

# Creation and the Fate of the Universe

Danny R. Faulkner and Robert Hill\*

## Abstract

**W**e examine two biblical positions that recent creationists have taken concerning the ultimate fate of the universe. Some believe the destruction of the heavens spoken of in 2 Peter 3 refers to the atmospheric heaven only. Another possibility is that the astronomical and cosmic heavens will share in this destruction. We respectfully disagree with those who hold to the former position. Those who think that the astronomical heavens will not be destroyed believe that the stars will continue to exist forever. Though this amounts to a sort of eternity, the stars are not fully eternal, because they came into existence recently in the past.

## Introduction

While creationists long ago established the premises and considerable detail of the recent-creation model, very few creationists have written about the future of the universe. A few years ago we discovered that Hugh Ross (2001) had compiled a list of ten differences between the teachings of recent creationists and day-age creationists. The fifth item on this list brought this shortage of creationary discussion about the future of the universe to our attention. The fifth point stated that recent creationists (or calendar-day creationists) believe the

stars and the universe are eternal, while day-age creationists believe the stars and universe are not eternal. We, the authors of this paper, were uncertain of the basis for this claim, because we certainly do not believe in the eternity of the stars and the universe and we did not think such a belief was common among recent creationists. Therefore, one of us contacted Hugh Ross requesting support for his claim.

We found Hugh Ross to be very helpful in providing further information, for which we are thankful. He asked to make three things plain in our discus-

sion of this matter. First, Ross has not committed this list to print, because the points require explanation and qualifications for a general audience. Second, the comparisons are generalizations only. Third, Ross recognizes that there are disagreements among recent (calendar-day) creationists on these points, just as there are disagreements among day-age proponents. Again, we wish to thank Ross for his cooperation in this matter.

We found that some of the references from the creation literature that Ross offered did, at least when taken at face value, seem to support this claim. Most of these references were to the work of Henry M. Morris (e.g. Morris, 1997; Morris and Morris, 1999), perhaps the creationist who has published the most on the subject of the fate of the universe. Herein we offer a clarification of the is-

\* Danny R. Faulkner, Ph.D., Answers in Genesis, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, University of South Carolina Lancaster

Robert Hill, Ph.D., Bob Jones University, Astronomy Program

Accepted for publication May 28, 2013

sues involved, as well as a suggestion of what we think is the proper biblical view of the future of the universe.

### **What Does *Eternal* Mean?**

We must first tackle the meaning of the word “eternal,” for the word has at least two connotations. One meaning is to have neither beginning nor end, while the other is to have a beginning but not an end. The correct biblical view of God is that He alone is eternal in the first sense. Created things, such as the soul of man, can be eternal only in the second sense. The Genesis creation account makes it very clear that God created matter in the beginning, and so matter, too, cannot be eternal in the first sense. That is, material things, such as stars and the universe, can be eternal only in the sense that they may have a beginning but have no end.

We do not hold this view, but apparently some creationists do hold this position. However, we are concerned when people use the word “eternal” to describe this belief, because when astronomers and cosmologists speak of the eternity of the universe, they nearly always—if not always—mean a universe that has neither beginning nor end. Therefore, describing those creationists who believe this universe will not end as believing in an *eternal* universe can inadvertently associate them with those who believe in a truly eternal universe, which has no beginning or end. People who believe in a truly eternal universe subscribe to the steady-state theory or some variation thereof and are nearly always atheists.

### **Biblical Issues**

What does the Bible say about the fate of the universe? Psalm 102:25–26 states

Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of

them shall wax old like a garment: as vesture shalt though change them, and they shall be changed.

This passage contrasts the fact that God is superior to His creation in that He made everything in the world. Unlike Him, this creation will grow old and wear out, but God will one day renew and change the creation. Incidentally, Hebrews 1:10–12 quotes this passage. Isaiah 51:6 continues in this vein.

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

In Matthew 24:35, Jesus said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

Isaiah 34:4 too speaks of the end of the creation, but it indicates a more violent end to the world.

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 falleth off from the vine, and as a falling *fig* from the fig tree.

In his second epistle, the apostle Peter echoed these words. Consider II Peter 3:10:

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.

The apostle John wrote in Revelation 20:11,

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

After the destruction of this world, there will be a new world to take its place. Isaiah 65:17 reads,

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

According to Isaiah 66:22, this new world will continue into perpetuity:

For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.

The promise of the new heaven and earth is repeated in the New Testament. Second Peter 3:13 says,

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

In Revelation 21:1 the apostle John wrote,

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.

These passages make it very clear that God will destroy the current heavens and earth, but God will also replace them with new heavens and a new earth. Thus, the present cosmology is not eternal. Why, then, do some creationists claim that some of the current creation will persist and exist into perpetuity? One psalm seems to contradict the end of this cosmos. Psalm 148 is a song of praise to the LORD. Its first six verses read,

Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created. He hath also established them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass.

The words in the final verse proclaim that they—the things previously mentioned—were established by God

forever and ever. On its face, this verse would seem to suggest that since the sun, moon, and stars are on this list, they must be eternal in the sense that they will have no end. How can one reconcile this passage with the ones previously discussed here? There are several possible answers. One must realize that the Psalms, being a poetic book, contains some hyperbole and figures of speech. For instance, the psalmist could directly observe that the heavens don't change as far as he could tell. The unchanging nature of the sky would then be a symbol for the immutability of God Himself. It is unwise to base a conclusion solely upon a psalm, especially when that conclusion appears to contradict other, very clear biblical statements found in nonpoetic books.

