

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 established 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