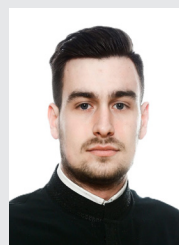


THE SEMANTICS OF EVERLASTINGNESS IN SCRIPTURE: THE TERMS עולם, αἰώνιος, AND αἰδιος IN CONTEMPORARY ESCHATOLOGICAL DEBATES

Abstract

This article examines the semantic development of the terms עולם ('*olam*), αἰώνιος, and αἰδιος in the Old Testament, the Septuagint, and the New Testament, and evaluates their significance for contemporary eschatological debates. Attention is given to the relationship between the Hebrew concept of עולם and its Greek renderings, αἰώνιος and αἰδιος, highlighting both their continuities and semantic distinctions. The study argues that while these terms belong to a common vocabulary of permanence and transcendence, they cannot be treated as exact synonyms. Through a philological and exegetical analysis of key biblical texts, the article demonstrates that the language of everlastingness in Scripture is more nuanced than is often assumed in modern theological discussions. Finally, it explores how the interpretation of these terms continues to influence contemporary debates concerning eternal punishment, universal salvation, and the nature of eschatological fulfillment.



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Introduction

Few theological questions have generated more sustained debate in contemporary Christianity than the nature and duration of eschatological realities. Discussions concerning eternal punishment, universal salvation, final judgment, and the consummation of history frequently depend upon the interpretation of a small number of biblical terms traditionally translated as 'eternal,' 'everlasting,' or 'forever.' Among

these, the Hebrew עולם ('*olam*) and the Greek adjectives αἰώνιος and αἰδιος occupy a central position. Their meaning has become a focal point in contemporary theological controversies because differing interpretations often lead to markedly different conclusions regarding the final destiny of humanity.

The importance of these terms extends beyond lexical analysis. They belong to the fundamental vocabulary through which Scripture articulates divine permanence, covenantal faithfulness, eschatological hope, judgment, and salvation. Consequently, questions concerning their semantic range are not merely linguistic but also theological. Whether αἰώνιος should be understood primarily as denoting endless duration, participation in the age to come, or some combination of qualitative and temporal dimensions remains a matter of significant scholarly disagreement. Similar questions arise regarding the relationship between αἰώνιος and αἰδιος, particularly considering their differing patterns of usage within the Septuagint and the New Testament.

Modern discussions often approach these terms through the lens of later theological debates, sometimes if they possess fixed and self-evident meanings. Yet the history of biblical language suggests a more complex picture. The Hebrew concept of עולם developed within the historical and covenantal framework of Israel's faith, while its Greek renderings emerged within a linguistic environment shaped by both Jewish tradition and Hellenistic culture. As a result, the semantic development of these terms reflects a dynamic interaction between language, theology, and historical context.

This study examines the semantic relationship between עולם, αἰώνιος, and αἰδιος across the Old Testament, the Septuagint, and the New Testament. Attention is given to the continuity and transformation of meaning that occurred during the transition from Hebrew to Greek. The article further explores the significance of these developments for contemporary eschatological debates, especially those concerning eternal punishment and universal salvation.

The central argument advanced here is that while עולם, αἰώνιος, and αἰδιος belong to a common semantic field associated with permanence and transcendence, they cannot be treated as exact synonyms. Their meanings are shaped by literary, historical, and theological contexts, and therefore resist reduction to a single definition of eternity. A careful examination of their usage reveals a richer and more nuanced biblical vocabulary of everlastingness than is often assumed in modern theological discourse.

The Meaning of עולם in the Old Testament

Any discussion concerning the biblical concept of everlastingness must begin with the Hebrew term עולם, which constitutes the primary Old Testament expression used to describe permanence, continuity, antiquity, and future duration. The importance of the term extends beyond lexical considerations, for it provided the semantic foundation upon which the Septuagint translators and later New Testament authors built their understanding of eschatological realities. Consequently, contemporary debates concerning αἰώνιος and αἰδιος cannot be adequately understood apart from the Old Testament background of עולם.

