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A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

We human beings have polluted this earth to a very large degree. We have destroyed much of what God originally provided ... many plants and many animals have become extinct. We have poisoned the soil, the water and the air. And while this planet is capable of absorbing a great deal of physical abuse, it is nevertheless inexorably running down. Unless God would intervene at some point in the future, ALL FORMS OF LIFE would be destroyed by our actions (Matthew 24:22).

But it is not just our planet earth. The whole universe is running down. The whole universe is slowly but inexorably heading towards total destruction. At some point in the future it will have to be either renewed or else replaced.

So how is God going to deal with this situation? Exactly what will happen when God brings about "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1)?

BEWARE OF PRECONCEIVED IDEAS

Some of the greatest misunderstandings about what the Bible really teaches are the result of first accepting a statement that is a mistranslation of the Hebrew or the Greek text as an established fact, and THEN interpreting other clear biblical statements from the perspective of the mistranslation, in effect giving a far greater credibility to the mistranslation than to the other clear statements which actually contradict the mistranslation.

This is perhaps Satan's most powerful tool in deceiving us human beings about what God has really revealed in the Bible. And, as a matter of interest, it is overwhelmingly through Satan's favourite translations of the Bible, the Greek language LXX and the Latin language Vulgate version, that Satan has inserted numerous subtle mistranslations into our English language translations of the Bible. And ALL of us have at one time or another been deceived by Satan with this tactic. I have been deceived in this way, and so have you. Satan has deceived "the whole world" (Revelation 12:9), including us. And the best we can do is recognize and eliminate one deception after another, as God opens our eyes to understand His truth.

Now there is a major deception that we in God's Church have over the years accepted without question. We have accepted that deception based on nothing more than a mistranslation, AND THEN we have tried to force all the other Scriptures, which clearly contradict this deception, into the straight-jacket created by the mistranslation.

What is that deception?

The deception is that this earth and this universe will exist for ever!

The truth revealed in the Bible is that THIS EARTH AND THIS ENTIRE UNIVERSE WILL BE BLOTTED OUT! IT WILL BE AS THOUGH IT HAD NEVER BEEN! EVERYTHING WILL BE CONSUMED BY FIRE! AND THEN GOD WILL CREATE A TOTALLY NEW UNIVERSE WITH A TOTALLY NEW EARTH!

Here is what I will do in this article:

- 1) First we'll look at the CLEAR Scriptures. We'll examine these Scriptures without any prejudice, i.e. without any appeals to: "since we ALREADY know that ... THEREFORE this Scripture obviously cannot possibly mean what it seems to be saying".
- 2) THEN we'll look at the one Scripture that seems to contradict these numerous Scriptures.
- 3) THEN we'll examine the Hebrew word that is translated into English as "for ever".
- 4) THEN we can try to assess God's intentions in regard to the universe.

THE CLEAR SCRIPTURES

Here are a number of verses we should examine.

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!

Without some kind of preconceived idea regarding what God is going to do at that time, this is the only possible conclusion this verse allows us to draw, that the heavens (i.e. the universe) will pass away! All the elements will MELT, or disappear in vapours.

By no stretch of the imagination was Peter trying to convey to us that only the surface of this earth gets a little burned up, because Peter was concerned about THE HEAVENS passing away.

Let's look at the next verse.

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! That's the only conclusion we can draw from Peter's statement. Let's see his next statement.

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!

So, if we do not have some preconceived idea regarding what God is going to do, then from Peter's statements here we would be forced to conclude that THIS WHOLE UNIVERSE WILL DISSOLVE AND DISAPPEAR! What else can we possibly conclude?

Any other conclusion is only possible by resorting to arguments like: "Well, we actually have to understand what Peter said here IN TERMS OF Scriptures like Ecclesiastes 1:4, etc.". In other words,

we can't (supposedly) believe what Peter actually said; no, we have to INTERPRET what Peter said, so that we come up with the meaning we are comfortable with.

The Apostle John had exactly the same understanding as the Apostle Peter. 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. (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. That new earth may or may not have the same diameter as our present earth? I suspect that the diameter of that new earth is going to be CONSIDERABLY larger than the diameter of the present earth, if the size of the New Jerusalem is any indication in this regard? At any rate, that new earth is going to be very different from the planet we now inhabit. Currently well over half of our earth is covered by oceans. But the new earth John saw had no oceans at all! None! John said: "there was no sea"! An earth without any seas is going to be drastically different from what we have today.

The idea that the whole universe will be replaced is also brought out in the Book of Psalms. In Psalm 102 we read:

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 a vesture shalt thou change them, and THEY SHALL BE CHANGED: (Psalm 102:25-26 AV)

The Jewish translation of verse 26 reads:

(Psalm 102:27) 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 is that this universe will be exchanged for a new one.

