

Daniel Affirms Eternal Rewards

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Are biblical rewards eternal or just temporary? The practical importance of this question is apparent. If rewards are just millennial in scope, the incentive they offer for living holy and loving lives is greatly diminished. The answer provided by *misthologists* (FG teachers who specialize in rewards¹) falls into basic categories: (1) no rewards are eternal; (2) some rewards are eternal; (3) all rewards are eternal. Those misthologists taking the second position pose that some negative rewards, such as the outer darkness, must be temporary, possibly not even lasting throughout the millennial kingdom. But if rewards are eternal, why assume that some negative rewards are not eternal? Other misthologists, taking the first option, allow that all negative rewards last throughout the millennial kingdom but then insist that all rewards cease at the end of the millennial kingdom. Other misthologists, taking the third option, affirm that all biblical rewards are fundamentally eternal.

The Hebrew and Greek terms are crucial. The Greek noun *aion* can refer to: (1) this *present age*, (2) *the future millennial age*, or (3) *eternity*. Although Greek dictionaries define the adjective form *aionios* as meaning *eternal* in the NT, some misthologists contend that *aionios* does not necessarily mean *eternal* in the NT. Accordingly, just because a reward is said to be *aionios* does not prove that it is eternal.

In Rev 22:5, *aion* cannot refer to the present age or the millennial age since the time being referred to is the eternal state after the millennium. The verse thus confirms that in the eternal state: “They will reign *forever and ever*.” Those misthologists who deny that rewards are eternal make two rejoinders: (1) *Aion* is being used in the plural in Rev 22:5. Granted, **the plural form of *aion* necessarily refers to *eternity***. But if used in the singular, whether *aion* means *eternity* must be determined from its context. (2) They also acknowledge that rulership is eternal in this context but then insist that at the end of the millennial kingdom, rulership undergoes such a fundamental change that it ceases to be a reward. Instead, it becomes a gift given to all kingdom inhabitants at that point.

Since the OT is the foundation for the NT, consider David’s warning: “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you *forever* [Heb. *ad*]” (1Chron 28:9). King Solomon will be rejected permanently from being king in the millennial and eternal kingdom because he forsook the Lord. The Hebrew word *ad* is used also in 1Chron 28:9, where David warns Solomon that if he forsakes the Lord, which he did, then the Lord would reject him *forever*. (The Greek expression is *eis telos*). Solomon was not rejected as king during his lifetime. Rather, he will be rejected as king in the eschatological future. Solomon will be one of those raised to experience the eternal misthological shame of being rejected as king *forever*.

Even more decisively, Daniel uses this same Hebrew word to describe the eternal misthological shame of unfaithful OT believers, which would include Solomon:

¹ Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, some to **eternal [Heb. *olam*; Gr. *aionios*] life**, but others to disgrace and **eternal [Heb. *olam*; Gr. *aionios*] shame**. ³ Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven. And those who instruct the many in righteousness will shine like the stars **forever and ever [Heb. *olam* and *ad*; Gr. pl. *aion*]**. (Dan 12:1-3; TM)²

¹ *Misthology* is the author’s coined term, derived from the Greek words *misthos* (*reward*) and *logos* (*teaching*), for the doctrine of rewards. *Misthological* means pertaining to rewards. *Misthologists* are Free Grace teachers who specialize in the doctrine of rewards. This material is a simplified abridgment from ch. 1 of the author’s book, *Rewards Are Eternal*. For an online video presentation of the heart of this material, see *Rewards are Eternal*. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6UJrL1sjqY>.

² *Translation Mine* (TM).

After contrasting the misthological fate of unfaithful believers in Dan 12:2, in terms of everlasting life versus everlasting shame, Daniel immediately adds, in the very next verse (Dan 12:3), that the wise will shine brightly *forever and ever*, illustrating the eternality of the misthological distinction. In Greek, this is a plural form of *aion*. In Hebrew, *forever and ever* is a combination of *forever (olam)* and *ever (ad)*. Even if one translates *olam* as *age*, the misthological distinction still lasts for *an age plus eternity*—thus *forever*. Wilkin correctly perceives this text is describing a misthological judgment dealing exclusively with believers before the millennium.³

First, Daniel says that *many* rather than *all* “of those who sleep” will be raised because he is not talking about a general resurrection of all people (*many ≠ all*). Some of the dead (i.e., the unsaved dead) will not be raised until the end of the millennium, a thousand years later. God will not raise any of the lost before the millennium. The *many* raised and judged by God at the time described by Daniel are believers raised at the beginning of the millennial kingdom.

Secondly, those raised in Dan 12:2 apparently have their names written in the Book of Life (cf. v. 1). Those Jews living at the end of the tribulation who have their names in the Book of Life *will be rescued*, while those Jews who are dead at the end of the tribulation and have their names in the Book of Life *will be raised*. This is a resurrection of only those who, at the end of the tribulation, have their names in the Book of Life.

