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# A chiastic opus to the Creator of “heaven and earth- earth and heaven”: A spatial reading of Psalm 148 and Colossians 1:15-20

## ABSTRACT

*Two hymns that focus on God (and Christ in the New Testament text) as the creator are Psalm 148 and Colossians 1:15-20. In both texts, an interesting chiastic pattern is noticeable concerning A-heaven-B-earth-B-earth-A-heaven. The imagery concerning heaven and earth can be spatially interpreted, as in both these texts, the creation and its inhabitants are understood in relation to, and their position towards God. This article analyses Psalm 148, and then makes a spatial comparison between the Old Testament text of Psalm 148 and the New Testament text of Colossians 1:15-20. The article indicates the importance of the chiastic structure in both of these texts, as it indicates not only a cosmic whole, but also contributes to the interpretive relation of God (and Christ) as creator to the creation and his people.*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

One<sup>1</sup> of the most profound confessions about God in the Old Testament is that God is the creator of heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1; Job 38, 39; Pss. 33, 104, 113, 121, 124, 146; Isa. 44). This confession contributes not only to the revelation and redemptive history of God, but also to the transformation of all creation through the work of his son, Jesus Christ. This is noted not only in the texts of the Old and New Testament but also in the creeds of the church such as, for example, in the Apostolic and Nicene Creeds (Boda 2017:122-123, 136-137).<sup>2</sup>

Two hymns that focus on God (and Christ in the New Testament text) as the creator are Psalm 148 and Colossians 1:15-20. Psalm 148 is part of the final Hallel, Psalms 146-150,<sup>3</sup> that functions as a closing to the entire Psalter. For Zenger (1998:101), these psalms with the two introductory psalms to the Psalter, Psalms 1 and 2, interprets them as the “recitation of the psalms as the actualisation of the way of life (Torah) instilled in the cosmos”.

In both the Psalm and the Colossians texts, an interesting chiasmic pattern is noticeable concerning A-heaven-B-earth-B-earth-A-heaven. The imagery concerning heaven and earth can be spatially interpreted, as in both these texts, the creation and its inhabitants are understood in relation to, and their position towards God. A spatial reading focusing on the three-tiered worldview of the Old Testament, and also incorporated in the New Testament, will assist in understanding what is communicated in these texts.

This article analyses Psalm 148 in detail, and then makes a spatial comparison between the Old Testament text of Psalm 148 and the New Testament text of Colossians 1:15-20. The purpose of the comparison is to indicate the importance of the chiasmic structure of A-heaven-B-earth-B-earth-A-heaven in both of these texts, as it not only indicates a cosmic whole, but also in both texts contributes to the interpretive relation of God (and Jesus) as creator to the creation and his people.

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1 This article is dedicated to the work and life of Prof. D.F. (Francois) Tolmie. Francois is a dear friend and colleague who inspires not only his students, but also many scholars, due to his excellent example as a dedicated, well-rounded academic and lecturer. His research is precise, detailed, and of the highest quality. It is a privilege to know and work with him.

2 See also Coetzee (2013:6-7).

3 For a detailed discussion of Psalms 146-150 as the end of the Psalter, see the work of Brodersen (2017).

## 2. ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN ORIENTATION AND THE PSALMS

When reading any literary text from the perspective of space, we have to consider literary spatial theory. This entails that a text (Old Testament text) be read either from the context of narrative space (or theory), social space or ancient Near Eastern spatial orientation (see Prinsloo 2013). Space influences our perspective and context of everyday life, knowingly or unknowingly, and how we perceive our worldview. It is, therefore, crucial to understand the worldview and spatial orientation of the people of the ancient Near East when reading their literature (see Wyatt 2001:33).

Ancient Near Eastern spatial orientation can be plotted on a vertical and horizontal axis. The vertical axis represents the typical three-tiered worldview from top to bottom: heaven, earth, and the underworld. Traditionally, God sits on his throne in heaven as the domain of God; the earth is the domain of human beings, and the underworld is considered the domain of the dead. God is not considered present in the underworld, and the dead cannot praise him from there. For the vertical orientation, moving up is considered positive and moving down negative (Sutton 2019:560; see Prinsloo 2013).