Psalm 102:26 uses the Hebrew verb "chalaph" twice. In the KJV it is twice translated as "changed". In the JPS it is first translated as "change" and the second time as "shall pass away". According to Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament this word "chalaph" basically means "to be slippery, to smoothly slide away", hence "to change", "to perish", "to come to nothing".

In other words, this verse tells us that the present universe will just "slip away" and be exchanged for a new one. The symbolism in reference to an OLD garment is easy to follow: you take off an old garment, lay it aside, and then put on a totally NEW garment. But you don't use any part of the old garment (as used in this analogy in Psalm 102) to make a new one, when the old one is clearly worn out!

So from this psalm we would also not get the slightest inkling that some parts of our present universe are supposed to survive the process described in Psalm 102.

Now the Apostle Paul quoted this psalm in his letter to the Hebrews. Paul also gives us the distinct impression that this entire present universe is going to disappear. Here is what Paul wrote:

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;
(Hebrews 1:11 AV)

The expression "they shall perish" is a translation of the Greek expression "autoi apolountai", which is the future middle indicative of the verb "apollumi". The verb "apollumi" means: "to perish, to destroy, to abolish, to put out of the way entirely", etc.. Paul is here stating the fact (indicated by the indicative mood) that the heavens and the earth are going to be destroyed completely, they will pass away in their entirety.

Without reference to any other Scriptures we are again forced to conclude that Paul is here telling us that this whole universe will perish. Let's see the next verse.

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 1:12 AV)

The Greek verb here translated as "they shall be changed" is "allagesontai", the second future passive indicative of the verb "allasso". Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament defines this verb "allasso" as meaning: "TO CAUSE ONE THING TO CEASE AND ANOTHER TO TAKE ITS PLACE".

So note carefully!

This verb "allasso" does not mean "to change by working with what you already have", like you might remould a piece of wax from being in the shape of a long candle to now having the shape of a ball. This verb really refers to causing the thing you have TO CEASE EXISTING and then replacing it with something else.

Let's look at another place where the Apostle Paul used this verb "allasso".

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and WE SHALL BE CHANGED. (1 Corinthians 15:52 AV)

Paul is here speaking about the resurrection. And when Paul said "we shall be changed", he meant that our physical bodies WILL CEASE TO EXIST, and they will be COMPLETELY REPLACED by spirit bodies. For some of the dead who will be in the first resurrection (Abraham, David, Elijah, etc.) their physical bodies ceased to exist millennia ago, and their physical bodies will never again exist. Their physical bodies "passed away", and in the resurrection they will all "be changed" by being given bodies composed of spirit.

With the verb "allasso" Paul is in Hebrews 1:10-12 telling us that this entire universe will be exchanged for a new one, just like at the first resurrection our physical bodies will be exchanged for completely new spirit bodies. The symbolism Paul used in Hebrews 1:12 also conveys the same thing, a garment being folded up, laid aside, and then replaced by a totally different garment.

Let's also notice the words of Jesus Christ.

HEAVEN AND EARTH SHALL PASS AWAY, but my words shall not pass away. (Matthew 24:35 AV)

Again, without reference to any other Scriptures we would be forced to conclude that this universe is going to disappear, pass away, be totally blotted out. Jesus Christ here plainly said that this present universe would cease to exist.

HEAVEN AND EARTH SHALL PASS AWAY: but my words shall not pass away. (Mark 13:31 AV)

Mark recorded the same words by Jesus Christ.

HEAVEN AND EARTH SHALL PASS AWAY: but my words shall not pass away. (Luke 21:33 AV)

Luke also recorded the same words by Jesus Christ.

Now let's examine Malachi chapter 4.

For, behold, THE DAY COMETH, THAT SHALL BURN AS AN OVEN; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh SHALL BURN THEM UP, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. (Malachi 4:1 AV)

This is a reference to the time when, in the words of Jesus Christ, "heaven and earth shall pass away". It will be like a universe-wide fire! Everything combustible will burn up. Everything that is composed of physical matter will burn up. Only those who are at that point spirit beings will not be affected by that fire.

But unto YOU THAT FEAR MY NAME shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. (Malachi 4:2 AV)

All those who really "fear God's name" in the correct way will then be spirit beings.

And YE SHALL TREAD DOWN THE WICKED; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet IN THE DAY THAT I SHALL DO *THIS*, saith the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 4:3 AV)

The time for the total destruction of this present universe is "in the day that I shall do this". And the spirit beings are pictured as "treading down" the wicked, meaning that the spirit beings are pictured as BEING PRESENT IN THAT FIRE!

