for ever". This is because the original sense of that phrase may reflect a preference for describing the length of a long but unknown period of time by saying that it extends *into the current age* for a time up to and including its end.

#### Historical Note:

The writer finds it interesting that St. Augustine lived between 354 and 430 A.D., a time during which he was personally caught up in the devastating barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire which would soon result in its complete collapse. It therefore seems only natural that he should take comfort from the thought that these barbarians would undergo a terrible afterlife punishment that would continue without end, day and night, forever and ever. Origen of Alexandria (circa 185 – 254 A.D.), a highly respected theologian who was later declared a heretic, on the other hand, lived at a time when the Roman Empire was still fairly safe and prosperous. Interestingly, Origen taught that, while afterlife punishments may be long and terrible, they would eventually end and that *all* living beings --- including Satan himself --- would be reconciled with God, a teaching that is one example of a doctrine called "Universalism". One can only wonder what the Christian teaching about the endlessness of hell would be today if the times when these theologians lived were switched.

#### Senses of Words Like Everlasting in the KJV Old Testament

Generally speaking, there are both similarities and differences between the ways in which the KJV New and Old Testaments formulate passages which use terms that do or may answer to ideas like everlasting, eternal or for ever, or that describe long but unspecified periods of time. While, for example, both Testaments use terms of all of these kinds, the two Testaments use them with very different relative frequencies. In addition, the Old Testament does not treat these terms as members of a family of terms that is based on a single root word, as the New Testament does. Finally, there is the fact that the two Testaments were originally written in languages which are very different from one another, and which use words that have different nuances and connotations. In spite of these differences, it is nevertheless possible to derive some useful general information about how these Old Testament usages may affect the senses in which words "everlasting", eternal" and "for ever" are used in the KJV New Testament.

As in the case of his discussion of the ways in which the New Testament uses the above-mentioned words and phrases, the writer will not try to discuss the meaning and significance of the most nearly similar Hebrew words in detail. Instead he will present a series of entries that show and discuss anglicized versions of their most commonly used variants. Because these entries are included only to provide enough information to enable readers to put them in the perspective of the overall Biblical framework within which they are used, these entries will be shorter and simpler than those included for their counterparts in the New Testament, and will not include lists of specific examples of the kinds included for their New Testament counterparts. In these entries the writer will show Hebrew words and phrases in forms in which Hebrew characters are replaced by (or transliterated into) their nearest English language equivalents, but will show them without the extra markings with which scholars often show them in their writings. In all cases these anglicized versions have been adapted from words shown in the 1890 edition of *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.

**olam** –A Hebrew word that the KJV Old Testament translates as the English word "everlasting" 60 times.

Olam is the word which the Hebrew version of the Old Testament uses in all but a few cases when it describes things that the KJV Old Testament describes as "everlasting". *Strong's Concordance* describes this word as generally meaning "time out of mind" and as equally applicable to either the past or the future. It also says that this word can have *practically* the same meaning as the word "eternity". See, for example, Ps. 103:17, which describes God's mercy as "from everlasting to everlasting". It goes on to say that olam is often used as an adverb in senses in which conveys ideas like always, ancient, any more, eternal, for ever, everlasting, evermore, of old, lasting, a long time, world without end, etc. Olam can also be used to mean a remote time (past or future), an indefinite amount of time or simply old. The next most often used Hebrew word that the KJV Old Testament translates as everlasting is "alam", which is used only 4 times, all in the book of Daniel.

**olam and qedmah** - Hebrew words that the KJV Old Testament translates as the English word "eternal".

Qedmah is a word which the Hebrew version of the Old Testament uses only once, in Deut. 33:27, and there uses it to describe God himself. The only other Hebrew word that the KJV Old Testament translates as the word "eternal" is olam, which Is. 60:15 uses to describe the excellency of Zion. *Strong's Concordance* describes "qedmah" as a word that is often used as an adverb to convey ideas like aforetime, ancient time, eternal, ever, everlasting, or old, among others.

Editorial Note: While the KJV Old Testament uses the word "eternal" only twice, the KJV New Testament uses the word

"eternal" 42 times to refer to a number of different things. Strangely, although the word "eternal" would seem to be an adjective based on the English root word "eternity", the Old Testament uses the word "eternity" only once to describe God's habitation (See Is. 57:15), while the New Testament does not use this word even once.

