

Bite Size Bible Study

Eternal Life Pt 1 #162

By Pastor Lee

But you, as a man of God, flee from these things; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faithfulness, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith, take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you testified so well to your faith before many witnesses. 1 Tim. 6:11-12 CJB

When we think of eternal life, we usually think of life after death – in heaven. While that is true it is only a partial definition. We often forget about another aspect of eternal life; it starts now in the present, not just after we die. In the Jewish culture of around the time of Jesus, they discussed what it meant to live in eternity while here in this world. Often when Jesus uses the term "eternal life", he also seems to be referring to the present world. If we read His words thinking only about heaven, we could easily miss His point. Not only does looking at this Jewish idea clarify our reading, but it will also give us wisdom about to live in today's world.

In the Talmud, there are several references to the rabbinic concept of **Hayei Olam** (Hi-YAY Oh-LAHM) – meaning *eternal life*. Often it was contrasted with **Hayei Sha'ah** (Hi-YAY Sha-AH) – meaning *fleeting life*, or earthly life. Usually they didn't speak of one as before death and the other after death. Rather, *hayei olam*, was "lasting life", and it referred to living a life focused on matters of eternal importance. Living now as if we were living for eternity. In contrast, *hayei sha'ah* was a life that was only concerned about the short-term material needs of today; that is working, making money, eating, etc.

The rabbis considered the study of Scripture one of the most important ways one could partake in eternity while on earth. A story is told about a rabbi who spent years in study of the Scriptures, and then walked past farmers tilling their land. He remarked, "they have abandoned lasting life (*hayei olam*) and involve themselves instead with fleeting life (*hayei sha'ah*)." The rabbis had a humorous way of describing a person who only lives for today. They said that they had "*the soul of a cow*", meaning that they live like a cow, standing all day long, slowly munching grass, only thinking about where the next mouthful will come from. If people only focus on daily cares and material things, they live life no more focused on eternity than a cow does.

Jesus often mentions "eternal life". He often he seems to be referring to *hayei olam*; having a life in eternity here and now. *Yeshua answered them, "Yes! I tell you that everyone who has left house, wife, brothers, parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, will receive many times as much in the 'olam hazeh (this world), and*

in the 'olam haba (world to come) eternal life." Luke 18:29-31 CJB

Using our more typical definition of life after death, this line doesn't quite make sense. We may try to read it as, "We will have eternal life after we die if we know God and Jesus Christ." But if we hear its intent to focus on the present life, we understand that Jesus is saying that knowing God intimately and living with Jesus Christ as Lord, here and now, is living as if you were already in eternity. This makes a lot of sense – what in our lives has more eternal significance than that?

Jesus makes one comment about eternal life that makes little sense without the knowledge of his Jewish context. The rabbis considered the study of the Scriptures truly living out one's "eternal life" – rising to a higher reality beyond everyday life by contemplating God's eternal truths. Jesus said: *You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.* John 5:39-40 NIV

Jesus is speaking to some of his fellow Jews who did not see that the Scriptures ultimately pointed toward him. Eternal life is not had even in studying the Scriptures, but in finding and following Jesus in those Scriptures is the true beginning of eternal life.

Paul points out that just as Jesus died and rose again into eternal life.

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.... Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.... In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body ... but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. Rom 6:6-13 NIV

To Paul, if we now are living in our "eternal life" we should not let sin reign over us, but live the way God designed us to live. Just as Jesus now has eternal life, we have it too, here and now, and extending after we die. We need to *take hold* of our eternal lives and live them well now, not just wait for them in the future.

Ref. Eternal Life by Lois Tverberg

Next week Pt 2 – Ways of Living an Eternal Life Now

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