

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 24

KEY TERMS: SIN, PART 2; WORLD

Why is all this even necessary? Sin permanently alienates mankind from a holy, righteous, and just God. Because He is holy and righteous, He cannot tolerate sin in His presence or even in His creation and because He is just, sin must be punished. The punishment for sin is death and without the shedding of blood there is no remedy for the sin problem. Christ Jesus satisfied these conditions.

Habakkuk 1:13 ¹³Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor....

Romans 6:23 ²³For the wages of sin is death...

Hebrews 9:22 ²²And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

“The vocabulary for sin in the OT is notably rich because of the strong spiritual and moral sense of the biblical faith. At least ten terms may be considered as closely related to this subject...” [*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, s. v. “חטא”].

“In OT times, sin over and above the guilt of the individual, was clearly recognized as a reality separating the individual and the nation from God. Yahweh himself is the yardstick for right and wrong. His covenant with the people, his commandments and law, his word spoken by chosen prophets—they all express his normative will. The fate of both individual and nation depended on Yahweh. Sin, guilt, and punishment were frequently not separated because sin is an estrangement from him, and thus brings harm and punishment on itself. The OT’s view of sin is the negative or reverse side of the idea of the covenant and hence is often expressed in legal terms. The nation’s history is often depicted as a history of apostasy, of punishment, and of Yahweh’s gracious intervention and of returning” [*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s. v. “ἁμαρτάνω”]. Sin separates us from God; it is both a falling away from a relationship toward God as well as disobedience to the commandments. Unbelievers are eternally separated from God and the remedy for that is faith in Christ Jesus. That is a justification salvation issue. Personal sins result in believers breaking fellowship with God within the family of God and they are restored by confessing that sin according to the dictates of 1 John 1:9. That is a sanctification salvation issue.

One of the primary Hebrew words for sin is חָטָא. It means to sin, to fail or miss, do wrong, to bear blame or loss, be guilty, commit an infraction of a law or agreement implying a penalty must be paid or forfeited. The word assumes an absolute standard of law and it means to miss or to fall short of that absolute standard. Context is important because it does bear non-theological meanings at times. When used as a noun, it can refer to a sin offering. This word for sin possesses the broadest range of meaning in Hebrew.

Genesis 39:9 ⁹“There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin [חָטָא] against God?”

It is noteworthy that Joseph understood Potiphar’s wife was asking him to commit an evil act against her husband, who was his master, and her marriage, but the sin that would have been committed was against God. “...But with Joseph there was one consideration which overshadowed all others. He knew that such actions were contrary to God’s revealed will. Even though the Mosaic laws were not yet written, there was enough primeval knowledge concerning God’s purposes for mankind available for him to know beyond question that adultery and fornication were wrong in God’s sight. He knew from the account of man’s creation that God had ordained the permanence and sanctity of marriage, and that none of man’s convenient excuses for breaking this ordinance were justified in God’s economy....All sin, and especially sin against the integrity of God’s first institution, that of marriage, must fundamentally be a sin against God” [Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific & Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings*, p. 561]. King David recognized this truth as well.

Psalms 51:4 ⁴Against You, You only, I have sinned [חָטָא] And done what is evil in Your sight...

As mentioned, the first sin was not Adam’s sin; it was Lucifer’s sin in heaven itself. The Bible does note the origin of that first sin. The word עָוֶל means wrong, evil, sin, injustice, dishonesty, or fault; it consists of acts, behavior, or persons which are contrary to a standard so possibly incurring guilt and punishment. The NASB and the ASV translate this word as “unrighteousness,” the HCSB translates it “wickedness,” the RSV, KJV, NKJV use “iniquity,” and the NET Bible translates it “sin.”

Ezekiel 28:15 ¹⁵“You were blameless in your ways From the day you were created Until unrighteousness [עָוֶל] was found in you.

In the Greek, the primary words for sin are ἁμαρτία, the noun, and ἁμαρτάνω, the verb. Unlike the Jewish concept of חָטָא, which can take on a non-theological meaning, the

Greek words have a moral sense. They are associated with rebellion, corruption, violation, trespassing, disobedience, and so on. These words mean sin or wrongdoing and they represent a state of sinfulness or an act contrary to the will and law of God.