This chapter concludes with the warning:

And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, LEST I COME AND SMITE THE EARTH WITH A CURSE. (Malachi 4:6 AV)

The Jewish Translation of this verse reads:

(3-24) And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers; lest I come and smite the land WITH UTTER DESTRUCTION. (Malachi 4:6 JPS)

People have often misunderstood the intent of this dire warning from God. Something specific needs to be achieved, something God actually requires. That "something" is that right family relationships need to be restored at some point, with parents having the right CONCERN for their children, and with children having the right RESPECT for their parents. Now that situation is NOT going to be achieved before the second coming of Christ!

The Hebrew here translated as "he shall turn" is the verb "shuwb", used with the hiphil stem and the perfect mood. The hiphil stem expresses causative action. In other words, Elijah is to CAUSE this process to be set in motion. The perfect stem is used to refer to completed actions, but from different viewpoints. For example, the perfect mood also describes an action as completed from the view of another action which is still future! Also, "sometimes in Hebrew, future events are conceived so vividly and so realistically that they are regarded as having virtually taken place and are described by the perfect, even though they are clearly still future." (Quoted from documentation included in the Online Bible)

So here in Malachi 4:6 a verb that is used with the Hebrew perfect mood, is translated into English by the future tense ("he shall turn").

The point is that NO RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS WILL BE RESTORED BEFORE CHRIST'S SECOND COMING! Humanity will still be unrepentant when Jesus Christ returns, and that lack of repentance will cover every area of people's lives.

BUT the process of starting to re-establish right relationships within the family WILL BE STARTED by the ministry of "Elijah". And that will then CONTINUE into the millennial rule of Jesus Christ here on earth. A start in the right direction will have been made.

The point of God's dire warning in Malachi 4:6 is this:

It is not a matter that God will not AT SOME POINT utterly destroy this planet! After all, Jesus Christ and Paul and Peter and John said in very clear words that this universe will indeed "pass away" at some point in time. That time will indeed come. BUT if Elijah's ministry would not be successful in starting this process of restoring right family relationships, THEN God would bring about this "utter destruction" EARLIER than He has planned to do that!

It is not that at this stage of human history man's actions can provoke God into bringing on a destruction He has not already planned for. Rather, it is that IF certain conditions are not achieved, THEN God might bring on the destruction that is already very much a part of the plans, but at an EARLIER time than the present plan calls for!

So Elijah's ministry carries a very heavy responsibility, one that influences how God will deal with all mortal human beings from then onwards. But Elijah's part is only to set the stage for Jesus Christ to then work with human beings, even as John the Baptist's role was only to set the stage for Jesus Christ to then start His earthly ministry. I suspect that Elijah's part in the process is to prepare those people, who will survive physically into the millennium, in some small measure, to be in the frame of mind to be able to respond to Jesus Christ, once Christ starts ruling and teaching humanity?

Anyway, Malachi 4:6 does not state or imply that at some future point this earth will not be utterly destroyed, because that "utter destruction" is indeed coming!

So to summarize this section: we have now examined statements by Jesus Christ (and which statements are quoted by Matthew, Mark and Luke), by Paul (Hebrews 1:10-12), by Peter (2 Peter 3:10-12), by John (Revelation 21:1), and by the unknown author of Psalm 102:25-26. These passages give us a total of THIRTEEN VERSES that all indicate that this present universe will pass away and disappear. All of these Scriptures are in full agreement with all the other Scriptures we examined.

Now let's examine the ONE VERSE that seems to contradict the above quoted thirteen verses. In the past rather than examining this one verse in the light of the other thirteen clear verses, we have usually tried to interpret the thirteen verses in light of this one verse. And, yes, in our English versions this one verse is in fact A MISTRANSLATION!

Let's examine this verse now.

ECCLESIASTES 1:4 EXAMINED

Here is the verse in question.

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

There you are, we are told! Here the Bible tells us, IN PLAIN TERMS, that the earth will exist FOR EVER! How much plainer do you want it to be?

So because of this verse all the other thirteen verses we have already looked at must (supposedly) be interpreted to not really mean what they ALSO state "in very plain terms". But, as I will show, we are dealing with a mistranslation in this verse.

The problem is this:

In Hebrew there simply was no one word that conveyed the concept of "FOR EVER"! All you could say was "for a very long time". So in Hebrew you would say exactly the same thing, whether you only meant "for a very long time", or whether you meant "for ever".

However, if you really wanted to make absolutely certain that your readers understood that you meant "for ever", then you would use A TWO WORD COMBINATION. We will look at that two word expression later.

Before we examine the Hebrew word involved, let's first notice how this concept of "for ever", as applied to Ecclesiastes 1:4, came to be accepted into our English translations.

The first translators into the English language relied almost totally on Jerome's Latin Vulgate translation. The translators that followed also relied very heavily on the Greek text of Origen's LXX translation, in addition to relying on the Latin Vulgate. So let's notice the influence these two translations have had specifically on the rendering of Ecclesiastes 1:4.

Here is the Latin text of this verse.