**olam, ad and netsach** - Hebrew words that the KJV Bible usually translates as terms like "for ever" and "evermore". These words, especially the word "olam", are the Hebrew words that the KJV Old Testament translates much more often than not as the English term "for ever" (over 250 times), but that it also translates numerous times as ever-based variants thereof, such as "for ever and ever" (14 times), "for evermore" or "evermore" (20 times) and "ever" by itself (30 times). Words translated from the Hebrew words "ad" and "netsach" appear far fewer times, 37 and 17 times respectively. Words translated from still other Hebrew words appear only a few times each and will not be discussed here. In addition to some of the meanings of olam discussed earlier (always, ancient, any more, eternal, for ever, everlasting, evermore, of old, etc.), *Strong's Concordance* describes meanings for the words "ad" and "netsach" that include terms like eternity, for eternity, perpetuity, old and perpetually (ad), and terms like always, continually, and "to the most distant end" (netsach). Negative forms of the word "ever" give rise to still more variant forms, such as "nevermore" and "shall never be".

### **Concluding Summary | Senses of Words Like Everlasting, Eternal and For Ever**

In the paragraphs that follow, the writer will summarize a few of the most important things he discovered by studying how the KJV New and Old Testaments use the words or phrases everlasting, eternal, for ever, and world, and/or the Greek or Hebrew words from which they were translated into English.

One interesting discovery involves the similarities and differences between the ways in which the King James Versions of the New and Old Testaments use terms like everlasting, eternal and for ever. The KJV New Testament, for example, makes frequent use of all of the terms "everlasting" (26 times), "eternal" (43 times) and "for ever" (53 times). In doing so it uses the word "everlasting" and the word "eternal" more or less interchangeably to describe numerous things, such as life, damnation and punishment, that the KJV Old Testament does not describe in this way. Similarly, while the New Testament often uses the term "for ever" in much the same way as the Old Testament, i.e., to describe the durations of things closely associated with God, it also uses this term to describe the durations of things which the Old Testament does not closely associate with God, such as the duration of a person's life, darkness and torment.

A second discovery is that the Old Testament, unlike the New Testament, does not use the words "everlasting" and "eternal" more or less interchangeably. The New Testament, for example, uses the word "eternal" 43 times, mostly in phrases like eternal life, but also in phrases that describe things like damnation, judgment and punishment. The Old Testament, on the other hand, uses the word "eternal" only twice, once to describe God himself (Deut. 33:27) and a second time to describe the excellency of Zion. (Is. 60:15). This clearly suggests that the Old Testament has a much narrower and loftier conception of the meaning of the word "eternal" than the New Testament.

A third discovery is the fact that, while the New Testament uses the term "for ever" roughly the same number of times as it uses the word "eternal" and about twice as often as it uses the word "everlasting", the Old Testament uses the term "for ever" at least five times more often than either. In addition, the Old Testament often associates this term with things with which the New Testament does not associate them. One example is the Old Testament's use of this term over 40 times to describe the enduring character of God's mercy, a thing the New Testament does not do. Another is that the Old Testament often uses "for ever" to describe divinely imposed punishments with outcomes that will *stand* for ever, as it does in Ps. 52:5 and Ps. 92:7 (destroy ... for ever), Num. 24:20, 24 and Ps. 9:18 (perish for ever), Obad. 10 (cut off for ever) and 2Sam. 2:26 (devour for ever), but does not describe divinely imposed punishments that continue or *last* for ever. This, in turn, suggests that interpretations of the phrases "everlasting punishment" in Matt. 25:46 and "eternal damnation" in Mark 3:29 that may seem to call for punishments of the latter kind are interpretations which are not supported by the Scriptures as they would have been known to Jesus during the time of his public ministry.

Finally, in spite of the differences between the ways the KJV New Testament uses terms like everlasting, eternal for ever and world, virtually all of these usages are renderings of the Greek noun "aion", or one of its adjective or adverb forms. Similarly, in spite of the differences between the ways the KJV Old Testament uses terms like everlasting, eternal and for ever, the vast majority of these usages are renderings of the Hebrew word "olam". This, together with the fact that both of the words "aion" and "olam" can be translated into English in so many different and overlapping ways, supports the idea that both words have meanings that are broad and ambiguous enough that their translations depend both on their overall Scriptural backgrounds and on their immediate Scriptural contexts. If the latter idea is correct, then St. Augustine's arguments in favor of the idea that adjective and adverb forms of the Greek word "aion" are free of ambiguities and should always be interpreted to mean "for an infinitely long time" are without merit.