1 Corinthians 15:3³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins [ἀμαρτία] according to the Scriptures,

1 Timothy 5:20²⁰Those who continue in sin [ἀμαρτάνω], rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning. ["of sinning" is not in the Greek text]

WORLD

There are a number of words in both Hebrew and Greek representing this concept that are not always properly interpreted by using the English word "world" in our English translations. Some of these words refer to the obvious physical properties of the material earth and its population but others represent intangible concepts.

The Hebrew word for the physical earth is אֶרֶץ meaning earth or land. It most frequently designates either the earth in a cosmological sense, in other words, the created earth, or as the land in a territorial sense primarily referring to Israel.

Genesis 1:1¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth [אֶרֶץ].

Genesis 15:18¹⁸On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land [אֶרֶץ], From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:

הָעוֹלָם refers to the generation then living, the duration of life, a life or lifetime, or the time span of one's life; it is an indefinite length of time, with a focus on the life lived in that time frame. The primary sense of the word is a duration or a span of time. When it is translated "world," it doesn't simply mean the earth, but rather the total scene of life and action on the earth.

Psalms 17:14¹⁴From men with Your hand, O LORD, From men of the world [הָעוֹלָם] [Septuagint γῆς, earth or land], whose portion is in this life, And whose belly You fill with Your treasure; They are satisfied with children, And leave their abundance to their babes.

Psalms 49:1¹Hear this, all peoples; Give ear, all inhabitants of the world [הָעוֹלָם],

עוֹלָם means everlasting, forever, and eternity; it pertains to an unlimited duration of time usually with a focus on the future. Context is important because it can also refer to the

long ago past. It corresponds to the Greek *αἰών* meaning age and is so used to translate this Hebrew word in the Septuagint. “The LXX [Septuagint] generally translates *olam* by *aion* which has essentially the same range of meaning. That neither the Hebrew nor the Greek word in itself contains the idea of endlessness is shown both by the fact that they sometimes refer to events or conditions that occurred at a definite point in the past, and also by the fact that sometimes it is thought desirable to repeat the word, not merely saying ‘forever,’ but ‘forever and ever.’ Both words came to be used to refer to a long age or period—and idea that is sometimes expressed in English by ‘world’ [Harris, Archer, Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s. v. “עוֹלָם”]. However, world does not seem to be a good interpretation of this word.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 [NASB] ¹¹He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity [עוֹלָם] in their heart...

Ecclesiastes 3:11 [KJV] ¹¹He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world [עוֹלָם] in their heart...

This verse seems to be saying that man inherently knows that he has an eternal destiny rife with meaning and purpose. Unger writes, “God has also set the world (*olam*, ‘eternity’...) in their (men’s) heart. It is this God-consciousness that the atheist seeks to convince himself and others does not exist. Because God has set eternity in our hearts (minds), the transient things of time do not satisfy. This deep sense of life hereafter shows that God is working in this world of vanity. That fact is pivotal in the argument moving to the climax that man knows instinctively that a day of reckoning is coming” [Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Commentary on the Old Testament*, pp. 1081-1082].

Keil and Delitzsch consider “world” to be an inadequate translation in this verse and they believe “eternity” is the better choice. “The author means to say that God has not only assigned to each individually his appointed place in history, thereby bringing to the consciousness of man the fact of his being conditioned, but that He has also established in man an impulse leading him beyond that which is temporal toward the eternal: it lies in his nature not to be contented with the temporal, but to break through the limits which it draws around him, to escape from the bondage and the disquietude within which he is held, and amid the ceaseless changes of time to console himself by directing his thoughts to eternity. This saying regarding [eternity] being planted in the heart of man, is one of the profoundest utterances of Koheleth. In fact, the impulse of man shows that his innermost wants cannot be satisfied by that which is temporal. He is a being limited by time, but as to his innermost nature he is related to eternity. That which is transient yields him no support, it carries him on like a rushing stream, and constrains him to save himself by laying hold on eternity....It is not enough for man to know that everything that happens has its divinely-ordained time. There is an instinct