Scholars have long recognized that עולם possesses a remarkably broad semantic range. Unlike later philosophical notions of eternity, the term does not primarily denote timeless existence or metaphysical infinity. Rather, it frequently refers to a duration whose limits are hidden from ordinary human perception. Ernst Jenni observes that the concept often points toward a temporal horizon extending beyond immediate experience, whether into the distant past or the indefinite future (Jenni 1997, 1076). The word therefore functions less as a technical definition of eternity and more as a description of realities whose temporal boundaries remain inaccessible or undefined.

This semantic flexibility is evident in the diverse contexts in which the term appears throughout the Hebrew Bible. In certain passages, עולם refers to remote antiquity. Deuteronomy 32:7 exhorts Israel to remember ‘the days of old’ (יָמֵי עוֹלָם), while Isaiah speaks of events occurring in former generations (Is 63:9–11). In such cases, the term clearly designates a distant historical past rather than eternity in the strict sense. The emphasis falls upon remoteness and continuity rather than upon infinite duration (Harris, Archer, and Waltke 1980, 672–3).

In other contexts, עולם points toward an indefinite future. One of the most frequently cited examples appears in Exodus 21:6, where a servant who voluntarily chooses to remain with his master is said to serve him לְעוֹלָם (‘forever’). Few interpreters understand this expression as implying endless existence. Rather, the phrase denotes permanence within the framework of the servant’s earthly life. The passage illustrates the contextual flexibility of the term and cautions against assigning a uniform meaning to every occurrence of עולם.

A similar observation may be made regarding cultic and legal institutions described as perpetual. Numerous ordinances within the Pentateuch are designated as

חֻקַּת עוֹלָם ('an everlasting statute'), including Passover observance (Ex 12:14), priestly functions (Ex 40:15), and various sacrificial regulations (Lv 16:34). From the perspective of later biblical developments, many of these institutions underwent transformation or fulfillment. Consequently, the designation עוֹלָם cannot automatically signify immutable perpetuity in every context. Instead, it frequently denotes enduring validity within the covenantal order established by God (Botterweck and Ringgren 1999, 545).

Particularly significant for the present study is the use of עוֹלָם in covenantal language. In Genesis 17:7, God promises Abraham: "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant" (בְּרִית עוֹלָם). Here the emphasis falls not merely upon duration but upon divine faithfulness and reliability. The covenant is everlasting because it remains grounded in God's enduring commitment rather than because the text seeks to define a precise temporal category.

The theological dimension of עוֹלָם becomes even more evident in the Psalms. Psalm 90:2 declares:

'From everlasting to everlasting you are God' (מִעוֹלָם וְעַד-עוֹלָם אַתָּה אֵל).

This expression approaches what later theology would describe as divine eternity. Yet even here the language remains poetic and relational rather than philosophical. The psalmist does not construct an abstract doctrine of timelessness; instead, he emphasizes God's transcendence over human mortality and historical change. Divine permanence is expressed through the language of immeasurable duration rather than through metaphysical speculation (Mays 1994, 289–290).

The prophetic literature further expands the semantic range of the term. Isaiah 45:17 proclaims:

'Israel is saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation' (תְּשׁוּעַת עוֹלָמִים).

The focus of the passage is not upon temporal measurement but upon the irrevocable character of God's redemptive action. The salvation promised by God is enduring, reliable, and beyond reversal. The theological force of the expression derives from divine faithfulness rather than from an explicit theory of eternity (Oswalt 1998, 211–2).

Perhaps the most important Old Testament text for subsequent eschatological debates is Daniel 12:2:

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life (עולם לְחַיִּי), and some to shame and everlasting contempt (לְחַרְפוֹת לְדָרְאוֹן עוֹלָם).”

This passage is significant for several reasons. First, it represents one of the clearest Old Testament references to resurrection and final judgment. Second, it places the destinies of the righteous and the wicked in parallel structures that would later influence New Testament eschatological language. Third, both ‘life’ and ‘contempt’ are qualified by עולם, thereby raising questions concerning the precise meaning of the term within an explicitly eschatological context.

