

Our eternal universe

I appreciate the insights John Hartnett provides in his writings (e.g. *Starlight, time and the New Physics, Dismantling the Big Bang*, and various articles in the creationist journals). I also agree with him when he says, in *Our eternal universe*,¹ that “Only the eternal God, the Creator of all, can preserve that which has a natural tendency to decay.” There will be no net increase in entropy in the ‘new heavens and earth’ because God will continually, and perpetually, maintain a zero-sum balance for increases/decreases in entropy. However, I believe that Dr Hartnett has overstated his claim that this *present* universe will be eternal. He quotes from Psalms 148:6 and 89:37 to substantiate his claim. He says:

“These verses from the Psalms are not prophetic, nor are they intended as allegory, or just poetry but are stating facts regarding God’s creation. That is, that the sun, the moon, and the stars in the cosmos are to be there forever. The Hebrew word used in both Psalms 89:37 and 148:6 is עֹלָם [sic] (‘owlam), which generally has the meaning of ‘timeout of mind (past or future)’, but practically means ‘eternity’ and is frequently translated as ‘always’.”

*Brown-Driver-Briggs*² indicates that עֹלָם can mean ‘long duration’ and does not necessarily have to mean ‘endless’ or ‘eternal’ time into the future, as Hartnett suggests: “So my argument here is that based on Psalms 148:6 and 89:37 God will preserve the starry heavens forever, i.e. for an eternity.” The Hebrew word עֹלָם can mean ‘always’ in a time-bound context—i.e., as long as the applicable time-based circumstances continue

(e.g. Exodus 19:9; Isaiah 14:20, 34:10, 47:7; Ezekiel 37:25 etc.).

Hartnett says that Psalm 148:6: “... is a clear reference to a created yet an eternally existing universe. That is, a universe that was created in the finite past yet exists eternally, never to vanish or be eviscerated. The sun, moon, and stars are specifically mentioned, that they will exist, ‘for ever and ever’. It is by decree of the Creator and that decree will never be cancelled.”

However, we should interpret Psalm 148:6 and Psalm 89:37 in the context of what Peter says:

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the *heavens will pass away* with a roar, and the *heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved*, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since *all these things are thus to be dissolved*, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which *the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!* But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells [emphasis added].”³

Peter states explicitly that this current universe is not eternal and will be consumed at the consummation of this current age. As one commentator stated regarding Psalm 148:6, “He hath also stablished them for ever and ever” (comp. Psalm 89:37). The expression, ‘for ever and ever’, must not be pressed. It means ‘for all *time*’—while heaven and earth endure—but does not imply an absolute perpetuity.⁴

James R. Hughes
Scarborough, Ontario
CANADA

References

1. Hartnett, J.G., Our eternal universe, *J. Creation* 30(3):104–109, 2016.
2. Brown, F., Driver, S.R. and Briggs, C.A., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp. 761–763, 1977.
3. *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*
4. Spence-Jones, H.D.M. (Ed.), *Psalms*, vol. 3, Funk & Wagnalls, London, p. 407, 1909.

» John Hartnett replies:

The main criticism here is that Hughes contends that I must use 2 Peter 3:10–13 to interpret the meaning of the Hebrew word עֹלָם (‘owlam), translated ‘forever’ in English in Psalms 148:6 and 89:37. However, I disagree.

I do not interpret 2 Peter 3:10–13 as literal melting of the elements of creation itself as do many others. Like other passages used to support a literal destruction of the starry heavens (Revelation 6:14 and Isaiah 34:4) I take a different approach to interpreting their meaning, which leads to a refurbishment of the earth and the heavens around the planet but not to the total destruction of all stars in the universe and planet Earth. In reference to 2 Peter 3:10, I wrote in the article:

“The ‘elements’ there are not subatomic particles but *the fundamental principles* upon which the earth has been governed to this point in time. At the *day of the Lord*, when Christ returns (here’s where eschatology comes in), God destroys the ‘old order’ bringing in His rule not only in heaven but in earth. The passage “*the earth also and its works will not be found*” makes no sense interpreted literally. The ‘earth’ symbolizes earthlings, inhabitants of the earth, not the planet itself. This is evident because the ‘earth’ has ‘works’ and only people can have works. It is true that the works include mankind’s creations, and I believe that that is one reason

God will refurbish the earth. But when God judges those works by fire at the *great white throne judgment* (Revelation 20:11) it is people He will judge and those people not found in the *book of life*—i.e. not saved—will be cast into the *lake of fire*” (Revelation 20:13–15).