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

The expression to notice is "terra vero in aeternum stat". "Terra" means "the earth", "vero" means "in truth", "aeternum" is both, an adjective and an adverb which means "ETERNAL", and "stat" is the verb which means "to stand". [Comment: We get our English word "eternal" from this Latin word "aeternum", as should be easily recognizable.]

So Jerome's Latin Vulgate translation reads for this verse: "... in truth the earth stands ETERNAL, FOR EVER"!

So the Latin translation does not just say for Ecclesiastes 1:4 that the earth stands "for a long time". No, the Latin Vulgate has taken that concept JUST A SHADE FURTHER, by stating that the earth stands "FOR EVER".

Now the biblical Greek language also did not really have one specific word for the concept of "for ever". In Greek you could only say "for a very long time. So let's now see the Greek LXX text.

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

The expression to notice here is "he ge eis ton aiona esteken". The words "he ge" mean "the earth", the expression "eis ton aiona" means "into the age", and the verb "esteken" is the imperfect active indicative of the verb "histemi", which means "to stand, to fix, to make firm".

Now the Greek expression "eis ton aiona" is used very commonly in the Greek text of the New Testament, and it is usually translated into English as "for ever", as for example in verses like Matthew 21:19, Mark 11:14, Luke 1:55, John 12:34, etc..

Now in Greek the expression "into the age" (eis ton aiona) can express both, the concept of "for a very long time", and also "for ever". It follows that when the translators of the KJV chose to mostly translate this Greek expression as "for ever", they were in fact going further than the meaning which this expression typically has.

So here is the trail of what happened:

1) Biblical Hebrew did not have a word that specifically means "for ever". But Hebrew did have a word that means "for a very long time". So this one Hebrew word was used not only to convey the concept of "for a very long time", but also the concept of "for ever". But since we in English are able to differentiate very clearly between "for ever" and "for a very long time", therefore we need to be very careful to never translate this Hebrew word into English as "for ever" in those instances where it is quite clear from the Hebrew text that in that context it is intended to only have the meaning of "for a very long time".

In other words, it is ALWAYS SAFE to translate this Hebrew word as "for a very long time", even when the meaning is really "for ever", because that's precisely what "for ever" is, a very, very, very long time. But we must ALWAYS BE CAUTIOUS before translating this Hebrew word as "for ever", because in many cases very clearly a time period shorter than "for ever" is implied. And then the translation as "for ever" creates a wrong impression.

Biblical Hebrew did have a two-word expression that would unmistakably convey the idea of "for ever", but this expression is not used in Ecclesiastes 1:4.

2) Biblical Greek also did not have a word that specifically means "for ever". But it does have a way of expressing the concept of "for a very long time". That is the expression "eis ton aiona", literally meaning "into the age". So the LXX translated the Hebrew text of Ecclesiastes 1:4 basically correctly.

3) 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 in the Latin Vulgate translation Jerome mistranslated the Hebrew word into Latin as "aeternum", as "for ever", or as "eternal". This was an unjustified assumption, an error.

4) This error was then copied by the English translators, who mostly opted for Jerome's interpretation of the Hebrew word involved as "for ever".

5) Now while most versions have opted to follow the Latin Vulgate's lead for this verse (e.g. KJV, NKJV, ASV, Darby, Douay, etc.), there are also a number of English language translations which recognize that the Hebrew word involved does not really mean "for ever". And so they have translated this verse without appealing to the concept of "for ever". Here are two examples of this. They are the 1902 Rotherham Translation and the 1898 Young's Literal Translation.

Generation, goeth and, generation, cometh, but, the earth, UNTO TIMES AGE-ABIDING, remaineth. (Ecclesiastes 1:4 Rotherham)

A generation is going, and a generation is coming, and THE EARTH TO THE AGE IS STANDING. (Ecclesiastes 1:4 YLT)

So the subtle error of stating that Ecclesiastes 1:4 refers to "for ever" has come into our English translations through the Catholic Latin language Vulgate version. Now all those people, who have accepted the Vulgate's translation of Ecclesiastes 1:4 as "for ever", will clearly have a major problem when they come to the thirteen verses we have already examined, which state quite clearly that this whole universe, including this earth, will pass away.

So now let's examine the Hebrew word used in Ecclesiastes 1:4.

THE HEBREW WORD TRANSLATED AS "FOR EVER"

Here is Ecclesiastes 1:4.

One generation passeth away, and *another* generation cometh: but the earth abideth FOR EVER. (Ecclesiastes 1:4 AV)

The words "for ever" in this verse are a translation of the Hebrew noun "OLAM" (sometimes also transliterated as "owlam"). Here is how Gesenius defines this word "olam":

"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 ..."

In other words, IF in Hebrew you wanted to refer to "eternity" or "for ever", then typically you would have used the word "olam". But IF you wanted to only refer to "a long time", then you would also have used the word "olam".

