

Everlasting, Eternal and For Ever and Ever

Describing the fate of mankind at the judgment, Jesus used an illustration of a shepherd dividing sheep from goats. Jesus said in Matthew 25 of the two groups (the goats and sheep representing the unrighteous and righteous) before him that the unrighteous would go to “eternal” punishment and the righteous to “eternal” life. Both these instances of “eternal” are the same Greek word. So shouldn't they mean the same length of time since they are used in a comparable way in the same sentence? Of course. The problem is not with the length of time but with what the punishment is considered to be. The common view is that eternal punishment for the unrighteous means that they will suffer torment for eternity. This has some inherent problems. Don't forget the unrighteous are not resurrected with immortal bodies. They are mortal, they cannot live forever! Being tormented for eternity is not death, it is lousy, even terrible, eternal life. Death means an end point, a cessation of life. So a person cannot be dying for eternity or it ceases to be dying and becomes suffering. ***But a person can be dead for eternity!*** Paul said, “the payment of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life...” [see [Romans 6:23](#)] In other words the ultimate result of sin is death, the opposite of eternal life. If the punishment for sin is death and that punishment is eternal, that means the person will be dead for eternity; not suffering for eternity. However, it does not preclude a person from suffering torment or anguish, but only until they are destroyed and dead forever. Jesus said, we shouldn't be afraid of someone who can only kill the body, but we should be afraid of him who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. [see [Matthew 10:28](#)] This destruction is worse than death, because in physical death there is the hope of life once again through resurrection. But if God destroys the soul and body in Gehenna after a brief resurrection, that's it, end of story, no more chances, no more hope. Some would argue you cannot kill the soul with literal fire or that you cannot kill the soul at all, because the soul is immortal. Even if you believe this is referring to an immortal soul, Jesus said it would be *destroyed* in Gehenna. [Whether or not the soul is immortal is a subject for a little later.] So what is the soul that Jesus referred to, that would be destroyed in Gehenna? The Greek word for soul used in Matthew 10:28 is translated elsewhere a variety of ways, such as; life, mind, or heart. It is translated as “life” almost as often as it is “soul.” It's up to the translator to determine what best fits the context. I think “life” fits better. So the meaning of this verse would be more like; don't be afraid of someone who can only kill the body but not take(or kill)

the [future chance for] life, instead be afraid of him who can destroy both the [chance for future] life and the body in Gehenna.

Jesus said of those in Gehenna; their worms do not die and the fire shall never be put out. [see [Mark 9:43-48](#)] If a burning Hell (i.e. Gehenna) is forever or eternal then that means these worms shall also inherit eternal life. Of course I'm kidding, but remember we are dealing with mortal bodies. If these worms are eating a mortal body for eternity and the unquenchable fire or fire that cannot be put out is burning this mortal body for eternity and the body is not consumed or destroyed then something doesn't add up. But wait, [Matthew 10:28](#) does say they will be destroyed, as does [2 Thessalonians 1:9](#), stating that the unrighteous will pay the penalty or suffer the punishment of *eternal* destruction. So what does, "their worms shall not die and the fire shall not be put out," really mean? The focus appears to be their purpose in consuming and destroying the body and life, not how long it takes. In other words their worms shall not die and the fire shall not be put out until they have completed their purpose and destroyed the ungodly totally and permanently for eternity. This view is also borne out by Jude, who states that Sodom and Gomorrah are an example of suffering the punishment of ***eternal fire***. [see [Jude 7](#)] That fire is not burning today, but the result and purpose (complete destruction) of that *eternal fire* is permanent or eternal.

It is significant to keep in mind that eternal and everlasting are a translation of the same Greek word and can be used interchangeably. Then we have the phrase "forever and ever" used to describe how long the smoke will ascend from the torture (by fire) of those who received the mark of the beast in [Revelation 14:11](#). "Forever and ever," is a very strong phrase and indicates never ending, as it is also used to describe how long God lives. But the only other usage of "forever and ever," in conjunction with smoke rising is much more limiting. This other instance is also found in the book of Revelation. There we find the description of a harlot (or prostitute), the symbol of the great city (called Babylon) that reigns over the kings of the earth. The city she represents will be desolated and burned with fire by the Beast and the kingdom comprised of ten kings. [see [Revelation 17:16-18](#)] Her smoke is said to rise, "forever and ever." [see [Revelation 19:3](#)] Here is a literal city (represented by a Harlot in John's vision) burned by the armies of an earthly kingdom and the smoke of her destruction rises "forever and ever." There is nothing supernatural about this and for the smoke to continue rising forever and ever would mean the fire of this literal city would have to be fed continually with objects to burn forever, even in the new earth. Once again something doesn't add up.

The phrases; "her smoke rises forever and ever" and "the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever," as with the phrases; "eternal fire," "fire that cannot be

extinguished,” “eternal punishment,” or “their worms do not die,” all have to do with symbolizing a destruction that will not be interrupted until it is complete. And, it is the death and complete destruction that is eternal and lasts forever and ever, throughout all eternity.

It is worth noting that languages can have peculiar meanings that can't always be derived from a word for word translation. Many of these ancient meanings or nuances are lost over time, even if the language continues to modern day. I believe that's what we are dealing with here, otherwise it would be a contradiction for a fire to be called eternal when it no longer exists [see [Jude 7](#)], or for smoke to ascend forever and ever from a burning city that will not exist in the new earth [see [Revelation 19:3](#)]. I think those that lived in the time of these writings understood that the *destruction* the fire caused or the *destruction* the ascending smoke represented was eternal, not the fire or the ascending smoke themselves.