Traditional interpreters have often understood the passage as teaching endless reward and endless punishment. Yet the text itself employs the same vocabulary already encountered elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures. Consequently, the meaning of עולם in Daniel cannot simply be assumed to differ from its broader Old Testament usage. Rather, the passage illustrates how the term could function within an eschatological framework while retaining the semantic flexibility characteristic of biblical Hebrew (Collins 1993, 398).

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that עולם cannot be reduced to a single lexical definition. Depending upon context, it may denote remote antiquity, enduring validity, covenantal permanence, divine transcendence, or eschatological destiny. The unifying feature is not necessarily endless duration but the notion of a reality extending beyond ordinary human horizons. The term therefore belongs primarily to the theological language of permanence and continuity rather than to the philosophical language of infinity.

This conclusion is of fundamental importance for the present study. When Jewish translators rendered עולם into Greek, they were not translating a technical concept of metaphysical eternity. Instead, they sought to express a rich and multifaceted Hebrew understanding of duration, permanence, and divine faithfulness. Their choice of αἰών and αἰώνιος would profoundly influence the language of the Septuagint, the New Testament, and the subsequent history of Christian theology. The transition from עולם to αἰώνιος therefore marks one of the most significant developments in the biblical vocabulary of everlastingness.

From עולם to αἰώνιος and αἰδιος: The Septuagint Background

The translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek marked a decisive stage in the development of biblical language. The Septuagint did not merely transfer words from one language to another; it also mediated theological concepts between two distinct cultural worlds. As Jewish translators sought to render Hebrew notions into Greek, they faced the challenge of expressing concepts that had developed within the historical and covenantal framework of Israel's faith by means of a language shaped by centuries of philosophical reflection. The translation of עולם constitutes one of the most important examples of this process.

The evidence of the Septuagint demonstrates that the translators overwhelmingly preferred αἰών and αἰώνιος as equivalents for עולם. This preference is visible throughout the Greek Old Testament and would later shape the theological vocabulary of the New Testament. Rather than introducing a new terminology derived from Greek philosophical discourse, the translators selected terms that were sufficiently flexible to preserve the semantic breadth of the Hebrew original (Tov 1999, 187–8).

The noun αἰών possessed a long history within Greek literature. In Homeric texts it often referred to life or lifetime, while later authors employed it to denote an age, epoch, generation, or world-order. By the Hellenistic period, the term had acquired a broad semantic range encompassing both temporal duration and cosmic structure (Liddell and Scott 1996, 45–6). Such flexibility made αἰών particularly suitable as a translation of עולם, which itself lacked a narrowly defined meaning.

The adjective αἰώνιος inherited this semantic diversity. In the Septuagint it regularly appears in contexts involving covenants, statutes, priesthoods, and divine promises. For example, the 'everlasting covenant' of Genesis 17:7 becomes διαθήκη αἰώνιος, while the priesthood of Aaron is similarly described through αἰώνιος language (Hatch and Redpath 1954, 53). These examples demonstrate that the translators regarded αἰώνιος as an adequate equivalent for the Hebrew concept of enduring covenantal permanence.

The significance of this translational choice becomes apparent when one considers that many realities designated as αἰώνιος in the Septuagint are not necessarily eternal in the philosophical sense. The Levitical priesthood, sacrificial regulations, and cultic institutions all receive the designation αἰώνιος despite belonging to historical structures that later biblical tradition understood as transformed or fulfilled. Consequently, the adjective cannot automatically be interpreted as denoting absolute and endless duration

in every instance. Rather, it frequently signifies enduring validity within the framework of God's covenantal economy (Silva 1994, 96).

Equally important is the relative absence of *αἰδιος* from the Septuagint. The adjective was well known in Greek philosophical literature and commonly expressed notions of permanence, necessity, and eternity. Plato and Aristotle employed it to describe realities that exist perpetually and independently of temporal change. Yet despite its availability, the Septuagint translators rarely used the term (Ramelli and Konstan 2007, 68–9).