It is always THE CONTEXT which will make clear whether it should mean "for ever" or whether it should mean a shorter period of time than "for ever". Let's examine a few places where this word "olam" is used. In each case I have rendered its translation into capital letters for easier recognition.

There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare *children* to them, the same *became* mighty men which were OF OLD, men of renown. (Genesis 6:4 AV)

Here "olam" clearly did not refer to "for ever". Here it means nothing more than "a long time ago".

The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the EVERLASTING hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren. (Genesis 49:26 AV)

Here the hills are also not really something that will exist "for ever". The hills only exist for a long time.

Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him FOR EVER. (Exodus 21:6 AV)

This slavery was most assuredly not approved by God to last FOR EVER, beyond the time of the resurrections. Here "olam" clearly meant "for a very long time", until the slave would die. But at the slave's death his slavery was terminated.

Remember the days OF OLD, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee. (Deuteronomy 32:7 AV)

This also is not a reference to "past eternity", but only to times of long ago.

And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood IN OLD TIME, *even* Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. (Joshua 24:2 AV)

Here the word "olam" is used to refer to the time no further back than the time of Abraham's father Terah. That was less than 1000 years before the time of Joshua. Clearly here "olam" did not mean "for ever".

But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, *I will not go up* until the child be weaned, and *then* I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide FOR EVER. (1 Samuel 1:22 AV)

Here Hannah did not really mean that her son Samuel would dwell there "for ever". She only meant that Samuel's whole life (of certainly less than 200 years in length) would be dedicated to the service of God.

And Achish believed David, saying, He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him;

therefore he shall be my servant FOR EVER. (1 Samuel 27:12 AV)

David deceived the Philistine ruler Achish and certainly did not tell him the truth. Achish thought that David would be loyal to him for a long time, i.e. as long as David would live. But Achish really did not think that David would be his servant "for ever". Again "olam" has a meaning far shorter than "for ever".

Then Bathsheba bowed with *her* face to the earth, and did reverence to the king, and said, Let my lord king David live FOR EVER. (1 Kings 1:31 AV)

David was near the point of death, and Bathsheba didn't really mean "live for ever". She really meant "live for a long time", a polite way of wishing rulers a long reign.

The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed FOR EVER. And he went out from his presence a leper *as white* as snow. (2 Kings 5:27 AV)

Elisha certainly did not mean that Gehazi and his children would have leprosy "for ever", going beyond the time of the resurrections. Elisha meant "olam" here to convey "for a long time".

Remove not the ANCIENT landmark, which thy fathers have set. (Proverbs 22:28 AV)

Remove not the OLD landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: (Proverbs 23:10 AV)

The ancient or old "landmark" these two verses refer to had obviously not existed for past eternity. Here "olam" again refers to a time covered by a few generations.

Is there *any* thing whereof it may be said, See, this *is* new? it hath been already OF OLD TIME, which was before us. (Ecclesiastes 1:10 AV)

Here Solomon also did not mean "olam" to convey "for ever".

Also *when* they shall be afraid of *that which is* high, and fears *shall be* in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth TO HIS LONG home, and the mourners go about the streets: (Ecclesiastes 12:5 AV)

This is a reference to the grave. But the grave is not the eternal home for anybody. ALL that are in the grave shall come forth to a resurrection (see John 5:28-29). And so here the translators translated "olam" as "his long home", but not as "his home for ever".

Because the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be for dens FOR EVER, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks; (Isaiah 32:14 AV)

Those forts and towers are not really dens "for ever", because "for ever" includes a time when there will be no wild asses and flocks. Here "olam" again meant simply "for a long time".

The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with EVERLASTING burnings? (Isaiah 33:14 AV)

There can be burnings that will last "a long time", but there will not be any "everlasting burnings".

I HAVE LONG TIME holden my peace; I have been still, *and* refrained myself: *now* will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once. (Isaiah 42:14 AV)

God means that for a long time He put up with Israel's sins. But God clearly did not mean "olam" here to mean "past eternity".

And thou saidst, I shall be a lady FOR EVER: so that thou didst not lay these *things* to thy heart, neither didst remember the latter end of it. (Isaiah 47:7 AV)

Babylon was not thinking of being a lady "for ever", but simply "for a long time". Here "olam" also is not really intended to convey the idea of "for ever".

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations OF OLD. *Art* thou not it that hath cut Rahab, *and* wounded the dragon? (Isaiah 51:9 AV)

The appeal here is not to past eternity, but to previous generations of long ago. That is not really "for ever".

And *they that shall be* of thee shall build THE OLD waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. (Isaiah 58:12 AV)

And they shall build THE OLD wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. (Isaiah 61:4 AV)

References to the "old" waste places are not the same as references to waste places "for past eternity". Again "olam" is used with a meaning other than "for ever".