The horizontal axis moves from one farthest point to the other, that is, where the sun rises in the east and sets in the west (Ps. 139:8). The earth is at the centre of the horizontal axis, where heaven, earth, and the underworld are enclosed within a cosmic ocean sphere. At the ends of the sphere (a. 41:4) is the extreme circular horizon (Job 26:10), where the mountains that support the sphere, the heavens, can be found (see Ps. 104). Psalm 18 mentions the battle between God and chaos. According to Psalm 68, the gates to the underworld can be found at the extreme horizons where east and west are also considered the extreme boundaries between light (the sun rises, considered positive) and darkness (sunset, considered negative) (Sutton 2019:560-561; see Prinsloo 2013).

Where the vertical and horizontal axis meet in the centre is a mountain, which is considered to be the cosmic centre of the universe. In the Old Testament, this is the temple mount, which is directly beneath the throne of God in heaven. Being in the holiest area of the temple is considered to be in direct contact with God, therefore, in the presence of God. The opposite of this is the underworld (*sheol*), where God is not present. Moving away from the temple is to move away from the presence of God. According to the spatial orientation, moving away or directing ourselves away from the temple is being off-centred (negative), and moving or directing ourselves towards the temple is being centred (positive). A person's orientation is

further influenced by the direction of east, west, north, and south. As for the ancient Near Eastern person, the east is considered to be our front (the past-temporal dimension), and the west is our back (future-temporal dimension). An eastern direction or orientation aligns us with God. The west is also the direction of the sea (and chaos monsters), the north is where the mountains are, typically associated as the home of the gods (Ps. 121; Isa. 14:13). In the south lies the desert (a place where God is found or comes from – Deut. 33:2; Hab. 3:3; and or where evil is found) (Sutton 2019:561; see Prinsloo 2013).

In relation to the typical three-tiered worldview of the Old Testament, God's relation to the worldview can be observed spatially from three different perspectives. According to Schmid (2006:111-148), the heavens, also referred to as the "heaven of heavens", can be viewed as God's home or dwelling place. This is the most familiar view as God sits on his throne in the heavens (see Pss 102:25-26; 115:3; 136:26). From this perspective, God is sovereign over all creation, including the heavenly beings, other gods, and all earthly powers, as God looks down upon creation from the heavens. Schmid (2006:114-118) calls this the heavenly model. This perspective is the one most commonly known when thinking about the three-tiered worldview of the ancient Near East.

The second perspective focuses on the perspective of God being depicted on the throne in the heavens and being closely linked to creation, also called the cosmos model. The imagery associated with this model is that of God on the throne with his feet testing the footstool. All creation is then the sanctuary for God. Although God is sitting on his throne in heaven, he is fully present in creation (Ps. 110:1; Isa. 6) (Schmid 2006:114-118).

The third perspective views God separated and distinct from all creation. The decoupling or separation model. God is not viewed as being in the heavens. Instead, he is seen as being over all of creation. In Psalm 148, all the realms of heaven and earth and all its inhabitants (heavenly and earthly) are called upon to praise YHWH. Schmid (2006:111-148) indicates that this perspective becomes more distinct in second-temple Judaism as a fundamental change occurred in the religion of Judah at this time. For him, the change took place in the implementation of the monotheistic primary option that God as creator is fundamentally to be separated from the creation. The classic previous key distinction between cosmos and chaos was replaced or fundamentally transformed (see Tucker & Grant 2018:1018-1019).

In the following sections, Psalm 148 is analysed, after which a spatial comparison with Colossians 1:15-20 is made. The spatial perspective will focus on Ancient Near Eastern spatial orientation, a typical three-tiered worldview, and God's spatial relation (and placement) towards this worldview (either from a heavenly, cosmos or separation model).

### 3. PSALM 148

Many scholars view Psalm 148 as an individual hymn, although it does not contain all the traditional elements of a hymn.<sup>4</sup> It falls within the genre of creation psalms (see Pss. 8, 19, 29, 104). The use of imperatives,<sup>5</sup> creation theology,<sup>6</sup> and wisdom characterises it.<sup>7</sup> Psalm 148 can be dated comparatively late as part of the post-exilic psalms (see Brodersen 2017:149-150). For this reason, many scholars want to indicate dependence between Psalm 148 and Genesis 1:1-2:4,<sup>8</sup> but these two texts are not that close as to indicate direct dependence, as the order of elements of creation differs (Hillers 1978:328).

