

Thomas Hieke

“From the Heavens, From the Earth”

Structure and Messages of Psalm 148

Abstract: This paper demonstrates that the poetic beauty of Psalm 148 becomes an ethical challenge when confronted with our contemporary problems. It uses a reader-oriented and text-centered methodology in order to describe the structure and content of this biblical text, its individual features and its typical traits shared with other texts, its context within the Psalter as well as within the Hebrew and the Greek Bible, and the messages that emerge from the process of this analytical reading. The imperative calls for praise in Psalm 148 thus become *in the present time* calls for respect for creation, for the entire cosmos and the ecological balance, which human beings are threatening to an unprecedented extent.

Keywords: Psalm 148, psalms, *Hallel*, praise of God, today’s reading

1 Introduction

This contribution on Psalm 148¹ was composed during the global Coronavirus pandemic, which brings about so much death, suffering, and restrictions of social contacts, as well as during the ongoing climate crisis that threatens life all over the planet; it is dedicated to a friend and colleague who passed away all too early, dear Géza Xeravits, due to a horrible disease. At first sight, there seems to be no reason for praise. Weeping and lament might be more adequate instead of an exegesis of a *halālū yāh* psalm of praise. Why then, for heaven’s sake, another study on Psalm 148? Why meditate on a psalm that calls the whole of creation to praise in a uniquely dense manner? The answer is simple: Because Psalm 148 changes our viewpoint, lifts our hope, challenges our way of living, and calls us to a new future. Read under today’s conditions, Psalm 148 becomes much more than a simple yet beautiful song of praise: It becomes an ethical challenge.

From a personal perspective, I have come to know Géza as a person who abounded with joy over the gifts of creation: The love for his family, good food, flavorful wine, feasting with friends after hard work examining God’s living word. Surely there were days in which praise of God was natural and appropriate. Let

¹ I am very grateful to Dr. Andrew Bowden for his assistance in preparing the English version of the paper.

us remember those days when meditating on Psalm 148. But let us also remember that all the hardships are not yet all finished. As believers, we share our common hope that God granted us the creation as a cosmos for a good life, and that God will lead all creation and all of us to completion in the days to come. As scholars, we scrutinize God's word and uncover reasons why our hope is not in vain. At the same time, however, we also discover new perspectives as well as fresh aspects and messages in God's word that speak today. Let me share with you my thoughts about praising YHWH with Psalm 148 in the face of the crises of our days, especially the climate crisis.²

In this paper, I intend to demonstrate the poetic beauty of Psalm 148, which in turn becomes an ethical challenge when confronted with our contemporary problems. I will use a reader-oriented and text-centered methodology³ in order to describe the structure and content of this biblical text, its individual features and its typical traits shared with other texts, its context within the Psalter as well as within the Hebrew and the Greek Bible, and the messages that emerge from the process of this analytical reading. Psalm 148 contains several references to other texts, thus creating an intertextual network. "References," in this contribution, however, denote text-text-relations that can be observed on the level of the reader; these relations are not necessarily *intended* by an author or editor. Likewise, the messages that Psalm 148 conveys from this analysis are certainly not entirely intended by the historical (human) author(s) of this text. If we limit a text's message to the mere content its author packed in it, we could dismiss a biblical text like Psalm 148 as a poem of the past, a pleasant artefact within a glass showcase, but without relevance for the complexities of the current day. This is not the way believers received the biblical texts; they rather have seen and still see in them the word of the living God. Christian theologians and exegetes must reflect this process of reading in a scholarly manner in order to find valuable impulses for the problems of our time. The following analysis of Psalm 148 intends to demonstrate how the beauty of an old text (roughly two and a half millennia) challenges the contemporary way of living.

² As late as 2014, ESTES, *Creation Theology*, 30, laments that Psalm 148 has appeared less frequently in discussions of nature or creation psalms. I share his opinion that this Psalm has much to contribute to a biblical theology of the created world.

³ The textbook on methods of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament exegesis that I wrote together with Benedict Schöning (HIEKE / SCHÖNING, *Einführung*) explains my approach.

2 The Text (Hebrew, Transcription, Translation, Coherence)

2.1 Text and Versions

2.1.1 The Masoretic Text and Its Transcription

הַלְלוּ יְהוָה	1	1 <i>halēlū yāh</i>
הַלְלוּ אֶת־יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם		<i>halēlū 'et-YHWH min-haššāmāyim</i>
הַלְלוּהוּ בַמְרוֹמִים:		<i>halēlūhū bammārômîm</i>
הַלְלוּהוּ כָל־מַלְאָכָיו הַלְלוּהוּ כָל־עֲבָדָיו:	2	2 <i>halēlūhū kol-mal'ākāyw halēlūhū kāl-šəbā'ō</i>
הַלְלוּהוּ שֶׁמֶשׁ וַיָּרַח הַלְלוּהוּ כָל־כּוֹכְבֵי אֲוִיר:	3	3 <i>halēlūhū šemeš wayārēah hallūhū kol-kōkəbē 'ōr</i>
הַלְלוּהוּ שְׁמֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם	4	4 <i>halēlūhū šamē haššāmāyim</i>
וְהַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל הַשָּׁמַיִם:		<i>wəhammayim 'āšer mē'al haššāmāyim</i>
יְהַלְלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה כִּי הוּא עֲנָה וְנִבְרָאוּ:	5	5 <i>yəhalēlū 'et-šēm YHWH kî hū' šiwwā wənibrā'ū</i>
וַיַּעֲמִידֵם לְעֵד לְעוֹלָם חֲקֵי־נֶתַן	6	6 <i>wayya'āmîdēm lā'ad la'ōlām ḥoq-nātan</i>
וְלֹא יַעֲבֹר:		<i>wəlō' ya'əbōr</i>
הַלְלוּ אֶת־יְהוָה מִן־הַאָרֶץ	7	7 <i>halēlū 'et-YHWH min-hā'āreš</i>
אֲנִינִים וְכָל־תְּהוֹמוֹת:		<i>tannînim wəkol-təhômôt</i>
אֶשׁ וְיָבֵד שֶׁלֶג וְקִיטוֹר	8	8 <i>'ēš ūbārod šeleg waqîṭōr</i>
רֵיחַ טְעֵמָה עֵשֶׂה דְבָרוֹ:		<i>rūah sə'ārā 'ōsā dəbārō</i>
הַהָרִים וְכָל־גִּבְעוֹת עֵץ פָּרִי וְכָל־אֲרָזִים:	9	9 <i>hehārîm wəkol-gəbā'ōt 'ēš pərî wəkol-'ārāzîm</i>
הַחֵיהָ וְכָל־בְּהֵמָה רִמֶשׂ וְצִפּוֹר כָּנָף:	10	10 <i>haḥayyā wəkol-bəhēmā remeš wəšippōr kānāp</i>
מְלִכֵי־אֲרָץ וְכָל־לְאֻמִּים	11	11 <i>malkē-'ereš wəkol-lə'ummîm</i>
שָׂרִים וְכָל־שֹׁפֵטֵי אָרֶץ:		<i>šārîm wəkol-šōpəṭē 'āreš</i>
בַּחֲוָרִים וְגַם־בַּתּוֹלוֹת זְקֵנִים עַם־נְעָרִים:	12	12 <i>baḥūrîm wəgam-batûlôt zəqēnîm 'im-nə'ārîm</i>
יְהַלְלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה כִּי־נִשְׁגָּב שֶׁמֶם	13	13 <i>yəhalēlū 'et-šēm YHWH kî-nišgāb šəmō</i>
לְבַדּוֹ הוֹדוּ עַל־אֲרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם:		<i>ləbaddô hōdō 'al-'ereš wəššāmāyim</i>
וַיִּרַם קֶרֶן לְעַמּוֹ תְהִלָּה לְכָל־חַסִּידָיו	14	14 <i>wayyārem qeren lə'ammō təhillā ləkol-ḥāsîdāyw</i>
לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַם־קִרְבּוֹ		<i>libnē yiśrā'el 'am-qərōbō</i>
הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה:		<i>halēlū-yāh</i>

2.1.2 Notes on the Hebrew Text and an English Translation

Ps 148:1, 14: The framing *halēlū-yāh* in v. 1 and v. 14 is not a necessary part of the psalm and perhaps arises from editorial activity. The initial *halēlū-yāh* is missing in the manuscript 11QPs^a (11Q5), and there is no final *halēlū-yāh* in the Septuagint and the Peshitta.⁴ However, due to the general character of this expression of

4 See, e.g., HILLERS, Psalm 148, 325.

praise, it makes little difference whether one regards the framing imperative as an original part of the psalm or as an editorial addition.