FOR OF OLD TIME I have broken thy yoke, *and* burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot. (Jeremiah 2:20 AV)

Here God used the word "olam" to refer to long ago, when He had led Israel out of Egypt. Again, "olam" does not really mean "for ever" in this verse.

Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it *is* a mighty nation, it *is* AN ANCIENT nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. (Jeremiah 5:15 AV)

"An ancient nation" is not the same as a nation that has always existed. Here "olam" also does not mean "for ever".

We have now looked at over twenty places where the Hebrew word "olam" is used with a meaning other than "for ever". So now let's see what Solomon was saying in Ecclesiastes 1:4. Here is a corrected translation of this verse.

One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth FOR A LONG TIME, FOR MANY GENERATIONS. (Ecclesiastes 1:4 AV)

When Jesus Christ plainly said that "the earth shall pass away", when Peter plainly said that the earth also shall melt with fervent heat, when John plainly said that the first earth was passed away, when Paul plainly said that the earth shall perish and shall be folded up and put away like some item of old clothing, when the Hebrew word "olam" plainly often refers to no more than "a long time" ... THEN it is totally impossible for "olam" in Ecclesiastes 1:4 to mean "for ever"!

Solomon's contrast between generations and the earth in this verse is NOT between the length of time for one generation and for ever; the contrast is really that the earth outlives many, many generations, but without implying "for ever".

So when we understand how Ecclesiastes should be correctly translated into English, then there is no longer any claim to the earth having to exist for ever. As the other Scriptures stated quite clearly, the earth will be destroyed with the rest of the universe.

Now let's examine the Hebrew expression that is intended to convey the idea of "for ever".

"FOR EVER AND EVER"

When a speaker in biblical Hebrew really wanted to make sure that his audience understood that he wanted to refer to "eternity" or "for ever", as opposed to just "a long time", then the speaker would not just use "olam" on its own. In such cases the speaker would either say: "OLAM AD", or he would say "OLAM AD OLAM". These two expressions made quite clear that the speaker really meant "for ever".

The Hebrew word "ad", when used in the expression "olam ad" is basically used like a noun, either with or without a preposition, and then it means "eternity" or "perpetually".

Here are some examples where the speaker used "OLAM AD". I have rendered the translation of these two Hebrew words into capital letters for easier recognition.

The LORD shall reign FOR EVER AND EVER. (Exodus 15:18 AV)

The LORD *is* King FOR EVER AND EVER: the heathen are perished out of his land. (Psalm 10:16 AV)

Thy throne, O God, *is* FOR EVER AND EVER: the sceptre of thy kingdom *is* a right sceptre. (Psalm 45:6 AV)

For this God *is* our God FOR EVER AND EVER: he will be our guide *even* unto death. (Psalm 48:14 AV)

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. (Daniel 12:3 AV)

For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God FOR EVER AND EVER. (Micah 4:5 AV)

The Hebrew word "ad", when used in the expression "olam ad olam" is basically the same as above, but in these cases the word "ad" is used as a preposition, adverb or conjunction, and then it has the meaning of "even to" or "until". In these expressions it is the repetition of the word "olam" that conveys the idea of "for ever".

Here are two examples where the speaker used "OLAM AD OLAM". I have rendered the translation of these three Hebrew words into capital letters for easier recognition.

Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel FOR EVER AND EVER. And all the people said, Amen, and praised the LORD. (1 Chronicles 16:36 AV)

Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, *and* Pethahiah, said, Stand up *and* bless the LORD your God FOR EVER AND EVER: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. (Nehemiah 9:5 AV)

To summarize this section, if a Hebrew speaker really wanted to clearly say "for ever", then he could use either the expression "olam ad", or he could use the expression "olam ad olam". But neither of these two Hebrew expressions is used in reference to the earth. Solomon certainly did not use either expression in Ecclesiastes 1:4. So in that verse Solomon was really not trying to say that "the earth abides FOR EVER"! Solomon there only said that the earth abides "A LONG TIME". And that is certainly true. It is due to Jerome's mistranslation of that verse, that we have all wrongly assumed that this planet earth would exist "for ever".

Now let's see if we can understand God's real intentions.

GOD'S INTENTIONS FOR THE UNIVERSE

In the beginning there were two God Beings. We know them as God the Father and as Jesus Christ. They devised a plan to enhance their existence in two ways. They would set in motion a process to create other beings like themselves, so they could have a huge "Family". They would also create the most beautiful environment for that Family to live in.

THEIR ULTIMATE GOAL is to have that huge Family in the perfect environment. But to achieve that goal they needed to set in motion A TRAINING AND TESTING PROGRAM. That testing program required them to create A TESTING ENVIRONMENT.