This phenomenon has generated considerable scholarly discussion. One explanation is that the translators sought to preserve the historical orientation of biblical thought. Whereas Greek philosophical traditions frequently distinguished between temporal and eternal modes of existence, the Hebrew Scriptures generally expressed permanence through relational and covenantal categories. God's faithfulness, kingship, mercy, and covenant endure through history rather than existing outside it. In such a context, *αἰώνιος* proved a more suitable vehicle than *αἰδιος* for communicating biblical ideas of permanence (Rösel 2008, 132).

The contrast may be illustrated through the designation of God Himself. In Genesis 21:33, Abraham invokes the Lord as אֱלֹהֵינוּ (‘the everlasting God’). The Septuagint renders this expression as *θεὸς αἰώνιος* rather than *θεὸς αἰδιος*. The translators evidently considered *αἰώνιος* fully capable of expressing divine permanence without resorting to the more philosophically charged vocabulary of *αἰδιος*. This choice suggests that *αἰώνιος* had already become the standard medium through which biblical notions of permanence were communicated in Greek.

Particularly influential was the repeated use of formulae such as *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα* (‘forever’) and *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων* (‘unto the ages of ages’). These expressions became deeply embedded within Jewish liturgical language and later entered Christian worship. Their structure reflects a Semitic pattern of intensification rather than a philosophical definition of eternity. The emphasis lies upon permanence and continuity rather than abstract speculation concerning infinite duration (Louw and Nida 1989, 673–4).

The importance of the Septuagint for subsequent Christian theology can scarcely be overstated. The New Testament writers inherited not only individual words but an entire semantic framework. When they spoke of *ζωὴ αἰώνιος*, *κρίσις αἰώνιος*, or *βασιλεία αἰώνιος*, they did so within a linguistic tradition already shaped by centuries of Jewish

interpretation. Consequently, the meaning of *αἰώνιος* in the New Testament cannot be separated from its Septuagintal background.

This observation is particularly relevant to contemporary eschatological debates. Modern discussions often assume that *αἰώνιος* necessarily signifies endless duration because it is commonly translated as ‘eternal.’ Yet the evidence of the Septuagint demonstrates that the adjective functioned within a broader semantic environment shaped by the Hebrew concept of עולם. While this does not exclude the possibility that *αἰώνιος* may denote everlasting duration in specific contexts, it does caution against assuming such a meaning without careful contextual analysis.

The Septuagint therefore occupies a crucial mediating position between the Old and New Testaments. It preserves the semantic flexibility of עולם while simultaneously providing the vocabulary through which early Christianity articulated its understanding of salvation, judgment, and the age to come. The translators’ consistent preference for *αἰώνιος* and their corresponding avoidance of αἰδίοις represent important evidence for understanding the development of biblical language concerning everlastingness.

By the time the New Testament was written, *αἰώνιος* had already become the established term for expressing many of the realities associated with God’s redemptive activity. The theological significance of this development would become fully apparent in the writings of the New Testament authors, who employed *αἰώνιος* extensively while using αἰδίοις only sparingly. The reasons for this pattern, and its implications for contemporary eschatological interpretation, form the subject of the next section.

Αἰώνιος and αἰδίοις in the New Testament: Semantic Distinctions and Eschatological Implications

The New Testament represents the culmination of the semantic trajectory that began with the Hebrew concept of עולם and continued through its translation into Greek by the Septuagint. Within this corpus, *αἰώνιος* emerges as the dominant adjective used to describe eschatological realities, while αἰδίοις appears only rarely. This asymmetry has become a focal point in contemporary discussions concerning eternal punishment, universal salvation, and the nature of the age to come.

The adjective *αἰώνιος* occurs more than seventy times in the New Testament and is associated with a wide range of theological realities, including life, salvation, redemption, judgment, glory, and the kingdom of God (Bauer et al. 2000, 32–3).

Such diversity suggests that the term functions as a central category within New Testament theology rather than as a narrowly defined expression of temporal duration.