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4 The reason for praise that is usually prominent in a hymn is appearing only briefly in verses 5 and 13. There are no customary participles and the deeds of YHWH in history in Psalm 148. The psalm consists mainly of imperatives enjoining praise (Prinsloo 1992:53-54).

5 On imperative hymns in the Psalter, see Kraus (1993a:44).

6 For a further discussion, see Bellinger (2023:354-361).

7 In creation theology, there is an element of wisdom. It is ecologically significant, as it is a way to understand God as creator as well as to understand the position of the Trinity in the creation (Edwards 1999). Old Testament wisdom is characterised by the "general order and patterns of living in God's creation [and] provides discernment for the particular order and circumstances of our lives" (Bartholomew & O'Dowd 2011:27). Psalm 148 provides a clear structure with the order and function of all who need to praise YHWH. Kraus (1993b:561) views Psalm 148 as a song of praise that belongs to the category of imperatival hymns. He also identifies elements of the psalm as being part of "natural wisdom", due to its resemblance to Egyptian lists (see Von Rad 1955:296-297; Keel 1978:56-60). According to Keel and Schroer (2015:132-138), it is unlikely that texts such as "Ps 148, Job 38-39, Dan 3:57-90 Lxx ("Song of the Three Young Men in the Fiery Furnace"), and Sir 42:15-43:33 could have been composed without the influence of this sort of name-list". The Egyptian influence is notable.

8 For a comparison between these texts, see Brodersen (2017:138).

### 3.1 Division, text, and translation of Psalm 148

This section notes the poetic techniques,<sup>9</sup> text, and translation in Psalm 148 that relate to this psalm's spatial reading.

Stanza	Strophe	Verse	Verse line	Masoretic text Psalm 148	Translation (a free translation)
Superscription				הַלְלוּ יְהוָה	Praise Yah!
I	A	1a	1a	הַלְלוּ אֶת־יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם	Praise YHWH from the heavens;
			1b	הַלְלוּהוּ בַמְרוֹמִים:	praise him in the heights.
			2a	הַלְלוּהוּ כָּל־מַלְאָכָיו	Praise him, all his angels (aides);
			2b	הַלְלוּהוּ כָּל־צְבָאוֹ [צְבָאוֹ:י <sup>10</sup> ]	praise him, all his host (hosts);
		3a	הַלְלוּהוּ שֶׁמֶשׁ וְיָרֵחַ	praise him, sun and moon;	
		3b	הַלְלוּהוּ כָּל־כּוֹכְבֵי־אֹר:	praise him, all bright stars;	
		4a	הַלְלוּהוּ שָׁמַי הַשָּׁמַיִם	praise him, heavens of heavens	
		4b	וְהַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר־לְמַעַל הַשָּׁמַיִם:	and waters that are above the heavens.	
		B	5a	וְהַלְלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה	Let them praise the name of YHWH,
		5b	בִּיּוֹ הוּא צִוָּה וַנִּבְרָא:	for he commanded, and they were created,	
	6a	וַיִּצְמַדְם לְעַד לְעוֹלָם	and he established them to stand forever, to eternity.		
	6b	וְהַחֹק נָתַן וְלֹא יֵעָבֹד <sup>12</sup> :	A law he gave, and it will not pass.		
II	C	7a	הַלְלוּ אֶת־יְהוָה מִן־הָאָרֶץ	Praise YHWH from the earth;	
		7b	וְהַיָּם וְכָל־תְּהוֹמוֹת:	sea monsters and all depths,	

9 For a detailed discussion of the poetic techniques used in this psalm, see the works of Prinsloo (1992:46-63) and Van der Lugt (2014:558-565).

10  $\text{Ⓢ}$  mit Mss Vrs ut Q, K i—: the *ketib* is a singular, “the host”, the *qere* is plural “the hosts” (Hossfeld & Zenger 2011:630). “Host” can also be translated with “army” or “armies”.