Ps 148:1: The manuscript 11QPs^a omits the *nota obiecti* 'et and assimilates the preposition *min* to the following word, thus reading *mšmym*.⁵

Ps 148:2: The *Qere* suggests reading the (unusual) plural (*šb'y-w*) at the end of the line (see the versions). The *Ketib* reading as singular is to be preferred.⁶

Ps 148:3: The LXX renders the “shining stars” – a construct chain also witnessed in 11QPs^a – by an enumeration: πάντα τὰ ἄστρα καὶ τὸ φῶς. This places the light as the first work of creation prominently at the end of the line and thus creates an intertextual connection with Genesis 1.

Ps 148:4: 11QPs^a reads at the end of the verse *m'l lšmym*.

Ps 148:5: The LXX aligns this verse with the similar wording in Ps 33[32]:9 and thus adds αὐτός εἶπεν, καὶ ἐγενήθησαν after ὅτι αὐτός.⁷ 11QPs^a reads the imperative *hllw*, “praise,” instead of the jussive *yhllw*, “let them praise.” The pendant in Ps 148:13 is unfortunately missing in the scroll fragment.⁸

Ps 148:8: The rare Hebrew term *qîṭōr* literally means “smoke, fog” (see Gen 19:28; Ps 119:83). The parallel with “snow” and the LXX rendering leads several translations to render it with “frost” (see NRSV; NAB chooses “thick clouds”).

Ps 148:14: The consonants of the first verb are *wyrm*, an ambiguous form which can be vocalized in different ways. The Masoretic vocalization reads a waw-imperative (*wayyārem*), while the LXX reads a future tense (i.e., a *wəyiqtol* form: *wəyārēm*): καὶ ὑψώσει. The time period in which YHWH intervened (or: will intervene) for his people is dependent upon one’s interpretation of the consonantal text: Did it already happen in the past, which the Psalm remembers (thus MT), or is it a promise for the future (as the LXX puts it)?

Ps 148:14: The final *haləlû-yāh* is not represented in the LXX.

5 A brief examination of the attestation of Psalm 148 (more precisely: Psalm 148:1–12) in the Dead Sea Scrolls, especially 11QPs^a, is provided by BRODERSEN, End, 152–153. She concludes: “In *summary*, in 11QPs^a Psalm 148 follows Ps 146 and may have preceded Ps 120 (not preserved) and the preserved Ps 121. There is no opening Hallelujah, the end of Ps 148 is not preserved. There are small differences in wording and orthography.”

6 See the brief discussion by BRODERSEN, End, 144.

7 HILLERS, Psalm 148, 325, opts to restore this colon in the MT, but he offers no compelling reasons. The MT can be retained here, see below.

8 See, e.g., NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 255.

The following English translation uses the NRSV in an emended and adapted way:

- 1 a Praise YHWH!
 b Praise YHWH from the heavens;
 c praise him in the heights!
- 2 a/aV₁ Praise him, all his angels;⁹
 b/bV₂ praise him, all his host!
- 3 a/aV₃ Praise him, sun and moon;
 b/bV₄ praise him, all you shining stars!
- 4 a/aV₅ Praise him, you highest heavens,
 aV₆ and you waters above the heavens!
- 5 a Let them praise the name of YHWH,
 b for he commanded
 c and they were created.
- 6 a He established them forever and ever;
 b he set an order
 c that will never change.
- 7 a Praise YHWH from the earth,
 aV₁ you sea monsters and all deeps,
- 8 V₂ fire and hail,
 V₃ snow and fog,
 V₄ stormy wind fulfilling his command!
- 9 V₅ Mountains and all hills,
 V₆ fruit trees and all cedars!
- 10 V₇ Wild animals and all cattle,
 V₈ creeping things and flying birds!
- 11 V₉ Kings of the earth and all peoples,
 V₁₀ princes and all rulers of the earth!
- 12 V₁₁ Young men and women alike,
 V₁₂ old and young together!
- 13 a Let them praise the name of YHWH,
 b for his name alone is exalted;
 c his glory is above earth and heaven.
- 14 a He has raised up a horn for his people,
 b praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him.
 c Praise YHWH!

⁹ “V” stands for *vocative*.

Notes on the translation: In Ps 148:6, the NRSV translates, “he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.” This translation implies that the law (*ḥōq*) refers directly to the entities mentioned before, that is, the highest heavens, the waters above, etc. The elements of the cosmos received their eternal law from YHWH, which cannot be changed. This interpretation fits the context very well, but the Hebrew text does not state explicitly to whom the law refers (the pronoun in “*their* bonds” is not in the biblical text). Hence, the version of the NAB (“[he] set an order that will never change”) is closer to the Hebrew text. This observation has consequences for the inner coherence and unity of the text (see below). The NRSV offers in a footnote on Ps 148:6 the verbatim translation: “he set a law that cannot pass away.”¹⁰

The syntax and semantics of Ps 148:14b are not clear.¹¹ (1) The term *təhillā* can be interpreted as an additional accusative object, that is, as a parallel to “horn.” Then it would mean something like “renown”; in other words, YHWH’s intervention would provide honor and respect for the previously despised and mocked Israel. However, *təhillā* usually, and especially in the Final Hallel of the Psalter, designates the praise that Israel sings for YHWH. (2) Hence, it is more appropriate to understand v. 14b as a nominal clause commenting on v. 14a, that is, the empowerment with which YHWH strengthened Israel (“he has raised up a horn”) is the reason for or the content of the praise that Israel sings for YHWH: “And he has raised up a horn for his people: (reason for) praise for all his faithful . . .” The rendering of *təhillā* with ὕμνος by the Septuagint (LXX; see below) corroborates this reading: The Greek nominal clause is to be read as an explanation or consequence of v. 14a (like in the MT).¹²

10 See also ZENGER, Psalm 148, 630: “קִן, ‘law, order, ordinance,’ here means first of all the cosmic order, but – above all in the context of the Final Hallel – it also connotes the Torah (Ps 147:19; cf. Pss 146:7; 149:9).” See also NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 282.

11 For the following see ZENGER, Psalm 148, 630. For a detailed discussion, see BRÜNING, Psalm 148, 4–6; see also SCHMUTZER / GAUTHIER, *Identity*, 172–174.

12 Cf. ZENGER, Psalm 148, 640; see also BRODERSEN, *End*, 148; NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 255–256; SCHMUTZER / GAUTHIER, *Identity*, 177–179.