Perhaps the most influential occurrence of *αἰώνιος* appears in Matthew 25:46:

“And these will go away into eternal punishment (*κόλασιν αἰώνιον*), but the righteous into eternal life (*ζωὴν αἰώνιον*)”.

This verse occupies a pivotal position in Christian eschatology because it places punishment and life in direct parallel. Traditional interpreters have argued that the identical adjective applied to both realities implies an identical duration. If eternal life is understood as endless, then eternal punishment must likewise be endless (Morris 1965, 165; Peterson 1995, 68–79).

The strength of this argument should not be underestimated. The literary structure of the verse clearly links the destinies of the righteous and the wicked through a shared vocabulary. For many theologians, this parallelism has provided one of the strongest biblical foundations for the doctrine of eternal punishment.

At the same time, other scholars have noted that the adjective itself does not independently resolve the question. Because *αἰώνιος* derives from *αἰών* and possesses a semantic history shaped by the Hebrew concept of *עולם*, its meaning may involve qualitative as well as quantitative dimensions. According to this interpretation, *αἰώνιος* designates realities belonging to the age to come rather than specifying their duration in isolation from context (Ramelli 2013, 50).

This broader understanding finds support in other New Testament passages. In the Gospel of John, eternal life is not presented merely as a future reward but as a present participation in divine communion. Jesus declares:

“Whoever believes has eternal life.” (Jn 6:47)

The believer already possesses *ζωὴ αἰώνιος* in the present. Consequently, the expression cannot refer solely to endless future duration. Rather, it describes a mode of life characterized by communion with God and participation in the realities of the coming age (Ladd 1993, 568).

A similar pattern appears in Hebrews. Christ is said to have obtained ‘eternal redemption’ (*αἰωνίαν λύτρωσιν*) (Heb 9:12) and to be the source of ‘eternal salvation’ (*σωτηρίας αἰωνίου*) (Heb 5:9). In neither case does the adjective merely indicate duration. Instead, it emphasizes the enduring efficacy and definitive character of God’s redemptive action. The adjective therefore functions as a theological qualifier rather than a simple chronological marker (Bruce 1990, 207).

The semantic flexibility of *αἰώνιος* does not mean that the term excludes permanence. Rather, it suggests that permanence is expressed within a broader theological framework connected to God's eschatological purposes. The adjective may simultaneously imply duration, quality, and participation in the divine age.

The situation becomes particularly interesting when one turns to *αἰδίος*. Unlike *αἰώνιος*, this adjective appears only twice in the New Testament. The first occurrence is found in Romans 1:20:

"His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived."

Here Paul describes God's power as *αἰδίος*. The context concerns divine attributes revealed through creation and therefore addresses realities understood to transcend the temporal order. The adjective functions as a designation of permanence and transcendence associated directly with God's nature (Cranfield 1975, 123–4).

The second occurrence appears in Jude 6:

"The angels who did not keep their own position... he has kept in eternal chains (*δεσμοῖς αἰδίοις*) under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day".

In this passage, *αἰδίος* modifies chains associated with divine judgment. Significantly, the author does not employ *αἰώνιος* but instead chooses *αἰδίος*, the less common term. Although the precise significance of this choice remains debated, it demonstrates that both adjectives were available within the New Testament vocabulary and that the authors did not regard them as entirely interchangeable (Bauckham 1990, 55–56).

The coexistence of *αἰώνιος* and *αἰδίος* within the same corpus has generated considerable scholarly discussion. Some interpreters argue that *αἰδίος* expresses a stronger notion of absolute permanence than *αἰώνιος*. Because Greek philosophical literature frequently used *αἰδίος* to describe eternal realities in the strictest sense, its appearance in the New Testament has been viewed by some as evidence that the authors possessed a more precise term for expressing absolute eternity (Ramelli and Konstan 2007, 69).

