

that mean *eternal* or *for ever and ever*. The Greek word αἰώνιος (aionios) which most versions translate *eternal* is the adjective from the Greek word αἰών (aion) which means *an age*. Its literal meaning is *age-lasting*. Similarly, the Greek words translated *for ever and ever* literally mean *to ages of ages*.

(I have explained the meanings of the Greek and Hebrew words in detail in the writings [Αἰών and אֱלֶם \(olam\)](#) and [Ever, Eon, Αἰών and Olam](#). See also [Universal Reconciliation](#).)

So yes, God's justice demands punishment for sinners; but justice also demands that this punishment is proportional to the sins they have committed.

There is no way that an eternity of never-ending horrific torment can be a just punishment for a limited duration of sin, however serious, in this present world. Neither is there any way that a God of justice can give the same reward for all believers and the same punishment for all unbelievers.

Conclusion

Traditional interpretations of the Bible have said that true believers in Jesus will all go to heaven when they die and spend eternity in total happiness; unbelievers will spend eternity in never-ending torment.

This doctrine, which appears to come from the Bible, is totally contrary to any form of justice. The same endless punishment for all unbelievers, no matter whether their lives were long or short, no matter whether their sins were small or great, no matter whether they ever heard the gospel or not, is completely impossible with a just God.

The truth is that there are no words in Greek or Hebrew that mean *eternal* or *for ever and ever*. The whole traditional doctrine of eternal punishment is based on wrong translation of Greek and Hebrew words.

Finally, we must ask what is the meaning of time? God created the whole material realm of time and space. At death we pass out of the material realm into the realm of spirit. In that realm, time words like day, year, month which all relate to the sun and the moon in this world lose their meaning. The word *eternal* also loses its meaning. We move into the hidden spiritual realm that is beyond our limited earthly understanding. There, God's perfect justice will be fully implemented.

God's Justice and Eternal Judgment

Introduction

Everyone who reads the Bible believes that God is a just God. The Bible states this many times:

- “His work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he” (Deut 32:4).
- “He loves righteousness and justice” (Ps 33:5).
- “He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow” (Deut 10:18).

People who believe the traditional teaching of eternal punishment are particularly strong in their belief in God's justice. He must punish sin, they say, because he is a just God.

Let's look more deeply at the nature of justice and see whether it is compatible with the punishment of eternal torment for sinners.

Justice in the Bible

In the Bible, punishment was always proportional to the offence committed - no more, and no less.

- “An eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life” ([Ex 21:23-25](#)). This was a law for limiting revenge.
- A thief had to make restitution for the thing which he stole, adding 20% to its value ([Lev 6:4-5](#)).
- If a man dug a pit and failed to cover it, and another man’s ox fell into the pit and died, the man who dug the pit was given the dead ox, but had to pay the price of the ox to the ox’s owner ([Ex 21:33-34](#)).
- A murderer was to be put to death ([Num 35:17](#)).
- “If anyone injures his neighbour, as he has done it shall be done to him” (Lev 24:19).
- A false witness was to be given the sentence that would have been given to the man whom he falsely accused ([Deut 19:16-19](#)).
- Sometimes judges could prescribe a limited number of lashes as punishment for unspecified offences ([Deut 25:1-3](#)).

Human Justice

In civilised societies, punishment is always proportional to the offence.

Murder is punished by capital punishment or life imprisonment.

Rape and violent offences normally lead to prison sentences of appropriate length.

Petty theft is punished by fines or community service.

Motoring offences lead to fines or in more serious cases, suspension or removal of driving licences.

Punishment is necessary to protect the public from harm and to discourage others from committing similar offences, but it is always proportional to the offence. No one is given life imprisonment for a relatively small offence.

Traditional Teaching

Traditional teaching states that people who confess their sins and put their faith in Jesus will be forgiven and spend eternity in great happiness in heaven, because Jesus has born the penalty of their sin; but God's justice demands that people who do not believe in Jesus must bear the penalty of their sins themselves. This penalty according to the Bible, they say, is eternal torment with fire and brimstone in hell.

According to traditional teaching all believers have the same reward: eternal bliss in heaven. People who have spent their whole lives believing in Jesus and following him have the same reward as people who have lived their whole lives in sin and finally repented on their deathbeds. **Is this justice?**

Conversely, people who have not believed in Jesus all have the same punishment: eternity in torment. Some have lived longer lives of 70 or 80 years. Others have died in childhood or youth. **Is the same punishment for all justice?**

A few people have lived very evil lives and been responsible for the death of thousands or even millions of their fellow humans. Others have lived relatively good lives and helped other people. **Is the same punishment for all justice?**

Some people have grown up in free countries where the gospel is preached and the Bible is taught in schools, but they have not accepted Jesus. Others have grown up under other religions or communism and scarcely even heard the name of Jesus. **Is the same punishment for all justice?**

Do you think Mahatma Gandhi and Adolph Hitler will endure the same eternal torment in the life to come?

The Bible

Does the Bible really support the doctrine of eternal punishment for unbelievers? No! This doctrine is based on wrong translation of the Greek and Hebrew texts of the Bible.

Although the word *eternal* and the phrase *for ever and ever* occur in most English translations of the Bible, there are no words in either Greek or Hebrew