

Our eternal universe

In response to John Hartnett's *Our eternal universe* (30(3):104–109), one is reminded of the danger of approaching the biblical text on terms other than the text's own. Dr Hartnett has approached the text from a cosmological rather than eschatological viewpoint and has reached conclusions that are not substantiated by an analysis of all the relevant texts.

First, Hartnett has not consulted qualified Hebrew experts regarding the usage of the Hebrew words he cites. He has also not interacted with how his definition of these words has implications for creation cosmology, and only thrown out a vague accusation of eisegesis towards people who hold a definition with which he disagrees. One would hope for a more substantial argument.

Second, the burning bush has nothing to do with eschatology as such, so to use whatever is happening regarding entropy in that passage to argue for an eschatological position is flawed. I would argue that speaking about a miracle in scientific terms may be a definitional exercise in confusing categories, and then to import questionable conclusions from this miracle to *eschatology* makes another gigantic, unsubstantiated (in the most literal sense—he does not justify it at all) leap. Of *course* God can reverse entropy; God can do anything. The question is: what does the Scripture teach God *will* do regarding the New Heavens and Earth?

Third, *ōlām* does not always mean 'forever'. While it may *sometimes* hold this meaning, its more-common meaning is "long time, duration".¹ No one would argue that Ecclesiastes 1:3–11 says that the earth is infinitely old, yet *ōlām* is used for the length of the past duration of the earth in that

passage.² It is also a problem to use *poetic* passages to interpret *didactic*; sound exegesis demands we do the opposite.

Fourth, his misuse of the New Testament shows that Hartnett has not consulted even the most basic scholarly sources; in fact, he does not even pretend to have done so. His opinion ("I say" ... "My claim" ... "I would take it") is presented as definitive, even when it disagrees with the vast majority of NT scholarship. For instance, he interprets Matthew 24:35 as "Jesus is not actually saying heaven and earth will pass away, but that it would be easier for them to do so than it would be for God's words to fail". But that is *precisely* the opposite of the point that Matthew is making. The vast majority of New Testament scholarship realizes that Jesus is saying that even the things that seem most permanent—the heavens and earth—will pass away, but in contrast God's Word will never pass away.^{3–6} Furthermore, the Greek word translated "will pass away" is in the future indicative, meaning Jesus is communicating it *will* happen (as opposed to it being stated in more hypothetical terms). It is egregious to appeal to Luke to negate the clear contrast present in Matthew, because Luke records Jesus making a *similar* (not identical) statement in a much *different* context, as anyone can see who bothers to read the surrounding context.

Then he makes the leap from subjective argumentation based on personal opinion to the *assumption* that these are accurate to form the basis of his next level of argumentation: "Once we accept the fact [!] of the eternal preservation of the heavens" This question-begging is not how scholarship should be done.

Fifth, the idea of the destruction and restoration of the universe, and its parallel with death and resurrection of believers, is so pervasive throughout Scripture. Therefore, to assert that

this restoration amounts to a simple reversing of entropy and to interpret all the destruction passages figuratively is simplistic and disrespectful to the text. The word limit does not allow me to draw out the theme here, but my forthcoming book, *From Creation to Salvation* (CBP, 2017), traces the 'uncreation' theme and its importance to a biblical creationist view.

There can tend to be a distrust of biblical studies as a discipline because of its liberal wing, and perhaps this is why Hartnett neglected to cite even one expert. But we cannot afford to do scholarship in a vacuum. Hartnett's paper would have benefitted from outside expertise; the lack of it means that his paper suffers from several flaws the reader must try to overlook before even weighing the merits of his position.

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References

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5. Keener, C., *The Gospel of Matthew: A socio-rhetorical commentary*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 590, 2009.
6. Lenski, R.C.H., *The Interpretation of the Gospel of St. Matthew*, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, MN, pp. 953–954, 2008.

» John Hartnett replies:

My article is an essay exploring the idea that the universe—the total sum of all that exists including all stars and galaxies—may, in fact, be eternal. As I pointed out there are scriptures in Psalms 89 and 148 that support such a notion. I admit that I have taken a different eschatological viewpoint to what has been promoted