

For the last few decades one of the most popular arguments against the existence of God has been a theory proposed by Nicholas Everitt in his book, *The Non-Existence of God*. In what has been called “the argument from scale,” Everitt claims that *the sheer size* of the universe is evidence against God’s existence. His formal argument can be summed up this way: 1) If the God of classical theism existed, then he would create a universe on a human scale, one that is not unimaginably large, unimaginably old, and in which human beings form an unimaginably tiny part of it. 2) The cosmos does not display a human scale. 3) Therefore, there is evidence against the hypothesis that God exists with the purposes traditionally ascribed to him.

In other words, if God really cared about us humans, as the Bible says he does, he would have created a universe better suited to humans. The sheer size of the universe proves that a God who cares about humans does not, in fact, exist. Of course, this argument *assumes* a lot! For instance, that this limitless universe is not good for human life. But that is something that has never been proven. In fact, some scientists argue that the sheer size of the universe is *exactly* what was needed to create the conditions on earth on which human life depends. Everitt’s argument *assumes* that the world was created purely for humans to thrive. But that’s a claim the Bible never makes. The Bible *does* say we are made in the image of God; and we are given dominion over the earth. But this biblical teaching does not mean “it’s all about us.” In fact, it’s all about God!

We could make a solid case against the argument from scale, but I mention it today not to disprove it. But rather, to point out how life looks to people who reject the interweaving of the created world and the covenant that runs through Psalm 147. For those of us who trust in our Creator and Redeemer, the immensity of the universe can be seen as an argument *in favor of* believing in God. Psalm 19 says, “*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork*” (v. 1). Not only is God willing to restore and rebuild our crumbling lives, but he is fully able to do that because the stars and the

seasons, the ruins of Jerusalem and even the baby birds are in his hand. The argument from scale causes me to look toward the Cross where the God in human flesh embraced the cosmos, in order to *“reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven...”* writes Paul in Colossians 1:20.

But first, back to the Psalm 147, the second Psalm in the so-called “Hallelujah Chorus.” The repeated appearance of the Hebrew word “Hallelujah,” which is translated “Praise the Lord,” is why the final five Psalms are called the “Hallelujah Chorus.” It is part of the triumphant response of God’s people to their struggles in this hostile world. Gone are the “why’s” and “how long’s,” the threats of enemies and the challenges to belief. All of Israel’s attempts to worship God properly in the light of his grace finally come together in pure *praise*. Therefore, the final word from God’s people is, *“Praise the Lord.”* When it’s all said and done, we can and should *Praise the Lord* because of his cosmic lordship and his covenantal care.

This Psalm opens and closes with praise to God for his special care for Israel. The Lord has brought them back from exile and he has given them his Word, marking them as unique in all the earth. Many scholars think that Psalm 147 was composed for a choir to sing on the joyous occasion of the dedication of the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem, described in Nehemiah 12. After the Exile, the rediscovery and public reading of Torah was a crucial part of recovering Israel’s national identity. So, it’s not surprising that Israel should focus on Yahweh’s special mercies to his people in whom he delights.

What is surprising is the theme of God’s cosmic lordship. Words about God’s grace to the exiles who are brokenhearted and wounded (vss. 2-3) are unexpectedly followed by a stunning claim that this compassionate God *“determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name”* (v. 4). Even though the ancient writer of Psalm 147 had only a rudimentary grasp of the immensity of the universe, he still knew that this claim was far beyond the human mind, because he then says about the Lord: *“his understanding has no limit”* (v. 5). That soaring affirmation of God’s character is followed by

another assertion about God's care for the humble of the earth (those who struggle), a care that will eventually "*cast the wicked to the ground.*"

The second stanza of Psalm 147, which begins in verse 7, opens with a call to "*Sing to the Lord with grateful praise*" that echoes verse 1. But in this verse the focus is not first on God's special care for Israel. Verses 8 & 9 praise God for his universal provision for life on planet earth: "*He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills.*" In this way the Lord provides food for wild beasts and for helpless baby birds.

Then in verses 10-11 the Psalmist turns back to Israel, with an implicit warning and an explicit promise. Before the Exile, Israel engaged in all kinds of political intrigue and military maneuvering to stave off the threats of invading armies from the north. But none of it worked. What God is saying to his people is that it won't work now either. Your only hope is in the Lord. "*His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse (the battle tank or stealth bomber of ancient times), nor his delight in the legs of the warrior (a reference to foot soldiers in the infantry).*" Rather "*The LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.*" Unfailing love is the Hebrew word—*hesed*—the Old Testament word for covenant faithfulness. Only God's personal care will assure us of a blessed future.

Nature alternating with grace is what we see in the closing verses. For instance, God sends the snow and his icy blast, followed by the soft melting breezes of spring, something we western Pennsylvanians know quite well. Surely Israel and we have abundant reasons to praise the Lord, even if we have had difficult experiences in the past. The purpose of interweaving nature and grace, of God's cosmic immensity and God's covenant intimacy, may seem a bit jarring at first, but I believe it is a truly joyful message. The 147th Psalm opens with an exclamation of joyful praise: "*How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!*" This interweaving of themes is designed to give us a balanced understanding of the Lord's divine sovereignty by placing God's concern for his people and his control of the world side by side.

All of this becomes more relevant for us if we simply insert the word “church” for Jerusalem or Zion in the Psalm. Even as God restored his people and rebuilt Jerusalem, he will restore and rebuild a currently troubled and some would say failing church. Even the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church that confesses, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* The God who cares for the church is the God who also counts and names the stars. He is willing and able in his covenant love (his *hesed*) and by his cosmic power to save the church today as he spared Israel then.

The Word of God puts the stars in place and names them all. The Word of God commands the seasons on earth. The Word of God gives clear direction and identity to those who fear the Lord and keep his commandments. And, best of all, the Word of God came down to earth from beyond the stars. He became part of the earth by taking on a human body, and he died for the sins of those who did not live by Torah, and even for those who never knew it. The entire world was given the Word made flesh, the Savior of all.

In words that expand on Psalm 147, Paul in Colossians 1 gives a striking description of the Word made flesh, a picture of his cosmic lordship and his covenantal care. Beginning at verse 15: *“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him...For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”*

Dear friends, the immensity of the universe is not an argument against the existence of God, as some would claim. Rather it is evidence of God’s ability to do all that he has promised for his people. In Psalm 147 God’s immensity and intimacy are inter-woven in a way that anticipates the miracle and the wonder of the Incarnation—God with us. Therefore, let us “Praise the Lord!” Hallelujah, Amen!