

But this has a stunning implication. Thus, the meta-structure in wisdom, though it has certain constants in it, is not defined essentially by those constants; its essence is caught in a word that came to me, as the accompaniment of ‘necessity’: ‘suppleness’. In short, wisdom does not simply impose constants, top-down, from above on the below. Rather, dwelling deep down in the below, being by nature its ‘lowliness’ (no grandiosity or omnipotence of a narcissistic kind), wisdom is supple and adapts constantly to changes in circumstance, in situation, in context. You could say of this – and I know it sounds paradoxical – wisdom is so latent it does not even exist until it is constellated in the particular, in the complex, in the changing, on the ground. Wisdom only comes into real existence, only becomes crystallised, in the concrete, the here and now, the ambiguous and messy specificity of this person, this group, this culture, this stage in the journey – not any other. Wisdom is mainly, in her dynamic, supple, adaptable, different in different settings. She must not be a boss and a dictator. It was part of JUNG’s pathology that he saw in wisdom only the constants, not the suppleness always changing, always different, always meeting the new with the new. Yes, the constants exist, and if it helps you to call them ‘archetypes’, fine; but wisdom is not mainly archetypal, in either the Platonic or the Germanic-metaphysical sense. Wisdom is fluid. Wisdom is about the particular, the complex, the messy, the changing. Wisdom is the water in mud that grows the lotus, or the rose. Yes, of course, wisdom’s weaving of story is always the old themes, but always in genuinely multiple and new embodiments.

But this leads to the most surprising conclusion. Wisdom is herself on a journey, wisdom herself is changing.

The water in the valley is what I have here tried, all too imperfectly, to point to, not box in.

The Celtic goddesses of sex and fertility, of war, of death and rebirth, the ‘dark feminine’, this is the wisdom I respect, and am not afraid to honour with my inadequate words.

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United together in Praise (Psalm 148)

Psalm 148 is an imperative hymn seeking to unite Heaven and Earth in praising the name of the Lord. Its two-part structure reinforces the psalm’s message of unity: all creation, heavenly and earthly, is called to praise the Lord. Psalm 148 does not conform to an anthropocentric worldview. Instead, it unites Creation in a common task, joining together in a harmony of praise for its exalted Creator.

(v1) Hallelujah!¹

*Praise the Lord: from the heavens,
praise Him in the heights.*

(v2) *Praise Him, all His angels,
praise Him, all His hosts.*³

(v3) *Praise Him, sun and moon,
praise Him, all the stars of light.*⁴

(v4) *Praise Him, heavens of heavens,⁵
and waters that are above the heavens.*

1 This phrase – composed of a Piel, Imperative, 2nd, masculine, plural verb ללה and proper noun – can be translated into English as “praise ye Yah” (BROWN Francis – DRIVER S. R. – BRIGGS Charles. 219. 238). Here it stands as “Hallelujah”, a term familiar to the prescribed audience. The Hebrew verb-root ללה carries the meaning of “shine, be boastful, praise,” though in the Piel form and within the formula of worship, “praise” is the thrust of the meaning. (BROWN Francis – DRIVER S. R. – BRIGGS Charles. 237–238.)

2 The personal name of God [יהוה] or “the proper name of the God of Israel” (BROWN Francis – DRIVER S. R. – BRIGGS Charles. 217).

3 The *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* Hebrew text contains a note on this verse. Likewise, ALLEN writes, “The plural in 103,21 supports Q” (ALLEN Leslie C. 312). In light of the textual note and cross-referencing Psalm 103, האבצ is here translated “hosts”.

4 The *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* Hebrew text contains a note on this verse. This expression is a *hapax legomenon* (appearing only once in the Bible), which the LXX interprets as indicating “stars and light” (ALLEN Leslie C. 353).

5 The phrase “heavens of heavens” indicates an upper, raised region of the World associated with the divine realm (SEYBOLD Klaus – DUNPHY R. Graeme, *Introducing the Psalms*. Edinburgh, 1990. 182.).

