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ECCLESIASTES 1:4

THE SCRIPTURE CONCERNED

> *One* generation passeth away, and *another* generation cometh: BUT THE EARTH ABIDETH FOR EVER. (Ecclesiastes 1:4 AV)

THE MEANING PEOPLE DRAW FROM THIS TRANSLATION

People may feel that this verse is proof that this planet earth will exist FOR EVER into the future. But that is simply not correct.

THE MISTRANSLATION

Biblical Hebrew did not have a word to distinguish between the concept of "for a long time" and "for ever". Both these concepts were expressed by the one Hebrew word "olam". It is always the context that makes clear whether we should translate "olam" into English as "for a long time", or whether we should translate it as "for ever".

In Ecclesiastes 1:4 "olam" has been translated in the KJV as "for ever", but that is a mistake. In this verse it really should have been translated into English as "for a long time".

Here is how Gesenius defines this Hebrew word "olam" in his Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon:

> "properly what is hidden, specially hidden time, LONG, the beginning or end of which is either uncertain or else not defined; eternity, perpetuity. It is used of time long past, antiquity, from a long time ago ... IT DOES NOT ALWAYS DENOTE THE MOST REMOTE ANTIQUITY ..." (my emphasis)

When examining this statement in Ecclesiastes 1:4 we must obviously take statements about this earth made in other Scriptures into account. And other Scriptures make quite clear that this present earth is going to vanish away and be replaced by a totally "new earth" at some point in the future.

Here are some clear statements about the earth found in other passages.

> But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which THE HEAVENS SHALL PASS AWAY with a great noise, and THE ELEMENTS SHALL MELT WITH FERVENT HEAT, THE EARTH ALSO and the works that are therein SHALL BE BURNED UP. (2 Peter 3:10 AV)

Peter is clearly stating that this entire universe is going to pass away! It is going to be destroyed and it will disappear! That includes this planet earth. This earth is going to be COMPLETELY BURNED UP!

> *Seeing* then *that* ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE DISSOLVED, what manner *of persons* ought

> ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, (2 Peter 3:11 AV)

Again, Peter clearly meant to convey to us that this present universe is going to disappear!

> Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein THE HEAVENS BEING ON FIRE SHALL BE DISSOLVED, AND THE ELEMENTS SHALL MELT WITH FERVENT HEAT? (2 Peter 3:12 AV)

Peter had no doubts that this present universe would be "dissolved" and it would disappear. And not only this earth, but especially also THE HEAVENS!

> And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for THE FIRST HEAVEN AND THE FIRST EARTH WERE PASSED AWAY; and there was no more sea. (Revelation 21:1 AV)

John saw a vision in which this whole present universe, including our earth, just passed away; it disappeared! THEN it was replaced by a NEW universe, including a NEW earth.

> (Psalm102:27) They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and THEY SHALL PASS AWAY; (Psalm 102:26 JPS)

Again the symbolism here is that this universe will be exchanged for a completely new one.

> And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: (Hebrews 1:10 AV)

Here Paul is very clearly speaking about the creation of the entire universe. That is Paul's subject in verse 10. Then Paul continued to say:

> THEY SHALL PERISH; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and THEY SHALL BE CHANGED: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail. (Hebrews 1:11-12 AV)

Paul meant that this earth would cease to exist.

All these Scriptures, and there are others as well, show that this planet earth is going to be destroyed completely, and that it will vanish away. This is further discussed in the article "A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH" in the main article directory of this website.

Ecclesiastes 1:4 is not intended to say that this planet earth will exist for ever. So how did we get this incorrect translation into English?

THE SOURCE OF THIS WRONG TRANSLATION

Neither biblical Hebrew nor biblical Greek had a specific word to convey the concept of "for ever". In both these languages the concept of "for ever" was presented by the word that also meant only "for a long time", WITHOUT necessarily being "for ever". But Latin had a way of distinguishing between "for ever"

and "for a long time".

Let's see the Greek LXX text for this verse:

> genea poreuetai kai genea erchetai kai HE GE EIS TON AIONA ESTEKEN (Ecclesiastes 1:4 LXX)

The expression "HE GE EIS TON AIONA ESTEKEN " means "the earth stands firm into the age". The expression "into the age" meant "for a long time", and was also used to convey the concept of "for ever". It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "olam".

But the Latin language had a way of differentiating between something being "for ever" or "eternal", and something only being "for a very long time". So here is how Jerome rendered this verse in his Vulgate translation:

> generatio praeterit et generatio advenit TERRA VERO IN AETERNUM STAT (Ecclesiastes 1:4 VULGATE)

The expression to notice is "terra vero in aeternum stat" which means "in truth the earth stands ETERNAL, FOR EVER". The Latin "aeternum" is the source of our English word "eternal".

So where the Hebrew and then later the Greek LXX had used a word that means "for a long time", the Latin went one step further by rendering this as "eternal", or "for ever". This error was then copied by the translators of the English language KJV. And that is how it appeared in our English translations.

THE CORRECT TRANSLATION

> One generation passeth away, and *another* generation cometh: but the earth abideth for a long time.” (Ecclesiastes 1:4)

THE MEANING OF THIS CORRECT TRANSLATION

Compared to the succession of human generations, the earth abides for a very long time. But this is not the same as saying "for ever".

IN SUMMARY

This verse has to be understood in the context of the many other Scriptures, which plainly speak about the earth at some future point passing away and disappearing, to be replaced by a "new earth". This subject is also discussed in more detail in the article mentioned above.

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