Others remain cautious regarding such conclusions. They emphasize that meaning is determined by usage rather than by etymology or philosophical background alone. The fact that *αἰδίος* exists does not necessarily imply that *αἰώνιος* excludes endless duration. Language often contains multiple terms with overlapping semantic fields, and the presence of one word does not automatically restrict the meaning of another (Silva 1994, 138).

Nevertheless, the distinction remains significant. The New Testament writers overwhelmingly preferred *αἰώνιος* when speaking about life, judgment, salvation, punishment, and the kingdom of God. The consistent use of *αἰώνιος* in these contexts reflects continuity with the Septuagint and, ultimately, with the Hebrew concept of *עולם*. The biblical language of everlastingness therefore remains deeply rooted in the historical and covenantal worldview of Scripture.

From a methodological perspective, two conclusions emerge. First, *αἰώνιος* cannot simply be reduced to the philosophical notion of timeless eternity. Its semantic history reveals a broader range of meanings connected to age, permanence, divine purpose, and eschatological fulfillment. Second, the existence and limited use of *αἰδιος* indicate that New Testament Greek possessed more than one way of expressing permanence and eternity. The relationship between the two adjectives is therefore more complex than many translations suggest.

The New Testament evidence does not by itself settle debates concerning eternal punishment or universal salvation. It does, however, demonstrate that biblical language concerning everlastingness is more nuanced than is often assumed. The interpretation of *αἰώνιος* and *αἰδιος* must therefore proceed not only from lexical analysis but also from careful attention to literary context, theological purpose, and the broader scriptural narrative.

Contemporary Eschatological Debates

The semantic relationship between *עולם*, *αἰώνιος*, and *αἰδιος* has become increasingly important in contemporary theological discussions concerning eternal punishment, universal salvation, and the final destiny of creation. Although these debates often involve broader questions of divine justice, human freedom, and the nature of redemption, the interpretation of biblical language remains a central point of contention.

Traditional defenders of eternal punishment generally maintain that *αἰώνιος*, when used in eschatological contexts, denotes endless duration. According to this view, the adjective functions as the ordinary New Testament term for eternity and should therefore be understood consistently when describing both eternal life and eternal punishment. The parallelism of Matthew 25:46 is frequently cited as decisive evidence. Since the same adjective modifies both life and punishment, it is argued that the two

realities must possess the same temporal character (Morris 1965, 165; Peterson 1995, 79).

This interpretation is also supported by broader theological considerations. Scholars such as Robert Peterson and Michael McClymond argue that the doctrine of final judgment cannot be determined by lexical analysis alone but must be interpreted within the wider framework of biblical theology. From this perspective, the permanence of judgment is rooted not merely in the meaning of *αἰώνιος* but in the overall witness of Scripture concerning human responsibility, divine justice, and the consequences of rejecting God's grace (McClymond 2018, 511–2).

In contrast, several contemporary scholars have questioned whether *αἰώνιος* necessarily implies endless duration in every eschatological context. Their arguments frequently begin with the observation that the adjective derives from *αἰών* and emerged within the semantic environment of the Hebrew עולם. Consequently, they contend that *αἰώνιος* may sometimes denote what belongs to an age or to the age to come rather than what is infinite in a strictly temporal sense.

Among the most influential proponents of this position is Ilaria Ramelli, whose extensive research on the history of the doctrine of *apokatastasis* has drawn renewed attention to the semantic distinction between *αἰώνιος* and *αἰδιος*. Ramelli argues that the two terms should not be treated as exact synonyms and that the predominance of *αἰώνιος* in biblical eschatology leaves room for interpretations that emphasize the qualitative and age-related dimensions of the term (Ramelli 2013, 50).

A similar perspective appears in the work of David Bentley Hart. While acknowledging the complexity of the biblical evidence, Hart argues that many modern translations obscure important distinctions present in the original languages. In his view, *αἰώνιος* is more accurately understood as referring to realities associated with the age to come than as a straightforward equivalent of the modern concept of endless duration (Hart 2019, 79).