(v5) Let them praise⁶ the name of the Lord,
for He commanded and they were created.
(v6) Then He established them forever and ever,
He fixed their boundaries, and they did not pass over it.⁷
(v7) Praise the Lord from the Earth,
sea monsters and all depths,
(v8) Fire and hail, snow and thunderclouds,⁸
stormy winds fulfilling his word,
(v9) Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,
(v10) Wild and domestic animals,⁹
creeping things and flying birds,
(v11) Kings of the Earth and all people,
princes and all judges of the Earth,
(v12) Young men and maidens together,
old men and young.
(v13) Let them praise¹⁰ the name of the Lord,
for His name is exalted,
His glory alone is above the Earth and Heaven.
(v14) He has raised up a horn for His people,
a praise for all His pious ones,
for the people of Israel, who are near to Him.¹¹
Hallelujah!¹²

6 Here the verb ללה appears in the imperfect form and breaks the imperative pattern of the previous verses. LAMBDIN writes: "The imperfect, with or without slight modifications, may be used in an indirect imperative sense in all persons." (LAMBDIN Thomas O. 118.) Here the verb is translated expressing the jussive.

7 Here the verb רבע is in the Qal, imperative, 3rd person, masculine, singular form. It is translated in the plural to make the English verb agree with the plural subject ("them").

8 From the root רטק meaning "thick smoke", this term is translated "thunderclouds" in light of the suggestion that this could be a figurative expression for "clouds in thunderstorm". (BROWN Francis – DRIVER S. R. – BRIGGS Charles. 882.)

9 Literally "beasts and all cattle", translated in this way to highlight the inclusive meaning intended by the contrast of wild and domestic animals.

10 Here the verb is translated expressing the jussive.

11 The *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* Hebrew text contains a note on this verse indicating that the text probably reads: "ויברק" or "(the people of) those close to Him", translated here "who are near to Him" (ALLEN Leslie C. 313, referencing GUNKEL Hermann).

12 See note 1.



Literary Design and Character

Placed near the close of the Psalter, Psalm 148 is part of the crescendo of praise that concludes the book. Third in a group of five closing “Hallelujah Psalms”¹³, Psalm 148 is unique in the breadth of its inclusion as it calls all of creation to praise. John H. HAYES writes:

“Psalm 148 is by far the most inclusive in its enumeration of those who should offer praise: angels, Sun and Moon, shining stars and highest heavens, sea monsters and the deep, mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars, creeping things and flying birds, kings and princes, men and maidens, old and young. The psalmist here envisions the whole of the Universe as one massive chorus offering to God His rightful praise.”¹⁴

Augustus THOLUCK eloquently elaborates on the placement of Psalm 148 at the conclusion of the Psalter: “as if it were intended that their perpetually recurring, ‘Praise ye,’ should form a many-voiced echo of the praise, which fills every preceding psalm.”¹⁵ Its position at the end of the Psalter, coupled with its dramatically inclusive call to action, leaves the reader humming a note of unity with a sense of community of cosmic proportions.

Psalm 148 is surely a hymn of praise. Its many calls to praise (vv. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 13, 14) concretely assert the thrust of the psalmist’s call to action. In defining those psalms that make up the genre “hymns”, Klaus SEYBOLD and R. Graeme DUNPHY describe a group of hymnic texts that “combine song, profession of faith, and prayer, and which had their fixed place in the public worship of both the first and second temple.”¹⁶

Artur WEISER adds specificity to the placement of Psalm 148 into this category: “In form [Psalm 148] is an extended hymnic introduction, which we may think of as sung by the priest (choir) at a cultic ceremony, which according to v. 14 was based on the establishment of salvation for the Israelite cult community.”¹⁷

This particular hymn was used in public worship to call those congregated to participate in song, praising the Lord as part of a choir of universal magnitude. As a song of praise addressing the entirety of

Creation, Psalm 148 includes a profession of faith, proclaiming Who the Lord is in relation to all created things.

Interestingly, there is a sub-group of “imperative hymns” within this genre, whose characteristic features include the exhortation and ensuing recitation of praise.¹⁸ With its ten expressions of the imperative call to “praise” (vv. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 14), Psalm 148 surely lives within the subgroup of imperative hymns.

Leslie C. ALLEN identifies the psalm as an imperatival hymn in form, “marked by development of the call to praise in the naming of those summoned.”¹⁹ These imperative hymns are described as serving a “liturgical-dramaturgical purpose”, functioning to introduce songs for worship, cries of joy, and musical productions.²⁰

Through the very dramatic use of the imperative, coupled with the roll-call enumeration of created things called to praise the Lord, Psalm 148 certainly serves a liturgical-dramaturgical purpose.