The plan very likely involved the following steps:

1) God first created HELPERS for achieving this goal. These helpers are all spirit beings, the vast majority of them being known by the designation "angels" (which means "messengers"). The fact that God created a vast number of helpers to act in the capacity of "messengers" even before He created the first human beings, probably indicates that God Himself intended to keep a certain distance from the ultimate testing process for human beings, choosing to largely work through messengers.

2) Once these spirit being helpers had been created, THEN God created the training environment, which

we refer to as "the universe". The universe was to serve a twofold purpose. The universe as a whole was to be the training ground for all the spirit beings, and this earth in particular was to be the training ground for the physical human beings that would later go through the training process.

3) Before the spirit beings could be used for the purpose for which God had created them (to help with the program of leading human beings towards the goal of becoming sons of God), these spirit beings themselves had to be tested, as they had been created with free wills of their own. So in some way this entire universe was their testing ground. After a certain measure of testing God eventually sent a third of the angels, under the leadership of the one we know as Satan, to this planet earth for the express purpose of preparing this planet for the next step in God's plan. That assignment was also going to be the final phase of the testing for Satan and all the angels under his leadership.

4) However, Satan and all the angels under his leadership, a third of all the angels God had created, rebelled against God. In the process not only did they NOT fulfill the assignment for which they had been sent to this earth, but they were also instrumental in causing large-scale destruction throughout their entire training environment, i.e. throughout the entire universe. The resulting warfare, in which the archangel Michael and the two thirds of all the angels who had remained faithful to God confronted, resisted, and defeated Satan was at the same time the final phase of testing for the righteous angels. Satan and his angels, now known as demons, were thrown back to this earth, in some sort of confinement. While they (Satan and his demons) were still spirit beings, God at that time also took away from all of them certain powers, to which they had previously had access. They are now spirit beings with only limited powers.

5) The training environment (i.e. this universe) had thus fulfilled its first purpose; all the created spirit beings had been thoroughly tested in that environment. In the process it had suffered some damage, but the potential for such damage God had factored into the original creation of the universe. But the training environment had another purpose to fulfill. This planet earth was to be the training ground for mortal human beings.

6) So God, in the person of Jesus Christ, repaired the damage Satan's rebellion had caused to this planet, in the process probably also correcting any orbits in our solar system that needed correcting. And then God carried out the job which Satan and the demons should have carried out if they had not rebelled, which was to prepare this planet as a suitable living environment for mortal human beings.

7) Then God created Adam and Eve, the original parents of all human beings. God allotted 7000 years to the process of training and testing a huge number of human beings for the opportunity to eventually be spirit beings within the Family that God is planning. God attached a 100-year period to the end of that 7000 years, to test all those who will come up in the second resurrection.

8) But, just like Satan and the demons, we human beings have overwhelmingly rebelled against God. And, even as Satan in the process of his rebellion caused universe-wide large-scale destruction, we too in the process of rebelling against God have caused worldwide destruction of what God had created for us back in Genesis chapter 1. Where Satan had made a mess of the universe, we have made a mess of this planet.

9) But no matter how much of a mess we human beings have made of what God gave us, the training program God has set in motion continues. It is only when things threaten to get completely out of hand that God has at times stepped in and affected certain modifications to our circumstances.

10) After Jesus Christ has ruled for 1000 years in the yet future millennium, and after Satan has been loosed and then bound again, then the second resurrection will take place. Everyone in that resurrection will be given a 100-year lifespan.

11) AT THE END OF THAT 100 YEARS GOD'S PLAN FOR CREATING A VAST FAMILY OF SPIRIT-BORN SONS OF GOD WILL HAVE BEEN COMPLETED!

12) Then God will totally and completely destroy that "training ground", this present universe. It will have served its purpose to the full, in providing an environment in which to train both, spirit beings and mortal human beings. Very likely it was never God's intention that what He had created as a training environment for beings with free wills would be His own living environment for all future eternity.

13) Every spirit being, except perhaps for Satan and the demons, will witness the mind-boggling fireworks display as this present universe burns up and disappears. The righteous angels will have witnessed the original creation of this universe, and they will also witness its destruction.

14) AND THEN God will create a NEW heaven (a new universe), which will also include a NEW earth, probably with a much larger diameter than the present earth. That new universe will pale into insignificance whatever splendour and magnificence might be attributed to our present universe. Compared to the new universe, our present universe will seem like nothing. Where our present universe was created to reflect any transgressions of God's laws and God's intentions in physical ways, the new heaven will be created specifically to provide a living environment for a staggeringly large Family of spirit beings.

And where at the creation of the first universe all the angels "shouted for joy" (Job 38:7), so likewise at the creation of the new universe the entire Family of God will "shout for joy" at the beauty and splendour and magnificence that God has planned to give to His Family. At God's right hand there will indeed be "pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11).