2.1.3 The Greek Text (Septuagint) and Its English Translation

Psalm 148 (LXX)	Psalm 148 (NETS adapted)
¹ Ἀλληλουϊα· Ἀγγαίου καὶ Ζαχαρίου. Αἰνεῖτε τὸν κύριον ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, αἰνεῖτε αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ὑψίστοις.	1 Hallelouia. [Of Haggai and Zacharias] Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the highest heights!
² αἰνεῖτε αὐτόν, πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ· αἰνεῖτε αὐτόν, πᾶσαι αἱ δυνάμεις αὐτοῦ.	2 Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts!
³ αἰνεῖτε αὐτόν, ἥλιος καὶ σελήνη· αἰνεῖτε αὐτόν, πάντα τὰ ἄστρα καὶ τὸ φῶς.	3 Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all the stars and the light!
⁴ αἰνεῖτε αὐτόν, οἱ οὐρανοὶ τῶν οὐρανῶν καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ὑπεράνω τῶν οὐρανῶν.	4 Praise him, you heavens of heavens and you water above the heavens!
⁵ αἰνεσάτωσαν τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου, ὅτι αὐτὸς εἶπεν, καὶ ἐγενήθησαν, αὐτὸς ἐνετείλατο, καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν.	5 Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he spoke, and they came to be; he commanded, and they were created.
⁶ ἔστησεν αὐτὰ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα καὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος· πρόσταγμα ἔθετο, καὶ οὐ παρελεύσεται.	6 He established them forever and forever and ever; an ordinance he issued, and it will not pass away.
⁷ αἰνεῖτε τὸν κύριον ἐκ τῆς γῆς, δράκοντες καὶ πᾶσαι ἄβυσσοι·	7 Praise the Lord from the earth, you dragons and all deeps,
⁸ πῦρ, χάλαζα, χιὼν, κρύσταλλος, πνεῦμα καταιγίδος, τὰ ποιοῦντα τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ·	8 fire, hail, snow, ice, tempest blast, those things that do his word!
⁹ τὰ ὄρη καὶ πάντες οἱ βουνοί, ξύλα καρποφόρα καὶ πᾶσαι κέδροι·	9 The mountains and all the hills, fruit trees and all cedars!
¹⁰ τὰ θηρία καὶ πάντα τὰ κτήνη, ἔρπετὰ καὶ πετεινὰ περρωτὰ·	10 The wild animals and all the cattle, creeping things and winged birds!
¹¹ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ πάντες λαοί, ἄρχοντες καὶ πάντες κριταὶ γῆς·	11 Kings of the earth and all peoples, rulers and all judges of earth!
¹² νεανίσκοι καὶ παρθένοι, πρεσβῦται μετὰ νεωτέρων·	12 Young men and unmarried women, old with young!
¹³ αἰνεσάτωσαν τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου, ὅτι ὑψώθη τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ μόνου· ἡ ἐξομολόγησις αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ οὐρανοῦ.	13 Let them praise the name of the Lord, because the name of him alone was exalted; acknowledgement of him is in earth and sky.
¹⁴ καὶ ὑψώσει κέρασ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ· ὕμνος πᾶσι τοῖς ὀσίοις αὐτοῦ, τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ, λαῶ ἐγγίζοντι αὐτῷ.	14 He will exalt his people’s horn; a hymn belongs to all his devout, the sons of Israel, a people drawing near to him.

The Septuagint (LXX) version¹³ shows some differences from the Hebrew text; a few of these differences can be interpreted as deliberate changes in order to strengthen intertextual relationships with other texts.¹⁴

¹³ BRODERSEN, End, 154–170, provides a close examination of the Septuagint version of Psalm 148. She concludes that the DSS and the LXX version of Psalm 148 are very close to the MT version, “though LXX stresses universalism and future” (p. 170).

¹⁴ On the following passage see, e.g., ZENGER, Psalm 148, 640.

The LXX enlarges the psalm's heading by adding "Of Haggaios and Zacharias," thus suggesting that the writings of these prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, have some relationship with this psalm and also Psalms 145(146), 146(147:1–11), and 147(147:12–20), where they are also mentioned.¹⁵ There are indeed some thematic relationships and linguistic parallels between these psalms and the writings of Haggai and Zechariah.¹⁶ Regarding Psalm 148, the most likely connection to Zechariah "may be found in the idea expressed by the Psalmist that all kings on earth, all nations and all rulers in the world shall praise God (v. 11). This ideal state is expressed in the message of Zechariah, 'Yea, many peoples and mighty nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of the Lord' (Zech 8:21)."¹⁷

Ps 148:3 LXX adds after sun, moon, and stars as a fourth entity the light itself (thus dissolving the construct chain in the Hebrew text: "stars of light," "shining stars"). Whether or not this change or interpretation is deliberate, it nevertheless creates a closer relationship with Genesis 1, where the light is created as an entity of its own and *before* the sun, the moon, and the stars.

Ps 148:5 LXX is enlarged with material from Ps 32(33):9 LXX. The addition disturbs the structure; however, it gains a closer intertextual relationship with Psalm 32(33).¹⁸ The chart illustrates the process:

Ps 148:5 Hebrew Text (NRSV)	Ps 148:5 LXX (NETS)	Ps 32:8–9 LXX (NETS)
Let them praise the name of YHWH,	Let them praise the name of the Lord,	Let all the earth fear the Lord, and due to him let all the inhabitants of the world be shaken,
	for he spoke, and they came to be;	because he it was that spoke, and they came to be;
for he commanded and they were created.	he commanded, and they were created.	he it was that commanded, and they were created.

Psalm 148 shares with Psalm 32(33) the notion of the interconnectedness of creation with God's election of Israel: While the entire creation came to be through the word of God, it is Israel who has a special relationship with God the creator; see, for example, Ps 32(33):12 LXX: "Happy is the nation of whom the Lord is God, a people he chose as a heritage for himself" (NETS).

Ps 148:6 LXX renders the superlative of eternity (*lā'ad la'ôlām*, see below) by making use of a long formula repeating the term αἰῶνα three times: εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα

¹⁵ For the discussion about these assignments see, e.g., BRODERSEN, End, 17.

¹⁶ See SLOMOVIC, Historical Titles, 362–364.

¹⁷ SLOMOVIC, Historical Titles, 364.

¹⁸ Cf. ZENGER, Psalm 148, 640.

καὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος. There is a tendency in LXX psalms to translate the Hebrew *lā-‘ad* with εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος, and this probably leads to the accumulation of three occurrences of αἰῶνα. Similar renderings occur, for example, in Exod 15:18; Ps 9:6; 9:37(10:16); 20(21):5; 44(45):18; 47(48):15; 51(52):10, etc.

Ps 148:8 LXX renders the rare Hebrew term *qîṭôr*, lit. “smoke, fog,” with the term κρύσταλλος, probably taken from Ps 147:6 LXX (147:17), where this word translates the Hebrew *qerah*, “frost, ice, hail.” The closeness of the preceding passage, the similarity of the Hebrew consonants, and the semantic equivalent to “snow” might have led to this replacement, which several modern translations tend to adopt. Again, the LXX strengthens the intertextual connection between Psalms 147 and 148 by employing the same (rare!) term κρύσταλλος.

In Ps 148:14 LXX, the Septuagint shifts the “rising of the horn” for Israel to the future, rendering the Hebrew narrative form (waw-imperative) *wayyārem* with the Greek future ὑψώσει (see above). Hence, while the Hebrew text probably remembers a particular historical situation, for example, the deliverance of the people of Israel from the exile in Babylon, the Septuagint awakens an eschatological expectation.

2.2 Coherence

The overall thrust of Psalm 148 focuses on the cosmos as a whole. The two halves refer to entities in heaven (vv. 1–6) and on earth (vv. 7–13). Up to v. 13, Psalm 148* has a global and an international perspective, including humanity in its entirety. The focus on Israel in v. 14ab does not fit into this pattern. If “Israel” was the primary focus of the original psalm, the people of God would have been mentioned among the groups of human beings in vv. 11–12.¹⁹ Hence, it is probable that v. 14 is a secondary addition.²⁰ If, however, the last verse of Psalm 148 is an editorial enhancement,

¹⁹ See NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 299.