Thirdly, those being raised are described as *those who sleep*. This imagery is certainly capable of describing dead believers (cf. Is 26:19). The context limits those who sleep in the ground (with their names in the Book of Life who are resurrected at this time) to believers at the end of the tribulational period.

Fourthly, the LXX word for *shame (aischune)* is the same word that Jesus uses concerning believers experiencing shame at His judgment (Rev 3:18). And, as Wilkin points out, the verbal form (*aischuno*) is used of believers being ashamed when the Lord returns in 1Jn 2:28, and a compound of it is used of their being put to shame in Mk 8:38. As for *disgrace (oneidismos)*, Paul says that believers may fall into disgrace (1Tim 3:7).

Overall, no compelling reason exists to believe that the second part of Dan 12:2 is not describing believers. Instead, significant arguments indicate that those resurrected to everlasting shame are believers. Therefore, concluding that the rewards being described in this verse are for faithful and unfaithful believers is best. The negative rewards are just as permanent as the positive rewards. The shame for the unfaithful believer will be just as eternal as the shine for the faithful believer.

The premillennial judgment being described in Dan 12:1-3 is part of a complex series of judgments taking place at the end of the tribulation. This judgment will include the Jewish believers who are alive when the Lord returns at the end of the tribulation. This Danielic judgment is predominantly a *Jewish Bema*, in contradistinction to the *Gentile Bema* (i.e., the *Sheep and Goats Judgment*) that occurs shortly thereafter. Daniel is describing a premillennial resurrection of OT (predominantly Jewish) believers so that they can be judged to determine what their status will be in the millennial kingdom. Whereas Matthew is dealing with *all the* [living] *nations* (Gentiles) at this judgment (Mt 25:32), Daniel is focusing on believers at this judgment, specifically Jewish believers.

Emphatically, Daniel does not limit the outcome of this Jewish Bema to the millennial age. Daniel is very clear that the results are eternal. Even if one insists upon translating the Hebrew word *olam* in Dan 12:3 as referring to the millennial age, the addition of the second Hebrew word *ad* moves beyond the millennial age to eternity. According to this rendering of the Hebrew text, the reward of shining brightly as a star lasts for *the millennial age plus eternity* (i.e., *forever*, pl. *aion*).

As to *aion* in Rev 22:5, the Danielic background for this passage is found in Dan 7:18. Because the rulership (possession of the kingdom) referenced in this Danielic verse is exercised during the millennial kingdom, it must be a reward limited to faithful believers. Both Dan 7:18 and Rev 22:5 use **the plural form of *aion*, which necessarily refers to eternity**. Therefore, Dan 7:18 must be expressing an eternal dominion. Yet this rulership is a reward that commences in the millennial kingdom! Because this rulership is eternal (according to the plural *aion*), it cannot be limited to the millennial kingdom. Because it is a reward (according to the context), it cannot be a gift. Thus, this rulership is an eternal reward.

Dan 7:18 Syllogism

1. The rulership exercised in Dan 7:18 is eternal.
2. The rulership exercised in Dan 7:18 is a reward.
3. Therefore, the rulership exercised in Dan 7:18 is an eternal reward.

³ Robert N. Wilkin, “Regeneration in the OT?” *GIF* (March-April, 2004).

The whole argument that rewards are not eternal is falsified by Dan 7:18. Furthermore, because misthologists disallow the possibility of *aion* and *aionios* referring simultaneously to both the gift and reward aspects of rulership, they cannot claim that (1) the rulership in Dan 7:18 is eternal but (2) the reward aspect of the rulership is only age lasting. Rather, their dichotomy requires that the rulership modified by *aion* be one or the other: a gift or a reward. Therefore, since the verse unquestionably is talking about possessing the kingdom/kingship as a reward for plural *ages*, it must be describing the possibility of possessing the kingdom/kingship as a reward during both the preliminary millennial age and the subsequent eternal state. Consequently, Rev 22:5 forms a suitable conclusion for Dan 7:18.

Whereas Dan 7:18 focuses on the beginning of this eternal misthological rulership during the millennial kingdom, Rev 22:5 focuses on the continuation of this eternal misthological reign during the eternal state. Some misthologists miss the point completely when they conclude erroneously that unfaithful believers not holding positions of power and authority during the millennial kingdom will have a part in this rulership during eternity (Rev 21:4; 22:2,5). Not so! Far to the contrary, those Christians who were denied positions of authority in the millennial rulership will not have a part in the eternal rulership! Rev 22:5 is the logical extension of Dan 7:18. The OT background found in Daniel has established that the misthological rulership entailed is an eternal reward that begins in the millennial kingdom. The eternal rulership confirmed in **Rev 22:5 is just a subset of the millennial-eternal rulership affirmed in Dan 7:18**. The plural *aion* of Dan 7:18 governs both the nature and duration of the reign. The nature of the reign is a reward, and its duration is forever. It is an eternal reward. This misthological rulership cannot be confined to the millennial kingdom. Rewards matter eternally!