

Which Forever is Coming?

It's a good idea to think about forever before you get there.

Forever is coming, whether we like it or not. The question is: which forever? Physicists and astronomers proclaim they know how and when the universe began and approximately when and how it will end. In the book, *Endless Universe*, the authors begin the story of the universe with the words: "From nothing" and "from nowhere" a "tiny speck of brilliant light appeared" and began to expand "not into anything, but throughout, because the Universe was, and is, everything and everywhere" ¹. There was no particular reason for the appearance of the speck some 13 billion years ago, they explain. It just happened. They then fast forward 8.4 billion years to when our sun and solar system, including earth, have formed. Add another billion years and the first life has appeared on earth. This would be, they say, about 3.5 billion years before the present.

But how long will life survive on earth, and what is the ultimate "forever" for each person and the universe as a whole? The Christian and the Materialist answer these questions very differently. The Materialist sees life as a short-lived accident in the long history of the universe. One author estimates we have two billion years before life on earth becomes extinct. By that time, we are told, our sun will expand to become a red giant star and burn or melt the earth to a lifeless lump of rock. This would make the entire history of life on earth about 5.5 billion years long. Five billion (5×10^9) years of life in a universe spanning 1×10^{100} years is less than a blink of an eye. So life is seen as a brief accident. It came from nowhere, has no

meaning or purpose, and as quickly as it arose, it will be gone.

But God has revealed in the Bible a distinctly different account of the origin and future of life; one that shows there is a reason for, and a purpose in, life and human existence. The purposeful order, complexity, and rationality of living things, as well as the elegant mathematical structure of the universe, are a reflection of the One who made all things by the Word of His power. They are the forensic evidence of the Creator (Rom. 1:20).

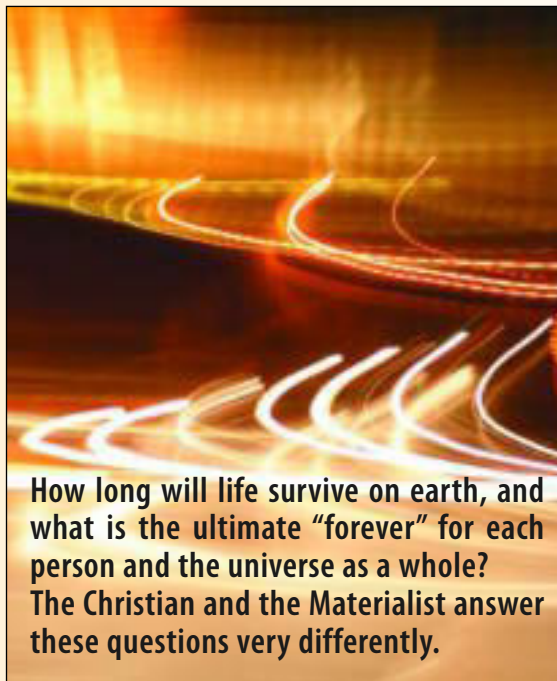
The Materialist believes that in the far distant future our sun and all other stars will exhaust their fuel and become brown or white dwarf stars that then collapse into black holes to be destroyed. All matter will break down and the universe will cool to a

temperature where nothing can ever happen again. The final forever, they predict, is cold, dark, and lifeless.

The Christian agrees that forever is coming, but points out that the Bible teaches we must choose between two different forevers: one forever in God's presence and the other away from His presence. The evidence of the universe and of life clearly point us to God, not to chance, as the originator of life, and can also guide our choice of forevers.

—MICHAEL G. WINDHEUSER, PH.D.

¹ H. Couper H and N. Henbest, *Endless Universe. The Story of Space, Time, and the Search for Life Beyond Our Planet*, (New York, NY: Covent Garden Press, 1999).



How long will life survive on earth, and what is the ultimate "forever" for each person and the universe as a whole? The Christian and the Materialist answer these questions very differently.