²⁰ On the scholarly discussion, see, e.g., ZENGER, *Psalm 148*, 634–635. Zenger concludes that v. 14 stands in tension with the preceding body of the psalm: “Although v. 14, as a concluding coda, establishes a clearly thematic accent, it remains very indeterminate in relation to the course of the psalm and in its own semantics. The ‘riddle’ of v. 14 is resolved if one regards the verse not only as a redactional transition to Psalm 149 (cf. v. 1), but as an element intended to integrate Ps 148:1–13 within the overall concept of Psalms 146–150” (p. 635). See also ZENGER, *Aller Atem*, 576, n. 34. NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 261–263; 283–284, strongly opts with good reasons for a secondary addition of v. 6 and v. 14. For a different opinion, see BRÜNING, *Psalm 148*, 3–4, who insists on the originality of v. 14 with reference to Sir 51:120 (Hebrew only). However, the points C. Brüning makes in favor of the originality of v. 14 can cut both ways and hence are not compelling reasons. RUPPERT, *Aufforderung*, 277–278, connects v. 14a with v. 13 and identifies this combination as the original end of Psalm 148*, while v. 14bc forms a secondary (editorial) colophon.

this addition to the second half of Psalm 148* would require a similar addition to the first half; otherwise, the well-balanced pairing of “from the heavens – from the earth” would be disturbed. On the basis of this assumption, it is probable that the same editor who added the “Israel” notion in v. 14ab created a counterweight in v. 6bc: “he [YHWH] set an order that will never change.” This wording is a very skillful elaboration, as the reader can understand “order” (Hebrew *ḥōq* without pronoun) in two ways: First, in a vertical reading following the flow of the text, *ḥōq* refers to the heavenly entities mentioned above: sun, moon, stars, heavens, waters above the heavens. YHWH provided an order for them according to which they function for centuries and millennia. Second, in a horizontal reading, v. 6bc appears as the counterweight to v. 14ab (see the analysis of the psalm’s structure below), that is, *ḥōq* refers to Israel and thus appears as a synonym to the *tôrâ* that YHWH gave to Israel. In other words, if an editor wanted to add the focus on Israel in v. 14ab, this editor had to create a counterweight in the first half. For this counterweight, the editor has chosen a wording that perfectly fits the immediate context (vv. 1–5) *as well as* the “Israel” supplement (v. 14ab). To confirm this, one can read Psalm 148:1–5, 7–13, 14c as a unity (abbreviated notation: Psalm 148*).

Hence, the psalm developed in two stages: a *Grundschrift* (Psalm 148*) with a global perspective, and a supplement (Psalm 148:6ab, 14ab) with a focus on Israel and its *tôrâ* = *ḥōq*. However, if one does not adopt this speculative reconstruction of the psalm’s origin, one can at least read the psalm in two ways: either with a focus on the entire cosmos, in which Israel takes on a special role, or with a focus on Israel as the apex of the praise of creation.²¹

3 The Structure

3.1 The Basic Structure

At first sight, Psalm 148 in its final form (Masoretic text) reveals two structural characteristics:²² First, the imperative *halālû yāh*, “Praise YH[WH],” is the first

²¹ BRODERSEN, End, 150, makes the bold statement that “Ps 148^{MT} is one unit.” Although she lists other opinions in the footnotes, she neither engages with the arguments that these scholars mention nor does she offer a suggestion about how to read the tension between the global view of creation (Psalm 148*) and the focus on Israel (Ps 148:14) as “one unit.” As pointed out above, such a reading is possible, but this question reaches beyond the methodological framework of Brodersen’s study.

²² See ZENGER, Psalm 148, 631; ZENGER, *Aller Atem*, 575. For a detailed syntactic and structural analysis of Psalm 148 see BRODERSEN, End, 132–135; NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 260–267. For suggestions on the structure of Psalm 148 from the French-speaking world, see

and the last word of the psalm and thus frames the entire text (v. 1a; v. 14c).²³ Two further repetitions divide the psalm in two halves (parts): The phrase *halālū 'et-YHWH min-*, “Praise YHWH from . . .,” occurs in v. 1b and v. 7a and thus opens the respective part. The phrase *yāhalālū 'et-šēm YHWH kī*, “Let them praise the name of YHWH for . . .,” in v. 5a and v. 13a initiates the second half of each part. Thus, the two parts of Psalm 148 consist of two strophes each:²⁴ (I) 1b–4 + 5–6; and (II) 7–12 + 13–14b. The basic structure of Psalm 148 can be illustrated in the following diagram:

Frame		1a	Praise YH[WH]
Body	First part (I)	1b–6	Praise YHWH from the heavens
	Second part (II)	7–14b	Praise YHWH from the earth
Frame		14c	Praise YH[WH]

The two parts (halves) of the psalm between the *halālū yāh* frame form a diptych.

3.2 The Diptych

The inner structure of the two parts proceed in a parallel way and thus form a mirror symmetry.²⁵ The following diagram displays the related passages.

1a	Praise YH[WH]		
1b	Praise YHWH from the heavens	7a	Praise YHWH from the earth
1c–4	6 times “Praise him”; 6 vocatives	7–12	12 vocatives
5a	Let them praise the name of YHWH	13a	Let them praise the name of YHWH
5b–6a	Motivations	13bc	Motivations
6bc	<i>the never changing order</i>	14ab	<i>the horn for Israel</i>
		14c	Praise YH[WH]

AUFFRET, Qu'ils louent, 221–234, with references to his own older work (1982), to J. Trublet-J.-N. Aletti (1983), and to M. Girard (1994). Auffret also discusses the suggestions made by G. Ravasi (Italian, 1984) and W.S. Prinsloo (English, 1992).

23 But see the text-critical remark on the framing *halālū-yāh* above: Perhaps this feature is a later addition.

24 See, e.g., SCAIOLA, La conclusione, 293.

25 See also, e.g., BRÜNING, Psalm 148, 2.

The perfect symmetry makes it highly probable that v. 6bc and v. 14ab are secondary additions to introduce God's order (or "law," *ḥōq*) and the focus on Israel.²⁶

Despite the perfect symmetry and the deliberate repetitions to form the symmetrical diptych, the two parts also contain differing structural elements. The first half (vv. 1b–6a) correlates six repetitions of the call to praise YHWH (*halēlūhū*) with six vocatives. The vocatives ("V") address the heavens and entities related to them. They are grouped in a descending order:

- V₁₋₂ angels and heavenly court
- V₃₋₄ heavenly bodies (= lower deities in Israel's neighborhood)
- V₅ highest heaven (perhaps the visible sky?)
- V₆ the heavenly ocean as source for rain, hail, snow, etc.

As the semantic field of "heaven" is opened, the motivations (vv. 5b–6a) focus thematically on God's everlasting creation.²⁷

The second half (vv. 7–13) contains only one call to praise YHWH (v. 7a), but twelve (two times six) vocatives which address a variety of phenomena and inhabitants of the earth. The rhetorical device of merism dominates throughout. The motivations (v. 13bc) emphasize the name of YHWH as the only one to be exalted and God's glory that transcends earth and heaven.

The counting of the vocatives needs some explanation. Some instances address a single entity ("all his angels," "all his host"), but some uses address (at least) a pair combined by "and" and separated from the next pair by asyndeton. Hence, "sun and moon" (v. 3aV₃) is counted as a unity (one vocative). In v. 8, two pairs separated by asyndeton ("fire *and* hail, snow *and* fog") are counted as two vocatives. Similar pairs occur in vv. 9–12. The pairs that are internally connected by "and" (Hebrew: *w-*) mostly form a merism: Two terms closely related express a larger entity, for example, v. 10V₇: "wild animals and all cattle," that is, all animals (mostly quadrupeds) that live on the land, and v. 10V₈: "creeping things and flying birds," that is, all other animals which are neither wild nor cattle. "Kings of the earth and all peoples" (v. 11V₉) are *all* human beings, and likewise "old and young" (v. 12V₁₂). One can arrange the twelve vocatives in the second half of Psalm 148 according to the following system:

- V₁ phenomena in the oceans
- V₂₋₄ the weather

²⁶ See NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 261.