While the classification of Psalm 148 as a hymn of praise may have a significant degree of consensus, its structure is debated. In his *Treasury of David*, Charles H. SPURGEON writes, “The song begins in the heavens, sweeps downward to all depths and all deeps, and then ascends again, till the people near unto Jehovah take up the praise.”²¹

SPURGEON seems to identify three movements: the first in the heavens, the next in the depths, and the final on Earth. Likewise, Mitchell DAHOOD SJ identifies Psalm 148 as having a tripartite structure, which he sees as mirroring the “three categories of beings”: celestial beings, creatures of the nether world, and terrestrial creatures.²² SPURGEON and DAHOOD assert a three-tiered structure as supporting Psalm 148.

On the other hand, there are those who would disagree, arguing for a bipartite structure within Psalm 148. ALLEN considers verses 1a and 7a as parallel calls, each marking one of the psalm’s two parts.²³

He directly attacks DAHOOD’s tripartite classification: “DAHOOD has divided the psalm into three parts. (...) HILLERS is surely correct in dubbing this division ‘very unbalanced’ and its author ‘misled by a desire to translate ארץ as ‘underworld.’”²⁴

18 SEYBOLD Klaus – DUNPHY R. Graeme. 114. (Referencing CRÜSEMANN F.)

19 ALLEN Leslie C. 313.

20 SEYBOLD Klaus. 114.

21 SPURGEON Charles H. 421.

22 DAHOOD Mitchell SJ. 352.

23 ALLEN Leslie C. 313.

24 ALLEN Leslie C. 313.

13 MAYS 147.

14 HAYES 23.

15 THOLUCK Augustus. 494.

16 SEYBOLD Klaus – DUNPHY R. Graeme. 113–114.

17 WEISER Artur. 837.

Hans-Joachim KRAUS agrees, identifying Psalm 148's structure as "clearly discernible and transparent."²⁵ He identifies two main parts (vv. 1–6 and vv. 7–14), both containing addresses and calls to praise and glorify the Lord.²⁶

While there are arguments on both sides of the structural debate, the bipartite structure of Psalm 148 is as follows:

- I. Call to the heavens (vv. 1–6)
 - a. Imperative call to praise (vv. 1–4)
 - b. Jussive refrain emphasizing harmony and unity (vv. 5–6)
- II. Call to the Earth (vv. 7–14)
 - c. Imperative call to praise (vv. 7–12)
 - d. Jussive refrain emphasizing harmony and unity (vv. 13–14)
 - i. Statement of faith speaking to the immediate context of human worship (vv. 13–14)

The dual calls to "Praise the Lord *from...*" (vv. 1, 7) and the dual jussive refrains, "let them praise" (vv. 5, 13), create a parallel structure for each of the psalm's two parts. Heaven (שָׁמַיִם) and Earth (אֲרֶצַח) are traditionally paired in both poetry and prose; here they make parallel sections of the psalm.²⁷

The opening and closing "Hallelujah" (vv. 1, 14) imperatives, calling the community to join in praise, form an *inclusio* (inclusion) around the bipartite structure of the Psalm. The structure of the hymn, a dual call to heavens and Earth, is indicative of the Psalm's larger meaning.

Exposition

The structure of Psalm 148 reflects the psalm's theme and theology. The two-part structure – represented by "heavens" (v. 1) and "Earth" (v. 7) – communicates the central theme of all creation praising God in a unified chorus of praise.²⁸

Everything in Heaven is alike in being created and set in place by the Lord (vv. 5–6). Everything on Earth shares a common position under the majesty and supremacy of the name of the Lord (v. 13).

The unity expressed in this hymn is inclusive, "everything is invited to praise: nothing is too high, nothing too low."²⁹ The psalm repeatedly calls all Creation to sing the praise of the majesty of the Creator.

²⁵ KRAUS Hans-Joachim. 563.

²⁶ KRAUS Hans-Joachim. 561.

²⁷ ALLEN Leslie C. 313–314.

²⁸ MAYS James Luther. 444.

²⁹ THOLUCK Augustus. 494.