peculiar to his nature impelling him to pass beyond this fragmentary knowledge and to comprehend eternity; but his effort is in vain, for 'man is unable to reach unto the work which God accomplisheth from the beginning to the end.' The work of God is that which is completing itself in the history of the world, of which the life of individual man is a fragment....A laying hold of this work is an impossibility, because eternity, as its name *olam* denotes, is the concealed, i.e., is both forward and backwards immeasurable. The [eternity] inherent in man thus remains under the sun unappeased. He would raise himself above the limits within which he is confined, and instead of being under the necessity of limiting his attention to isolated matters, gain a view of the whole of God's work which becomes manifest in time; but this all-embracing view is for him unattainable" [C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, "Ecclesiastes," pp. 6:687-688].

I went through all this simply to demonstrate how some Hebrew and Greek words translated "world" in our English Bibles can mask the true meaning of the original language. I would suggest that any native English speaking person would not get the same meaning out of this verse when reading the King James Version or the New American Standard Version. We simply do not think of "world" in an eternal way. This problem is much worse in our New Testament English translations of the Greek.

This verse, Ecclesiastes 3:11, coupled with Romans 1:18-20 has powerful implications for Soteriology and the preaching of the gospel. Human beings have an innate, God-given sense of eternity; they know there is more than this life now. They know there is something about eternity that is different. They know there is something greater than themselves involved in it. In addition to that knowledge, they know about God to some degree because He has made Himself known to everyone to that degree. They also see Him displayed in the majesty of His created order and they know He is the Creator God who brought it all into existence. They may deny this knowledge and they may reject this knowledge and they may hate this knowledge and they may wish they didn't have this knowledge, but they do have this knowledge. We are not starting with a blank slate when we preach the gospel to people. We are starting with a hostile slate that is deliberately suppressing the knowledge they have. We are starting with a slate that may not want to hear what we have to say. We may be preaching the gospel to people who are going to reject the message and the Lord it represents, but they will be without excuse because they KNOW!

Romans 1:18–19 ¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

Romans 1:20–21 ²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has

been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

תִּבְלָה means the world or earth; it refers to the whole expanse of the earth where people live which does not include the oceans and it can refer to the people who live in the world. It corresponds to the Greek οἰκουμένη referring to the inhabited earth and it is so used in the Septuagint.

Psalms 24:1 ¹The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, The world [תִּבְלָה], and those who dwell in it.

Isaiah 18:3 ³All you inhabitants of the world [תִּבְלָה] and dwellers on earth...

The amount of confusion caused in the Old Testament by using an inadequate translation of these Hebrew words and using our English word "world" instead is minimal in comparison to the problems that crop up in the New Testament when "world" is not the appropriate translation for the Greek word.

The first Greek word is αἰών and it means an era; it is a unit of time as a particular stage of history. The adjective αἰώνιος refers to being without beginning or end and to eternal. Scofield writes that "aion [is] a word which always refers to *time* (or eternity), and never means the earth, or people, or a part of the earth and the people dwelling therein, or the material universe" [C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Bible Study Correspondence Course*, 5:1380]. Scofield goes on to write that changing the verses from "world" to "age" will allow the Bible student to differentiate this age from past and future ages and that teaching is almost completely lost when the incorrectly translated word is used.

The noun αἰών is used in the Septuagint but nearly always as part of the prepositional phrase εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνα which literally reads "to the age," and it carries the meaning of "forever." When it is used as an adjective in the Septuagint it takes the form of αἰώνιος. For example, in Genesis 9:16 the Hebrew בְּרִית עוֹלָם literally meaning "a covenant of eternity" is in Greek διαθήκη αἰώνιον meaning "an eternal covenant."

Genesis 9:16 ¹⁶"When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant [בְּרִית עוֹלָם/Septuagint: διαθήκη αἰώνιος] between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

The New Testament often uses the Greek term ζῶν αἰώνιος meaning eternal life.