²⁷ On the "ministructure" of Ps 148:5–6, 7–12, see AUFFRET, *Qu'ils louent*, 223–227; see *ibid.*, 227–230, on the microstructure of verses 13 and 14. The observations are very detailed and cannot be discussed here.

- V₅ the landscape
- V₆ plants
- V₇₋₈ animals
- V₉₋₁₂ human beings

This sequence resembles the creation account in Genesis 1 and in Psalm 104, which is likewise dependent on Genesis 1.

3.3 The Number Symbolism

Psalm 148 reveals a carefully arranged number symbolism.²⁸ In the psalm’s body the root *HLL* (“praise”) occurs ten times. Likewise, the term *kol*, “all,” is used ten times. The number “ten” symbolizes totality and perfection: Ten words of creation and ten times *wayyiqra’*, “and he [God] said” in Genesis 1, the “Ten Words” of the Decalogue. If one adds the two occurrences of *halēlū yāh* in the psalm’s frame, the sum amounts to twelve (twelve tribes of Israel, twelve months of the year, in a word: everything).²⁹ Without the two occurrences of *halēlū yāh* in the psalm’s frame, the body of the psalm has 30 lines (three times ten). In sum, 30 entities are summoned to praise YHWH (seven in the first half, 23 in the second half).³⁰

The sequence “heavens” – “earth” of the psalm’s body relates in an inverted manner to the phrase “earth and heaven” in v. 13c. This sequence, in turn, mirrors the relationship between Gen 1:1 (heaven and earth) and Gen 2:4 (earth and heaven).³¹ The question arises about how the two halves of Psalm 148 relate to each other and which messages the text intends to convey.

²⁸ Cf. BRODERSEN, End, 135–136; NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 258–259; BIELEFELD / BRÜNING, Psalm 148, 276–279; BRÜNING, Psalm 148, 6–10.

²⁹ Cf. ZENGER, Psalm 148, 632.

³⁰ In addition, RUPPERT, *Aufforderung*, 278–281, and ZENGER, Psalm 148, 632, count seven strophes in Ps 148:1–13, which may well be an allusion to the creation of “heaven and earth” in seven days according to Gen 1:1–2:3. However, one should also take into account that God created heaven and earth actually in six days, while the seventh day is separated and sanctified as the day of rest, later called the “Sabbath.” In Psalm 148, one can identify no allusion to the Sabbath.

³¹ Cf. ZENGER, Psalm 148, 638; NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 294–295.

4 The Content

4.1 Propositions

The first part of Psalm 148 (vv. 1–6) focuses on the upper sphere of the biblical conception of the world (“heavens” and “heights,” v. 1). The text summons the phenomena located in this upper sphere to praise YHWH: Angels, YHWH’s host, sun and moon, shining stars, the celestial spheres containing the heavenly ocean that brings rain from time to time (vv. 2–4). All these entities, invisible or visible, are told to praise YHWH, for YHWH (1) has created them, (2) established them in eternity, and (3) provided an unchangeable order for them (vv. 5–6). (1) The term for “created,” *wə-nibrā’û*, is a Nifal form of the verb *BR’*. This verb also occurs in the very first verse of the Bible (Gen 1:1) and is exclusively reserved for God (YHWH) as subject. Hence, the passive voice (Nifal) is clearly a *passivum divinum*, God alone is the acting power behind the passive “they were created” (see also Ps 104:30).

(2) The phrase rendered as “forever and ever” (v. 6a) combines two Hebrew terms denoting “eternity”: *‘ad* and *‘ôlām*, both with the preposition *l-*. This poetic construction expresses an unsurmountable superlative that transgresses all limits of time.³² Thus, Psalm 148 extends the imagination of its readership in space *and* time to the ultimate borders and beyond: From the highest heavens down to the earth, from creation to eternity (forever and ever). The implied message conveys the notion that YHWH has no spatial or temporal limits; there is no era and no space without YHWH. Although this is not stated explicitly, the conclusion remains inevitable. Thus, Psalm 148 conveys the concept of an implicit monotheism.

(3) Regarding the crucial term *ḥōq* in v. 6b, this order can refer in the immediate context to the cosmic order, that is, the fixed paths of the stars, of sun and moon, the repetitions of the seasons, and the weather. However, a larger view that includes the context of the neighboring psalms associates the term *ḥōq* with God’s “statutes” given to Israel, as Ps 147:19 states: “He [YHWH] declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances (*ḥuqqāyw ū-mišpātāyw*) to Israel.” This last part of Psalm 147 is very closely related to the first part of Psalm 148, since both texts share the topic of cosmic or meteorological phenomena (snow, frost/fog, hail, waters). A reader of Psalm 148 who is acquainted with the immediately

³² HILLERS, Psalm 148, 325–326, suggests an emendation of the text and translates: “He established them as an ordinance forever.” Because this is a *lectio facilior*, the MT should not be changed.

preceding Psalm 147 will definitely associate *both* meanings of *ḥōq* in Ps 148:6: The cosmic order as well as God’s statutes and ordinances for Israel.³³

The second part of Psalm 148 (vv. 7–14) focuses on the lower sphere, that is, the earth and all other imaginable spaces: (1) The sea monsters and all deeps, (2) the atmosphere with its weather phenomena, (3) the landscapes, plants, animals, and human beings. To be specific: (1) The sea monsters (*tannînim*) occur in the creation account (Gen 1:21) and other texts alluding to God’s creative (and restrictive) powers (Isa 27:1; 51:9; Ps 74:13; 148:7; Job 7:12).³⁴ The deeps (*tāhômôt*) are a poetic expression for the water beneath the earth, predominantly used in the Psalms, usually not accessible to human beings, but dominated by YHWH. The pair “sea monsters and all deeps” form a *t*-alliteration in Hebrew: *tannînim wəkol tāhômôt*.

(2) The weather phenomena in Ps 148:8 repeat similar terms from the preceding Psalm 147:

Psalm 148:8	Psalm 147
fire and hail (<i>bārod</i>),	17 He hurls down hail (<i>qerah</i>) like crumbs
snow (<i>šeleg</i>) and fog (<i>qîṭṭôr</i>),	16 He gives snow (<i>šeleg</i>) like wool; he scatters frost (<i>kəpôr</i>) like ashes.
stormy wind (<i>rûaḥ sə’ārâ</i>) fulfilling his command!	18 . . . he makes his wind (<i>rûaḥ</i>) blow . . .

The differences in sequence and terminology do not obscure the shared motif of God’s command over the weather phenomena, which are beyond the control of human beings. Hence, both psalms exalt and praise YHWH by interpreting the uncontrollable events of the weather as expressions of YHWH’s power. YHWH’s name and glory are the reasons why the entire earth and its inhabitants are summoned to praise YHWH (see Ps 148:13).

(3) The imagined “camera” of Psalm 148 looks down through the atmosphere to the landscape of the earth: Mountains, hills, trees, animals, and even creeping things, that is, very small animals crawling on the surface of the earth (vv. 9–10).³⁵ These verses read like the storyboard of an image video of the earth’s beauty. The

³³ See, e.g., NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 282.

³⁴ The other occurrences in Exod 7:9, 10, 12; Deut 32:33 denote snakes. In Jer 51:34 and Ezek 29:3, the term refers in a metaphorical way to foreign powerful kings (Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and Pharaoh, king of Egypt).