This theme is essentially linked to the psalm's core theology, which asserts that the Lord alone is exalted and all Creation is called to respond by praising the Lord. Only through the unity of all created voices can Creation attempt to reflect the Lord's majesty back in praise.³⁰ The Lord alone is exalted; no other hierarchy is established in this psalm. James Luther MAYS articulates:

"We [human beings] are in our obligation to praise no different from and no more than all the rest. Everything and everyone is identical in being addressed by the psalm. We human beings are one with all being in our relation to One, Whose name alone is exalted and whose majesty is above Earth and Heaven."³¹

Psalm 148 describes a chorus of praise, not a human solo of adoration. It does not identify a leader among the chorus members, but rather focuses its attention on the supremacy of the object of praise, exalted above Heaven and Earth and all Creation.

Those hearing this psalm in the post-exilic era would identify aspects of the Genesis creation narratives within the lyrics of the hymn. Hans-Joachim KRAUS points to the "sea monsters" (v. 7), "fruit trees" (v. 9), "creeping things" and "flying birds" (v. 10), as specific echoes of Genesis (Gen. 1,21; 2,17 and 1,21, respectively) in Psalm 148.³²

In this way the psalm taps into the shared memories of the worshipping community, all of which point to the Lord as the Creator, Who speaks the world into existence, establishes its order, and maintains divinely apportioned boundaries. By lifting up the Lord as Creator and Establisher, Psalm 148 communicates the Lord's supremacy and majesty.

In this psalm the name of the Lord is specifically exalted as worthy of praise (vv. 5, 13). The unified chorus of Creation has the "name of the Lord" as its object of praise. This name's (שֵׁם) theology – which focuses attention on the specific, personal name of God – affirms the Lord's supremacy over the Universe.

KRAUS writes: "In His name Yahweh has proclaimed Himself as Creator and King of the Universe."³³ The call to praise the "name of the Lord" would strike a powerful chord in the hearts and minds of members of the post-exilic community, a community surely familiar with the gods and religious convictions of neighboring traditions.

DAHOD asserts: "The psalmist rejects the tenets of neighboring

³⁰ ALLEN Leslie C. 316.

³¹ MAYS James Luther. 445.

³² KRAUS Hans-Joachim. 563.

³³ KRAUS Hans-Joachim. 564.

religions concerning the origin of the Universe.”³⁴ Psalm 148 calls all Creation to praise the name of the Lord – the Creator of the Universe – in a unified voice.

As mentioned above, the purpose of this psalm is not to proscribe a position of prominence for human beings within an earthly hierarchy. Likewise, Psalm 148 does not seek to establish a heavenly hierarchy of gods.

Only one name – the name of the Lord – is even considered within the theology of this psalm. MAYS writes: “The royal majesty of the Lord is ‘above Earth and Heaven’ (v. 13), and only the praise of all in both realms can respond and correspond to the Lord’s exalted name.”³⁵ Psalm 148 seeks to describe a setting where all Creation praises God in unity.

Artur WEISER writes: “The glorification of the Creator and Preserver of the World fulfills the ultimate depth of meaning, which unites the inanimate created things and the living creatures in a mutual relationship; to praise the sole majesty of God is the final goal, which unites the whole Universe in a communion of God’s service.”³⁶ The psalmist extols God as deserving of praise, a praise that the entire Universe – not just human beings – must join in singing.

This raises interesting questions. How does the Universe praise the name of the Lord? What is the role of humanity within the universal chorus of praise? Responding to the psalmist’s idiom of an upraised horn (v. 14), MAYS explains that the Lord gives praise to the faithful as their dignity and power and – receiving this praise – the faithful then voice the unspoken praise of all of Creation.³⁷

“In the praise of the people of the Lord, the name that is the truth about the entire universe is spoken on behalf of all the rest of creation.”³⁸ The psalmist presents a picture of all of Creation praising through being who they were created to be. Humanity is distinct within that picture: the uniquely voiced member of a universal choir.

Though this idea of humanity as uniquely gifted to raise an audible expression of praise to God seems to enjoy a mainstream following, it might be wise to include a note of caution in this discussion.

While humanity is uniquely gifted, so are all other created elements described in the psalm. Psalm 148 risks distortion, if read through

³⁴ DAHOOD Mitchell SJ. 353.

³⁵ MAYS James Luther. 444–445.

³⁶ WEISER Artur. 837.

³⁷ MAYS James Luther. 445.