Some claim one other passage, Daniel 12:3, to support the eternity of the stars. That verse reads,

And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

However, care must be taken in probing the meaning of this verse. This is a poetic passage: shining like the firmament of the stars clearly is an analogy, not a physical event. What property or properties will the wise share with the stars? Obviously, the metaphorical comparison to stars shining is intended, but does this comparison extend to eternity? We know that God's redeemed people will live forever, but that does not necessarily mean that stars will also. Thus, this passage's reference to "for ever and ever" may exclusively refer to the wise, not to the stars. We can illustrate this meaning if we were to delete the two similes from Daniel 12:3 and read, "And they that be wise shall shine; and they that turn many to righteousness for ever and ever." Notice that the emphasis clearly is upon the wise, not the stars. We do know that there will be new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13), and there is no reason why the new heavens will not include stars; but, as many of us

believe, the destruction of the heavens refers to the astronomical heavens, so God must re-create those new stars.

If all that remains to support the eternity of the stars is Psalm 148:6, we cannot entirely dismiss the verse, but we must look for another meaning that agrees with the clear, nonpoetic passages. Notice that Psalm 148 also refers to the waters above the heavens. If this refers to some sort of vapor canopy that no longer exists, as many creationists (and certainly Morris) believe, then how can we explain the inconsistency of the nonexistent waters above being forever and ever? Perhaps what is eternal in this passage is God's decree concerning the original creation. However, the introduction of sin into the world has frustrated that decree, at least temporarily. One could say that the new creation will take the place of this cursed creation so that in a sense the creation will continue forever.

The word "heaven" can have several meanings. The three most common meanings are the atmospheric heaven, the astronomical heaven, and heaven as the abode of God. Some, including Morris (1997, p. 79), have suggested that the destruction of the heavens refers only to the atmospheric heaven. That is, the stars, not being part of the atmospheric heaven, will not pass away. This solves the problem with Psalm 148 but introduces another problem. Based on Romans 8:20–22, recent creationists generally agree that the entire creation is subject to the curse. If this is true and if the entire creation must be purified of the effects of sin by destruction and re-creation, then this process must apply to all of creation. It is inconsistent to claim that the entire universe was affected by the sin of Adam but that the stain of sin will be removed by the destruction and restoration of the earth and its atmosphere alone. Therefore, we suggest that the entire universe will partake in this destruction.

How did Morris come to his conclusion on the eternity of stars? Prior to

Morris, Lucas A. Reed (1919) reached the same conclusion using similar arguments that Morris used. Morris was an avid reader, and while developing his ideas in his youth, he read many other authors who were committed to six-day, recent creation. For instance, a large influence in developing Morris's flood geology was George McCready Price. Both Price and Reed were Seventh-day Adventists, and a century ago Seventh-day Adventists were among the few who still maintained scientific arguments for six-day, recent creation. We cannot be certain, but it is likely that Morris read Reed's book, though he clearly rejected some other teachings of Reed.

## Conclusion

Just what does it mean that the heaven and the earth will pass away? There are two basic schools of thought on this. One possibility is that God will truly destroy this universe. That is, the matter of the cosmos will be annihilated, followed by a new creation of matter and the new heaven and new earth. The other possibility is that the matter of this universe will survive, but that God will completely rework matter so that it is a new creation. With the limited biblical information that we have, one cannot be dogmatic on this question. We prefer the option that God will destroy the matter of the cosmos and completely re-create the universe. Stewart Custer (1977, p. 174) also promoted this view when he wrote, "There will be an atomic reorganization of all the universe (II Peter 3:10)."

DeYoung (1989, pp. 133–134) also indicated the temporary state of the present-day stars because of the curse. However, DeYoung did state that stars will be permanent in the eternal state. Furthermore, he noted that more research is needed on the relationship of the curse to the end and entropy.

One of us contacted Henry Morris about his teaching on the eternity of

the universe. Besides his very rapid and courteous private letter, he also quickly clarified his position with a public response (Morris, 2004). There he clearly stated that the universe has not always existed. He further stated that the earth and its atmosphere will be destroyed before they are created anew. However, he also reiterated his position that the rest of the universe will not end.

We respectfully disagree with him on this latter point. We conclude that stars and the universe, as it now exists, will not exist eternally in any literal sense. Instead, this cosmos will end, and God will replace the cosmos with a new creation. Whether in this destruction and re-creation matter is preserved is a matter of conjecture with no firm indication

in Scripture. We believe the current structure of the universe will not survive, and we have no clear indication of how different from this cosmos the future one will be. In any regard, we believe the proper recent-creation view is that the stars and the universe are not eternal.

We make these statements out of no disrespect for the late Henry Morris. To the contrary, both of us hold him in the highest regard, and we had the pleasure of personally knowing him. He was a very gentle man all the while he contended for the truth. Not only did he teach us many things through his writings, but he also led by good example. If we ever were to write a tenth of what he wrote and get a tenth of what he got right, we would be truly blessed.

## References

- Custer, S. 1977. *The Stars Speak: Astronomy and the Bible*. Bob Jones University Press, Greenville, SC.
- DeYoung, D.B. 1989. *Questions and Answers on Astronomy and the Bible*. Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Morris, H.M. 1997. *The Heavens Declare the Glory of God*. World Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Morris, H.M. 2004. The eternal future of time, space, and matter. *Back to Genesis* number 187. <http://www.icr.org/article/482/>
- Morris, H.M., and H.M. Morris III. 1999. *Treasures in the Psalms*. Master Books, Green Forest, AR.
- Ross, H. 2001. Ten major differences between calendar-day and day-age creationists. <http://www.reasons.org/articles/ten-major-differences-between-calendar-day-and-day-age-creationists>.
- Reed, L.A. 1919. *Astronomy and the Bible*. Pacific Publishing, Mountain View, CA.