³⁵ ESTES, *Creation Theology*, 35, aptly writes: “Nothing is excluded from Yahweh’s praise choir. Yahweh has deep concern and care for all the animals (cf. Job 38:41; Ps 104:21; Jonah 4:11), and all are exhorted to praise Him. What might sound to human ears like a cacophony of roars, grunts, squeals, and chirps is to Yahweh a sonorous symphony exalting Him.” I appreciate Estes’ invitation to take on YHWH’s perspective for a moment!

psalm tries to cover every imaginable feature on the earth, closely resembling the order and terminology of Genesis 1. The merisms in vv. 11–12 describe the totality and diversity of human beings. Furthermore, as the diversity of genders and ages, between peoples and leading powers often lead to harsh conflicts, one can also read Psalm 148 as a call to a *common* praise of God: The psalm binds all these different groups and interests together in one single praise that acknowledges YHWH's world order in which every element and group does precisely that for which it was created.³⁶ Psalm 148 presents the world as a “sound(ing) cosmos.”³⁷

“Heaven(s)” and “earth” do not simply denote two parts or spheres, but this merism works as a compound term relating to the entirety of creation, to the cosmos as a whole. Biblical Hebrew has no special term for “cosmos” or “world.” YHWH, however, is separated from this entirety of “heaven and earth.”³⁸ The deity as creator transcends the cosmos.³⁹

The phrases “*from* the heavens” and “*from* the earth” imply a dynamic movement: In the same way as almost all of the enumerated phenomena move and change throughout, the praise for YHWH should carry on without pause or end. The dynamic within the phenomena itself corresponds to a teleological dynamic within the entire psalm: Using the “camera” metaphor, one could say that the text describes one long tracking shot from the farthest point that human beings can imagine (the highest heavens) down to all human beings (vv. 11–13), and, in the final form of Psalm 148, down to Israel as God's chosen people (v. 14). The movement of this track of praise also marks a progression. The final form of Psalm 148 culminates with the very close and unique relationship between YHWH and his people. This fascinating relationship motivates the entire cosmos to praise YHWH. Deutero-Isaiah expresses a similar idea:

Sing, O heavens, for YHWH has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For YHWH has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel (Isa 44:23).⁴⁰

The focus on Israel as YHWH's people connects Ps 148:14 with Ps 147:19–20 and Ps 149:4 (see also the “[children of] Israel” in Ps 147:13; Ps 148:14; Ps 149:2). This observation can corroborate the assumption that Ps 148:14 (together with Ps

³⁶ Even more, as ESTES, *Creation Theology*, 35, states: “Even those humans who because of their gender, class, or status are routinely dismissed have a welcome voice in Yahweh's choir of praise.”

³⁷ See ZENGER, *Aller Atem*, 579.

³⁸ Cf. ZENGER, *Psalm 148*, 636.

³⁹ ZENGER, *Psalm 148*, 636.

⁴⁰ See also Isa 49:13; cf. ZENGER, *Psalm 148*, 632.

148:6bc) is an editorial addition, intending to focus the entire praise of Psalms 147–149 (and beyond) on Israel’s relationship with YHWH.⁴¹ Without this addition, Psalm 148* focuses on God’s creation as a whole, from the highest heavens down to the creeping things on the earth, from the angels in heaven to human beings, old and young, on the earth. The psalm’s symmetry and balance unfold a fascinatingly beautiful picture.

4.2 Speech Acts (Illocutionary Acts)

The dominating speech act of Psalm 148 is without doubt the call for praise, that is, a directive speech act that summons various entities to praise YHWH. The recurring syntactical pattern is the combination of the imperative with the vocative, especially in vv. 1–4 and vv. 7–12. The imperative (second person plural) changes to the jussive (third person plural) in v. 5a and v. 13a, followed by a connective assertion (vv. 5b–6a and v. 13bc) which works as a motivation for the call for praise. Psalm 148* thus follows the basic pattern of the imperative hymn (“*imperativischer Hymnus*”). Needless to say, the call for praise (syntactically expressed by imperatives and jussives) is itself already the speech act of praise: The uttering of the imperative “Praise!” is in itself an act of praise.⁴²

5 The Typical (Genre and Language)

As the analysis of the speech acts already demonstrated, Psalm 148 is a quite typical representative of the genre “imperative hymn”: A call for praise followed by some sort of motivation or reasoning why (or: for which) God shall be praised (see, e.g., Psalm 117 for comparison).⁴³

⁴¹ See NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 298–303.

⁴² NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 303–306. She concludes: “So hat die Forderung eines universalen Lobaufrufs bereits Auswirkung auf die Gegenwart. Durch den Hymnus, der aller Welt aufgetragen ist, wird der Blick auf die Welt und auf Gott gestaltet. Dabei wird das Loben als die höchste und eigentlichste Aufgabe allen Seins gepriesen – ob schon vollzogen oder nicht. Der Anspruch ist formuliert und wird dadurch schon Wirklichkeit. Gleichwohl hat sich der Verfasser von V. 14 wohl etwas mehr Realitätssinn bewahrt, als der ursprüngliche Psalm formulieren wollte: Denn er versteht Israel als Initiator des kosmischen Lobpreises, das jetzt schon mit seinen Psalmen den Herrn des Kosmos, der zugleich sein Gott ist, loben kann und soll.”

⁴³ See, e.g., BRODERSEN, *End*, 148–149.

Psalm 148* has intertextual relations with several prominent texts of the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁴ First of all, the intertextual connections with Genesis 1 cannot be overlooked. The sequence of the created items is very similar. Hence, Psalm 148 is also connected with other texts that refer to Genesis 1, such as Psalm 104 and God's speeches in the book of Job (Job 38–39).⁴⁵ Psalm 148* shares with Psalm 103:20–22 the call for praise addressed to entities beyond the human realm: The angels, the mighty ones, the host of YHWH, all his works. However, instead of *HLL* (Piel) in Psalm 148, Psalm 103 uses *BRK* (Piel). Nevertheless, the basic idea is common to both texts, and Psalm 148* looks like an expansion and realization in a larger scale of the brief suggestion in Psalm 103:20–22: “Bless YHWH, all his works, in all places of his dominion” (Ps 103:22) – Psalm 148* does exactly that.⁴⁶

The final form of Psalm 148 correlates God's creation with “an order that will never change” (v. 6bc). The same combination occurs notably in Psalm 19 with its two parts:⁴⁷ Psalm 19:1–6 (“the heavens are telling the glory of God”) and Psalm 19:7–14 (“the law of YHWH is perfect”). Perhaps the editor who added v. 14 and v. 6bc to Psalm 148* had an eye on this composite psalm.

One can also detect a close relationship of Ps 148:1–2 with Neh 9:6: “You are YHWH, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. To all of them you give life, and the host of heaven worships you.” The idea of YHWH the creator⁴⁸ draws from a linguistic reservoir of very similar expressions and motifs. The pairs “heaven + the heaven of heavens” as well as “earth and heaven” or “the earth and all that is on it” or “the seas and all that is in them” form merisms that seek to cover the entire organized world.⁴⁹ The creation of all this alone by the word of God occurs at various places in the Hebrew Bible, not only in Genesis 1, but also in Psalm 33:6–9:

44 For a detailed study of the dependence of Psalm 148 on earlier Scripture, see NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 267–306; see also RUPPERT, *Aufforderung*, 283–286. Psalm 148 has a close parallel in the deuterocanonical (Greek) parts of the Book of Daniel: The song of the three young men in the furnace (Dan 3:52–90); see RUPPERT, *Aufforderung*, 281–282, who regards the hymn in Daniel as a secondary imitation.

45 See also NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 251–252; RUPPERT, *Aufforderung*, 293–294.

46 See RUPPERT, *Aufforderung*, 294–295.

47 See, e.g., ZENGER, *Psalm 148*, 637; NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 254.

48 The idea of YHWH as creator is an important aspect in the final composition of the Psalter; see SCAIOLA, *La conclusione*, 296.

49 For the motif of Heaven and Earth as personified entities praising God, see NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 252–255. She points especially to Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 44 and 49), Deut 32:1–3, and Psalms 96–98.

- 6 By the word of YHWH the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.
- 7 He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; he put the deeps in storehouses.
- 8 Let all the earth fear YHWH; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.
- 9 For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

Especially Ps 33:9 is so close to Ps 148:5 that the Septuagint version enlarged the latter verse by filling in phrases from Ps 32:9 LXX (see above).

The stability of the earth as a testimony of God’s power and wisdom is also a topic that occurs frequently in the psalms (for example, Ps 24:2; 104:5; 119:90–91; see also Prov 3:19).