³⁸ MAYS James Luther. 445.

anthropocentric lenses. Augustus THOLUCK illustrates this in the following way:

“*Man* is chiefly invited to praise the Lord. It devolves upon him, as the priest of nature, above every other creature: every rank, every age, and every generation, have abundant cause for engaging in this praise.”³⁹

While THOLUCK is inclusive in his identification of every rank, age, and generation as called to praise, his assessment of humans as somehow *more* invited to praise the Lord than the rest of Creation is an overstatement of the role of humanity within the chorus described in Psalm 148. This perspective of humanity as above the rest of Creation can lead to an imbalance of universal proportions.

It is interesting to note that, if indeed the psalmist is identifying humanity in the role of priest of the Universe, the psalmist does not seem to make such liturgical designations within the text of the psalm.

Humanity, just one part of the entirety of Creation called upon “from the Earth” (v. 7), is not addressed until the end of the psalm (vv. 11–12). At that point, humanity is given no special designation as playing a leadership role.

In fact, rather than being described in the psalm as helpers of Creation, Psalm 148 identifies humanity as the object of special divine assistance (v. 14). Indeed, it is the Lord, Who is described as raising up the horn and song of praise for the people (v. 14), not the people lifting up a song for the rest of Creation.

KRAUS reads Psalm 148 as a “double choir” with Heaven and Earth “situated over and against each other.”⁴⁰ That may be the case, but it is also possible that the Psalmist is describing a single choir united in a harmony of praise that arises from diversity and a multitude of voices. Opening and closing with “Hallelujah!” (vv. 1, 14), the structure of the psalm seems to indicate a single choir, a single musical movement.

In everyday interactions and in theological thought, contemporary audiences tend to picture human beings at the top of the food chain, imagining humanity at the pinnacle of some sort of earthly – and at times universal – hierarchy.

This psalm challenges that worldview. By identifying humanity as part of a universal choir singing a hymn of praise far more resounding and powerful than humanity alone could muster, Psalm 148 flies in the face of an anthropocentric worldview.

³⁹ THOLUCK Augustus. 495.

⁴⁰ KRAUS Hans-Joachim. 564.

ALLEN explains Psalm 148 as expressing the praiseworthiness of Yahweh, while underlining the reality that God's people need helpers in offering their own praise.⁴¹ Humanity's loudest praise cannot match the worth and status of the Lord.⁴²

The Lord is the main focus of the praise that comprises the central theme of the whole Psalm 148; and humanity is only one voice in the diversity of Creation called upon to join this very hymn of praise.

One further point needs now to be made in addressing the intelligibility and understanding of this psalm. The closing verse seems to place a special designation upon the heads of all the Lord's people, singling them out from among the universal choir as the objects of a very special divine attention (v. 14).

Leslie C. ALLEN writes: "A more intimate source for praise is found in [the Lord's] bestowal of exaltation upon His covenant people, so that they enjoy renown. The re-establishment of the community of Judah after the exile most probably underlies the reference to Yahweh's historical activity on their behalf."⁴³

It is important to remember two things when considering this concluding verse (v. 14) and any statement it might be seen as making about humanity, specifically in relation to the rest of the created Universe.

First, Psalm 148 is situated within a human context. It was likely sung at a cultic ceremony within the Israelite cult community.⁴⁴ The concluding verse, therefore, can be read as an extra step in connecting the human audience with the broad scope of creation as addressed by this psalm.

Secondly, the concluding verse describes an action – the raising of a horn and a singing of a song of praise, interpreted as exaltation upon the covenant people⁴⁵ – done at the discretion of the Lord.

It is not a result of the work of the people. The praiseworthiness of the Lord remains the central feature of this psalm. Psalm 148 in no way makes a statement establishing humanity as somehow in control of or in a position or dominion over the rest of Creation. Humanity is one of many voices called upon to respond to the Lord's splendor and majesty.

Psalm 148 is an imperative hymn calling the entirety of Creation to praise its Creator and Lord. Through semantics and structure, it establishes the Lord alone as exalted above Heaven and Earth and as the sole object of the praise of the entire created Universe.

As part of the concluding psalms of the Psalter, Psalm 148 depicts a universal choir of enormous inclusivity: the entirety of Creation is responding to the universal call to praise the Lord, our Maker.

This psalm informs a contemporary audience by offering a special worldview that places humanity alongside of – and not ahead of or above – all of Creation in a chorus of praise to the Creator.

Suggested Reading

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41 ALLEN Leslie C. 316.

42 ALLEN Leslie C. 316.

43 ALLEN Leslie C. 317.

44 WEISER Artur. 837.

45 ALLEN Leslie C. 317.