John 3:15-16 ¹⁵so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life [αἰώνιος ζωῆ]. ¹⁶“For God so loved the world [κόσμος], that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life [αἰώνιος ζωῆ].

John often presents the picture that he “understands eternal life in relation to Christ through faith, love, and obedience. The word ‘eternal’ here indicates a definite quality: it is a different life from the old existence typified by hate, lack of love, sin, pain, and death. Eternal life does not therefore just begin in the future—it is already the possession of those who have entered into fellowship with Christ. Thus John 3:15 speaks of having eternal life in the present. But there is also a temporal sense, so that ‘eternal’ indicates the quantity or length of this life: because it belongs to Christ, who himself is the Life, it has no end. It will not even cease at death” [*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. “αἰών”].

Let’s examine an example of how the mistranslation of αἰών can affect the correct interpretation of the Bible. In Matthew 13:39-40, The King James Version and the American Standard Version both translate this word as “world.” This gives the reader the impression that the harvest occurs at the end of the world as we know it immediately prior to the eternal state. But that is an incorrect interpretation. The proper interpretation of this Greek word is “age.” All the modern translations translate the word as such; these include the NASB, NET, HCSB, NKJV, RSV, and the NIV. There must be a reason for the change and indeed there is. This word does not mean “world;” it means “age.”

Matthew 13:39–40 [NASB] ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age [αἰών]; and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰“So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age [αἰών].

Matthew 13:39–40 [KJV] ³⁹The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world [αἰών]; and the reapers are the angels. ⁴⁰As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world [αἰών].

Most commentators today agree these verses are referring to this age, but they do not understand the Kingdom has been postponed and the next age is not eternity. The next age is the Messianic Kingdom on earth ruled by Christ Jesus on the Davidic throne in Jerusalem. Many theologians believe the Kingdom is now and brought by Christ at the first advent. “... ‘the end of the age’ was a common concept to describe the destruction of evil and the beginning of eternity” [Grant R. Osborne, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew*, p. 533]. Only dispensationalist theology correctly utilizes the meaning of αἰών. “This fact gives the ending of the time period suggested by these parables. ‘The end of the Age’ represents the conclusion of the present Age before Christ establishes the messianic kingdom. Thus

the parables in Matthew 13 cover the period of time from Christ's work on earth to the time of the judgment at His return" [Louis A. Barbierie, Jr., "Matthew" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 50].

Scofield, of course, worked from the King James Version of the Bible. He identified thirty-nine verses in which the KJV translated this world as "world" when it should have been, in his opinion, translated "age." However, this is not just a problem in the KJV; the NASB makes this mistake as well. This has profound implications for properly understanding dispensational distinctions in God's program.

Romans 12:2 ²And do not be conformed to this world [αἰών], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Using "age" instead of "world" would be in conformance with the Greek and it would, according to the analogy of Scripture, be more aligned with Paul's writing elsewhere. It would also be perfectly understandable. The NASB translates the same word "age" in Galatians 1:4 and Ephesians 2:1 and that makes the meaning very clear. We are not to be conformed to the spirit of this age. "World" is not as specific and it doesn't make things dispensationally clear but using age does make it clear.

Galatians 1:4 [NASB] ⁴who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age [αἰών], according to the will of our God and Father,

Galatians 1:4 [KJV] ⁴Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world [αἰών], according to the will of God and our Father:

Ephesians 1:21 [NASB] ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age [αἰών] but also in the one to come.

Ephesians 1:21 [KJV] ²¹Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world [αἰών], but also in that which is to come:

Why would the NASB translators use "world" in Romans 12:2 and use "age" in the other two Scriptures which are saying the same thing? I don't know. What I do know is that "age" would have been the correct translation of the Greek in all three Scriptures and the meaning would have remained clear. By using "world" in the KJV in Galatians and Ephesians, the meaning becomes obscured a bit. Ephesians is referring to this dispensation which will be followed by the Messianic Kingdom; it is not followed by another world to come.