The phrase “kings of the earth and all peoples” in Ps 148:11 echoes texts like Ps 2:10; 47:9–10; 102:16–17, 23; 138:4–5. These verses express the hope that all foreign powers and peoples will finally find their way to Zion and YHWH (see also the pilgrimage of all peoples in Isaiah 2:1–5 and Micah 4:1–5).⁵⁰ Especially Ps 148:11, 13 and Ps 138:4–5 show many similarities:⁵¹

Psalm 138	Psalm 148
4 All the <i>kings of the earth</i> shall praise you, YHWH, for they have heard the words of your mouth.	11 <i>Kings of the earth</i> and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! . . .
5 They shall sing of the ways of YHWH, for great is the glory of YHWH.	13 Let them praise the name of YHWH, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven.

Like the depiction of the entire cosmos in Psalm 148, the part about human beings also represents the order of the world as it is: Foreign affairs and domestic policy, administration, government, genders, age groups.

Ps 148:13 formulates the large topic of God’s majesty, power, and glory. The text uses motifs and coined phrases from texts like Isa 12:4 and especially Ps 8:2; 96:6; 104:1. This observation corroborates the overall impression that Psalm 148 uses more or less the conventional language of praise and arranges it in a structure with impressive beauty (see the “diptych” above).⁵²

⁵⁰ See also the eschatological hope expressed in Hag 2:7–9 and Zech 8:20–23, which might have led the Septuagint to add the names “Haggaios and Zacharias” to the heading of the psalm (see above). Some Greek manuscripts add “of Zacharias” or “of Haggaios and Zacharias” also to the heading of Psalm 137 (p. 138).

⁵¹ For “praise” and “glory,” both texts use different but synonymous terms.

⁵² NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, calls Psalms 145 and 146–150 rightly “schriftgelehrte Hymnen” (songs of praise based on Scripture). On Psalm 148, she states: “Der Psalm zeugt von einer hohen und unvergleichlichen formalen Durchgestaltung” (p. 251).

The raising of a horn as a metaphor for “gaining/providing power or strength”⁵³ (or, more generally, the wild ox with raised horns as a symbol for power and strength, see Deut 33:17) is very common in the Hebrew Bible; see, for example, 1 Sam 2:1, 10; Ps 75:11; 89:18, 25; 92:11; 112:9; 1 Chr 25:5.⁵⁴

Regarding the history of tradition,⁵⁵ Psalm 148 stands in two ways in the cultural tradition of Israel’s environment: (1) The enumerations in Psalm 148 follow the “science of lists” as it can be found in the Egyptian school of wisdom. A first step for a scientific understanding of the world from a human perspective can be seen in the early lists of animals, plants, places, deities, etc. The multitude of entities and the variety of species became manageable by inventorying them in these lists. As an example, the Onomasticon of Amenope (21st/22nd Dynasty; 11th century BCE) lists 610 entries.⁵⁶ The comprehensive encyclopedic lists try to understand the complex world in an anthropocentric perspective.

(2) Psalm 148 also stands “in the tradition of Babylonian-Assyrian and Egyptian prayers and hymns in which the individual divinities and elements or living things of the world are called upon, sequentially and in order, to praise the creator god (for example, Marduk) or the sun god.”⁵⁷ The Great Hymn to the Aten is a very close parallel to Psalm 104, and thus also to Psalm 148: This hymn from

53 In many cases, the modern translations do not use “horn” (the verbatim rendering), but the abstract terms like power or strength; see, e.g., the NRSV of 1 Sam 2:1, 10: The term *qeren*, “horn,” is rendered in 1 Sam 2:1 as “strength,” and in 2:10 as “power.” On the discussion about the meaning of the term “horn” in the context of Psalm 148, see SCHMUTZER / GAUTHIER, *Identity*, 161–183. They conclude: “The sociopolitical reality of exile gathers themes of deliverance and judgment for 148:14a from the surrounding FD [Final Doxology, i.e., Psalms 146–150]. The ethical treatment of the poor and needy is prominent in the FD, and an expectation for national restoration pervades this unit. In the LXX, this is more explicitly the case with Diaspora Judaism. Against a postexilic background with unique political realities for the Judean returnees, ‘raising a horn’ describes both the judgment of Israel’s enemies and Israel’s restored reputation on an international scale” (p. 183).

54 See also ZENGER, *Psalm 148*, 638–639, with examples from Ancient Near Eastern iconography.

55 On the following passage see ZENGER, *Psalm 148*, 632–633. NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 266, sees only few formal contacts between Psalm 148 and the Ancient Near Eastern lists. The intertextual connections to Deutero-Isaiah and the YHWH-is-king psalms are much more intense.

56 Introduction and text: GARDINER, *Ancient Egypt Onomastica*, 24–63 (and the autographed text in vols. 1 and 2); see also ZENGER, *Aller Atem*, 577–578; RUPPERT, *Aufforderung*, 292–293. HILLERS, *Psalm 148*, 329–330, points out major differences between Psalm 148 and the long lists of Amenope; he sees no literary dependence on learned Egyptian tradition. Hillers identifies the hymnic traditions of Mesopotamia and Egypt as the major background for Psalm 148.

57 ZENGER, *Psalm 148*, 633; RUPPERT, *Aufforderung*, 286–287.

the Amarna literature (14th century BCE) praises the great living Aten represented by the sun disk wandering over the sky and thus enumerates all the works the sun god created in his great wisdom.⁵⁸

6 The Context

The neighboring Psalms 147 and 149 have much in common with Psalm 148. In all three psalms the term *təhillā*, “song of praise,” occurs in prominent places, that is, at the beginning (Ps 147:1; 149:1) or at the end (Ps 148:14).

Psalm 147 shares with Psalm 148 the basic scheme: God’s creation gives reason for praise (the stars, heavens, earth, rain, plants, animals, snow, frost, fog, hail, wind), and the focus on Israel and God’s statutes for his people (see Ps 147:19–20) is added to the original version of Psalm 148* in Ps 148:6bc, 14. The combination of God’s care for Israel/Jerusalem with God’s creation in general seems to be very natural in Psalm 147 and a basic feature in this text. Perhaps Psalm 147 therefore “colored” Psalm 148* in the process of the composition of the end of the Psalter, that is, an editor added the focus on Israel to Psalm 148* in order to align Psalm 148 with the preceding one. However, this assumption, which sounds quite probable, must remain a speculation or a “good guess.”⁵⁹ The impression of the reader

⁵⁸ For an English translation of the Great Hymn to the Aten see LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 96–100. See also RUPPERT, *Aufforderung*, 288–289.

⁵⁹ BRODERSEN, *End*, 140–141, carefully lists the shared elements between Psalm 147 and Psalm 148 and in conclusion casts heavy doubt on the assumption of an *intended* reference: “Thus, apart from the shared frame הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה / ‘Praise-Yah!’, a reference is unlikely.” She also doubts intended references between Psalm 148 and Psalm 149 (*ibid.*, 95–96) and all other texts taken into account: “References to Gen 1–2; Deu; Isa; Ps 2; 33; 96; 98; 103; and 104 are unlikely. Ps 146; 147; 149; and 150 show no references except the framing Hallelujahs” (*ibid.*, 142). This statement makes Psalm 148 look like an island without any intertextual relationships, but it fits the very strict and narrow methodological approach. Brodersen does not acknowledge the perspective of the readership and possible conclusions from the process of reading Psalms 146–150 in a row. Her exclusive focus on authorial intention regarding the “references” leads quite naturally to the conclusion that there are no such *intended* references that can be proven with the historical-critical methodology. Although the methodological rigor of this approach is praiseworthy, the gain of knowledge is comparably small, and this was even to be expected. Hence, the methods applied to the exegesis of the Psalter are now wider and more diverse, including reader-oriented and text-centered intertextual approaches like the one executed here should be welcomed. Brodersen’s study does not manage to falsify these approaches and their results, and it hopefully did not intend to do that. The study by NEUMANN, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, heads in quite the opposite direction from Brodersen’s approach. Neumann identifies a wide variety of intertextual relationships between Psalm 148 and other biblical writings (see pp. 267–303).

of the end of the Psalter is more obvious: Coming from Psalm 147, the reader is already acquainted with the idea that God's creation finds its apex in God's relationship with Israel. While an isolated reading of Psalm 148 detects the focus on Israel in Ps 148:14 as a secondary addition, the contextual reading (i.e., Psalms 147 and 148 together) mitigates this impression or even triggers the expectation that Psalm 148 will not only praise God for the creation but will also mention God's care for Israel. The final verse 14 satisfies this expectation.