Thomas Talbott likewise maintains that the semantic flexibility of *αἰώνιος* should caution interpreters against drawing dogmatic conclusions solely from lexical considerations. According to Talbott, the New Testament language of judgment may be compatible with a broader vision of divine restoration than is often assumed within traditional accounts of eternal punishment (Talbott 2014, 170).

Despite their differences, both traditional and revisionist approaches face important methodological challenges. One of the most significant is the danger of

lexical reductionism, the assumption that theological questions can be resolved through the analysis of individual words alone. Modern linguistic scholarship has repeatedly demonstrated that meaning arises from context, usage, and discourse rather than from etymology in isolation (Barr 1961, 262; Silva 1994, 138).

This observation is particularly relevant to the interpretation of αἰώνιος. Even if the adjective originally referred to what belongs to an αἰών, its meaning in a specific passage must be determined by contextual factors. Likewise, the existence of αἰδιος as a distinct term does not automatically imply that αἰώνιος excludes the notion of permanence. The semantic relationship between the two adjectives is more complex than a simple opposition between ‘temporary’ and ‘eternal.’

The contemporary debate therefore reveals both the importance and the limitations of lexical evidence. On the one hand, the study of עולם, αἰώνιος, and αἰδιος has exposed assumptions that have often gone unquestioned within theological discourse. On the other hand, the interpretation of eschatological texts ultimately requires engagement with broader biblical, historical, and theological considerations.

What remains clear is that the biblical vocabulary of everlastingness cannot be reduced to a single concept of eternity. The linguistic evidence points instead to a rich and multifaceted tradition in which permanence, divine faithfulness, eschatological fulfillment, and transcendence are expressed through a variety of interconnected terms. Contemporary discussions concerning judgment and salvation continue to draw upon this vocabulary, demonstrating its enduring significance for Christian theology.

Conclusion

The present study has examined the semantic development of the terms עולם, αἰώνιος, and αἰδιος from the Old Testament through the Septuagint and the New Testament, as well as their significance in contemporary eschatological discussions. The evidence demonstrates that these terms belong to a common semantic field concerned with permanence, continuity, and transcendence, yet they cannot be treated as exact synonyms.

The analysis of עולם reveals that the Hebrew Bible employs the term with considerable flexibility. Depending on context, it may refer to remote antiquity, an indefinite future, covenantal permanence, divine faithfulness, or eschatological destiny. While certain passages approach the notion of eternity, the term itself does

not consistently denote metaphysical infinity. Instead, it frequently expresses realities whose temporal limits lie beyond ordinary human perception.

The Septuagint largely preserved this semantic flexibility by translating עולם through αἰών and αἰώνιος. The translators consistently preferred this vocabulary and rarely employed αἰδιος, despite its availability within the Greek language. This preference suggests a desire to preserve the historical and covenantal character of biblical thought rather than to adopt the more abstract language of Greek metaphysics.

Within the New Testament, αἰώνιος became the dominant adjective used to describe eschatological realities such as life, salvation, judgment, and punishment. At the same time, the limited but significant use of αἰδιος indicates that early Christian authors possessed more than one linguistic resource for expressing permanence and eternity. Although the semantic fields of αἰώνιος and αἰδιος overlap, the evidence suggests that they are not entirely interchangeable and that their distinctions deserve greater attention within biblical scholarship.

The study has also shown that contemporary debates concerning eternal punishment and universal salvation frequently depend upon assumptions regarding the meaning of these terms. Nevertheless, lexical analysis alone cannot resolve such theological controversies. Words derive their meaning from literary, historical, and theological contexts, and therefore must be interpreted within the broader framework of Scripture as a whole.

Ultimately, the significance of עולם, αἰώνιος, and αἰδιος lies not merely in their contribution to discussions of duration or eternity, but in the way they express the biblical understanding of God's enduring relationship with creation. A careful examination of these terms reveals a richer and more nuanced vocabulary of everlastingness than is often reflected in modern translations. Recognizing this complexity contributes to a more precise understanding of biblical eschatology and provides a firmer foundation for ongoing theological reflection on judgment, salvation, and the consummation of history.

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