15) And only then will God bring the New Jerusalem to that New earth. It will be the headquarters city for the Family of God, and the permanent residence for all those who will be in the first resurrection. It will be the permanent headquarters for the new universe.

And I John saw the holy city, NEW Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:2 AV)

God the Father and Jesus Christ will have achieved the plan they set in motion however long ago, which plan they started to implement with the creation of the angels.

Now let's examine what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans.

ROMANS CHAPTER 8

In Romans chapter 8 Paul said that we are "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). That inheritance only takes place after God has created the new heaven and the new earth. The new heaven and the new earth is that inheritance, which God is offering to all those who will be in the first resurrection.

So in the next few verses Paul speaks about that inheritance. Paul speaks about the present universe. Now where he had told the Hebrews that this present universe must "perish" (Hebrews 1:11), Paul tells the Romans that the present universe is groaning and travailing in pain.

In Romans 8:19-22 Paul uses the Greek word "ktisis" four times, once in each of these verses. In the KJV it is translated three times as "CREATURE" and once as "CREATION". It really should have been translated all four times as "CREATION", since Paul is not really speaking about any "creature". This

error has been recognized by many translations, including even the New King James Version, and these versions all consistently translate "ktisis" as "creation" in these four verses.

Below I will quote the NKJV, rather than the KJV which I usually quote. Let's examine what Paul is actually saying in this passage.

For THE EARNEST EXPECTATION OF THE CREATION eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. (Romans 8:19 NKJV)

Here Paul has personified the whole creation, i.e. this whole universe. Paul depicts the whole universe eagerly looking forward to the time of the resurrection. Now WHY would Paul say that the inanimate creation is "looking forward to" the time of the resurrection? What does the inanimate creation possibly have to gain from God's plan to reproduce Himself being achieved?

Let's continue.

FOR THE CREATION WAS SUBJECTED TO FUTILITY, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; (Romans 8:20 NKJV)

Do we grasp what Paul is saying and implying here? There is a specific reason WHY God made the present universe subject to decay (i.e. "to futility" or "to vanity"). It was created subject to decay FOR THE EXPRESS PURPOSE of providing a training ground in which to carry out the testing of spirit beings and of human beings. Now the way Paul has stated this very strongly implies that "the new heaven" will NOT be "subjected to futility"; the new heaven will not be subject to decay! A universe that runs down, no matter how slowly, is not something that Almighty God will ever settle for as a permanent solution. As I have in the past sometimes tried to explain it to people: the new universe will not be one in which God will have to see to it that someone "does the yard work every week"; it will be a maintenance-free universe.

Let's continue.

because THE CREATION ITSELF ALSO WILL BE DELIVERED FROM THE BONDAGE OF CORRUPTION into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (Romans 8:21 NKJV)

There we have it! The new universe will not be subject to any form of decay, or any form of "running down". The "glorious liberty" all the children of God will possess is that we will be immortal, incapable of ever deteriorating in any way! And the whole universe will enjoy that same "glorious liberty"; the whole new universe will be totally incapable of ever deteriorating in any way. The new universe cannot contain stars that would eventually "burn out", because any star that is still capable of eventually burning out is still in "the bondage of corruption".

Let's continue.

For we know that THE WHOLE CREATION GROANS AND LABORS WITH BIRTH PANGS together until now. (Romans 8:22 NKJV)

"A birth" produces something new! If the present universe would only be "upgraded" and "all the faults in it eliminated", if it would only get a facelift and some "plastic surgery", then the analogy to "a birth" would

be inappropriate.

The picture Paul is here drawing for us is that A WHOLE NEW UNIVERSE IS ABOUT TO BE BORN! And the time of that "birth" is when ALL THE CHILDREN OF GOD will have attained unto "glorious liberty", freedom from death and from mortality.

In the next verse Paul does not use the word "creation", but he is still speaking about the same subject. Now Paul ties the universe and the Family of God together.

Not only *that*, but WE ALSO who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, EAGERLY WAITING for the adoption, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:23 NKJV)

We wait for the time when God will give us immortality, even as the present universe waits for the time when it will be replaced by a new universe.

The picture Paul presents us with in this section of Romans is in full agreement with all the other Scriptures we have examined.

There is no place for our present universe in the future that God has mapped out for His Family of spirit beings. Our present universe is polluted. It has been inhabited by Satan and his demons, and it bears the scars of Satan's rebellious activities. Any place where Satan has been is unfit for the presence of God! And BECAUSE Satan has inhabited this universe, THEREFORE the only option is for this universe to be totally blotted out before God will prepare His PERMANENT future dwelling place. This applies even more so to this present earth, which has been Satan's dwelling place for more than 6000 years.

So ... when John says that he saw "a NEW heaven and a NEW earth", then that is exactly what he meant. They will be totally new.

Frank W. Nelte