Psalm 148 is part of the large Hallel ("praise") that closes the Psalter (Psalms 146–150) and marks the middle position within this composition.⁶⁰ With the clear intertextual references⁶¹ to Genesis 1, Psalm 148 sums up the creation motifs in Psalms 146 and 147. Ps 148:14 shares with Ps 147:19–20 the particular role of Israel within the cosmos. This unique relationship of God with Israel, made visible through Israel's praise of YHWH, also connects Ps 148:14 with Ps 149:1 (see the key word *ḥāsîdāyw/ḥāsîdîm*, "[his] faithful").⁶² The praise of YHWH's name (Ps 148:5, 13) is continued in Ps 149:3.⁶³

7 The Messages

Psalm 148* in its original form (without Ps 148:6bc, 14) formulates a call for praise which perceives (realizes and regards) the entire world as a well-designed cosmos that God arranged and stratified according to a meaningful and helpful order. This entirety is the source and reason for a permanent praise of God as the creator.⁶⁴ Thus, Psalm 148* becomes an invitation to join this ongoing admiration and

60 Quite a number of studies deal with the final composition of the Psalter of the Hebrew Bible and related texts; see, e.g., BRODERSEN, End; NEUMANN, Schriftgelehrte Hymnen; SCAIOLA, La conclusion; ZENGER, Aller Atem; ZENGER, Ps 145–150.

61 Notabene (see footnote 59): These references are observations on the level of the reader and do not necessarily imply authorial or editorial intention.

62 On this connection between the editorial addition of V 14 in Psalm 148 and the following Psalm 149, see especially ZENGER, Ps 145–150, 17.

63 Cf. ZENGER, Psalm 148, 639.

64 See, e.g., ESTES, Creation Theology, 36–41, with his five points on creation theology derived from Psalm 148, and his conclusion with a quote from the poem of Francis of Assisi. However, while all these statements remain valid, one must add another aspect to Psalm 148's theology. It is a challenging one, as I will demonstrate in the following. In his *Ennarationes in Psalmos*, Augustine provides a theological interpretation of Psalm 148 as praise for God's creative power; see AUGUSTINE, Expositions, vol. 6, 415–433; BIELEFELD / BRÜNING, Psalm 148, 280–281; on a Christological interpretation of Psalm 148 by the Fathers of the Church, see *ibid.*, 283–284. They conclude: For Christians in their earthly reality, the singing performance of Psalm 148 has the

worship in the face of an orderly, harmonious world. It becomes clear that the text only works in a world that is in an ecological balance. However, in view of the manifold destructions and pollutions that humans are inflicting on this world *today*, Psalm 148* becomes a call to respect and preserve God’s creation, the psalm of praise becomes a hidden commandment to keep the earth in a praiseworthy balance. This new pragmatics only emerges in *today’s* perspective. In the original version of Psalm 148* that ends with v. 13, the text has an international and global perspective. It focuses on humanity in general and integrates all human beings into a bigger picture, that is, humanity is not a counterpart of “the world” or its “crown,” but rather a part of it next to other entities of the world (visible and invisible, animated and not animated). Although it is not explicitly stated, the praise for YHWH and YHWH’s creation, name, and glory implies a strong sort of responsibility on the side of the one who utters the praise – in other words: One cannot praise God’s glory together with God’s creation and at the same time exploit and thus destroy this harmonious world. Praying and praising with Psalm 148 is not compatible with environmental pollution and irresponsible behavior in economy and society at the cost of the climate, of nature, animals, and plants.⁶⁵ In a sense, the imperative calls for praise in Psalm 148* thus become *in the present time* calls for respect for creation, for the entire cosmos and the ecological balance, which human beings are threatening to an unprecedented extent.⁶⁶

function, on the one hand, of furthering salvation and, on the other, of expressing and igniting the Christians’ longing for the perfect harmony in the heavenly Jerusalem. . . . According to the understanding of the Fathers of the Church, Psalm 148, when sung as the Word of God in the Holy Spirit, is therefore at the same time the song of longing and the song of freedom already given (conclusion translated by TH).

65 This aspect needs to be added to the otherwise very fine summary that Erich ZENGER formulated for Psalm 148*: “The praise of God that unites the various powers and forces, institutions and groups, animals and humans is presented in Psalm 148 as the cooperation of creatures in binding chaos and keeping the cosmos working. The concept of the psalm, according to which the entire creation is called to praise YHWH because of the world order he has bestowed, and whereby cosmic as well as social antagonisms are dissipated, ultimately means that the individual elements of creation should, through their praise of God, accept and acknowledge the place assigned to them by God” (ZENGER, Psalm 148, 640).

66 Hence, the critique of VIVIERS, *Eko-bilike beoordeling*, 815–830, seems to be a bit exaggerated. He thinks that Psalm 148 depicts YHWH as the “super” male and reveals an androcentric and ideological stance. Perhaps due to my lack of knowledge of Afrikaans, I cannot understand this position. I would like to stress the following point: The distance that Psalm 148 makes between the creation in its entirety and her creator lifts YHWH far beyond any human ideas about gender; in other words, the creator is neither male nor female, but something (better: someone) completely different. Regarding human beings, Psalm 148 does not single out humans as something special, but rather integrates them as parts of YHWH’s creation, and as such they have to behave,

The addition of Ps 148:14 (and 148:6bc) causes a focusing on Israel. The deity whom receives praise from the entire cosmos, YHWH, has turned in a unique way to his chosen people, Israel, and has given them an eternal law (*hōq* in the sense of *tôrâ*, v. 6bc). This people, Israel, has been exalted by God and has received the privilege of coming very close to God. But what is the sense and purpose of all this? The task that comes with election and exaltation is not mentioned here, but can be derived, for example, from Exod 19:5–6: Israel’s task is to keep YHWH’s covenant, to obey YHWH’s voice and thus demonstrate to the entire world (keyword: “in the sights of the nations”) in a paradigmatic way how the keeping of God’s *tôrâ* leads to a fruitful and happy life (for example, Lev 18:5: “You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live”; Lev 26:45: “I will remember in their favor the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of the land of Egypt *in the sight of the nations*, to be their God”). In this regard, the general, international, and global praise of Psalm 148* becomes an encouragement to the people of Israel to focus on this God and his *tôrâ* and to reassure themselves of this election and this task. Erich Zenger concludes: “Praise of God creates community, advances harmony, and leads to the perfection of creation and history. In this, as the conclusion of the psalm emphasizes, a special task is given to Israel.”⁶⁷

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i.e., they have no right to exploit and destroy all the other works of God, which are summoned to praise YHWH in Psalm 148. To put it frankly, Psalm 148 forbids human beings from pursuing an economy that wastes resources and irreparably destroys the environment, because this “environment” is also a source of praise for YHWH. Read this way, the cosmic praise of Psalm 148 turns out to be a harsh critique of the andro- and even anthropocentric economy and society of our days. Maybe the criteria for eco-justice in texts from 2004 were not yet elaborated enough to find a way to read Psalm 148 as a challenge for contemporary failures to “create” an eco-sensitive and eco-just society, economy, politics, and church.

67 ZENGER, Psalm 148, 640.

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