Now looking at Revelation 6:14: “And *the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together*; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places [emphasis added].”

It cannot mean the destruction of the starry heavens either. From the second part, it could signify the refurbishment of the atmospheric heavens because it seems to indicate from “every mountain and island were moved” that the earth’s surface is reworked. This argument is strengthened by Revelation 21:1 itself which concludes with “there was no more sea”. So *if this has a literal fulfilment* it must occur with the refurbishment of the earth surface, thus the earth survives but the surface is remade. Then why not “heaven” also, meaning the atmospheric heaven around the earth?

The preceding verse Revelation 6:13:

“And *the stars of heaven fell to the earth*, even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind [emphasis added].”

The stars of heaven cannot *literally fall* to the earth. Under the historical interpretation of biblical prophecy Revelation 6:13 is interpreted to mean the dethroning of earthly rulers. It is *symbolic language*. Therefore, these verses probably have no literal fulfilment.

Similarly with Isaiah 34:4:

“And *all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll*: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falls off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree [emphasis added].”

(Note Revelation 6:13–14 is a reference to Isaiah 34:4.)

Chapter 34 of Isaiah describes God’s judgments on the wicked. If verse 3, “the mountains shall be melted with their blood”, cannot be literal, then why assume that the following “And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved ...” (verse 4) to be literal?

Of Isaiah 34:4, John Gill¹ wrote: “*And all the hosts of heaven shall be dissolved*. ‘Pine away’, as with sickness, grow languid, become obscure, lose their light, and be turned into blood and darkness; this figure is used to express the horror of this calamity, as if the very heavens themselves, and the sun, and moon, and stars, were affected with it; see (Isaiah 13:10) *and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll*; a book, or volume, which when rolled up, one letter of it could not be read; and it was the manner formerly of making and writing books in the form of a roll; hence the word volume; and here it signifies that there should be such a change in the heavens, as that not a star should be seen, much less the sun or moon; and may signify the utter removal and abolition of all dignities and offices, supreme and subordinate, civil and ecclesiastical, in the whole Roman jurisdiction; thus the destruction of Rome Pagan is described in (Revelation 6:14) ... from whence the language seems to be borrowed: *and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree*; that is, the stars should fall down: by whom may be meant persons in office, that made a considerable figure; who shall fall from their stations, in which they shone with much splendour and grandeur, as leaves fall from trees in autumn, particularly the vine; or as unripe and rotten figs fall from the fig tree when shaken by a violent wind; the same metaphor is used

in (Revelation 6:13) [underlined emphasis added].”

On the following verse, Isaiah 34:5, John Gill wrote:

“*For my sword shall be bathed in heaven ...* That is, the sword of the Lord, as it is called in the next verse (Isaiah 34:6), and it is he that is speaking; it designs the vengeance of the Lord, the punishment he will inflict on the wicked, said to be ‘bathed in heaven’, because determined and prepared there; the allusion may be to the bathing of swords in some sort of liquor, to harden or brighten them, and so fit them for use. Kimchi renders it, ‘my sword’ which is ‘in heaven shall be bathed’, that is, in the blood of the slain; ‘heaven’ may denote ... the whole Roman Pagan empire in (Revelation 12:7) and may design the principal men in it, those that are in the highest places and offices, in whom the sword of the Lord shall be first drenched, and be as it were satiated and inebriated with the blood of them”

John Gill understood this verse as a metaphorical description of the removal of those in power; *nothing to do with a literal heaven and stars falling or dissolving*.

Therefore 2 Peter 3:10–13, Revelation 6:14 and Isaiah 34:4 cannot be used to straightjacket a literal interpretation on the destruction of the whole starry universe, and thus it follows one does not interpret the Hebrew word עולם (‘owlam) in Psalms 148:6 and 89:37, translated ‘forever’, as not meaning ‘eternal’ because of a prior commitment to a certain eschatology.

John G. Hartnett
 bible-science-forum.com
 Australia

References

1. John Gill’s Exposition on the Entire Bible, www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/.