11  $\text{Ⓢ}$ ( $\text{Ⓢ}$ ) + *αὐτὸς εἶπεν, καὶ ἐγενήθησαν*, ex 33,9: “He is the one who commanded” corresponds to the opening of 33:9b; LXX precedes it with a colon equivalent to Psalm 33:9a (Goldingay 2008:727).

12 Law (*ph*) in this text reflects the cosmic order and also in the contexts of the Hallel to the Torah (see Psalms 146:7; 147:19; 149:9) (Hossfeld & Zenger 2011:630). It is not a law that cannot be transgressed, “either it requires us to take the third-person verb as impersonal and thus passive, which is not a natural understanding where ‘a degree’ is inviting us to take it as a subject” (Goldingay 2008:727).

Stanza	Strophe	Verse	Verse line	Masoretic text Psalm 148	Translation (a free translation)
		8a	8a	אֵשׁ וְבָרָד שֶׁלֶג וְקִיטּוֹר	fire and hail, snow and fog (smoke),
		8b	b	רוּחַ סְעָרָה עֹשֶׂה דְבָרָוּ:	storm wind, doing his word,
		9a	9a	הַהָרִים וְכָל הַגְּבָעוֹת	the mountains and all hills,
		9b	b	עֵץ פְּרִי וְכָל אֲרָזִים:	fruit trees and all cedars,
		10a	10a	הַחַיָּה וְכָל בְּהֵמָה	the wild beasts and all cattle,
		10b	b	דְּמַשׁ וְצִפּוֹר כָּנָף:	creeping things and winged birds,
	D	11a	11a	מַלְכֵי-אָרֶץ וְכָל לְאֻמִּים	kings of earth and all peoples,
		11b	b	שֹׁפְטֵי וְכָל שֹׁפְטֵי אָרֶץ:	rulers and all judges of the earth,
		12a	12a	בַּחֹרִים וְגַם-בְּתוֹלוֹת	young men and also young women (virgins)
		12b	b	זְקֵנִים עִם-נְעָרִים:	oldsters together with youngsters.
		13a	13a	הַלְלִי   אֶת-שֵׁם יְהוָה	Let them praise the Name of YHWH,
		13b	b	כִּי-נִשְׁגָּב שְׁמוֹ לְבַדּוֹ	for exalted is his name alone;
		13c	c	הוֹדוּ עַל-אָרֶץ וּשְׁמַיִם:	his majesty is above earth and heaven.
III	E	14a	14a	וַיִּרָם קָרוֹן לְעַמּוֹ <sup>13</sup>	And he has raised up a horn for his people
		14b	b	תְּהַלֵּה לְכָל חַסִּידָיו	praise for all his faithful
		14c	c	לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עִם-קִרְבּוֹשׁ <sup>14</sup>	For the children of Israel, the people close to him.
Subscription				הַלְלִי-יְהוָה:	Praise Yah!

Psalm 148 can be divided into three stanzas, five strophes and verse lines that are consistent with two per verse, except for verses 13 and 14, with three verse lines each. Psalm 148 starts and ends with the words הַלְלִי יְהוָה “Praise Yah!”, forming an *inclusio*.<sup>15</sup> Verses 1a and 7a introduce the two major sections concerning praise from the heavens and the earth. Verses 5a and 13a function as an introduction and a type of refrain, indicating the reasons for praise by Stanza 1 on the heavens and Stanza 2 on the earth. The reasons for praise are introduced in both with a כִּי. The Name

13 It is translated according to the Masoretic text. According to the LXX, it can be translated “and he will lift up a horn for his people”. The LXX implies that it will still happen – a future perspective.

14 This verse line can also be translated as “the people of his nearness”.

15 Gerstenberger (2001:437-438, 447) views these two Halleluim as being an opening cheer (v. 1) and a closing cheer (v. 14).

of YHWH occurs four times in strategic places in the psalm (vv. 1, 5, 7, 13). This further supports that the first two stanzas act as two parts with parallel features.

The psalm makes use of a number of imperatives, especially with the verb הלל. Another striking repetition is the word כל, which acts as a literary device to strengthen the theme that everything must praise YHWH. The word for heaven appears five times in the psalm, and the word for earth four times. This reinforces the equal features of the first two stanzas. In verse 8, the word קיטור can be problematic, as it can be translated as ice, smoke, fog or clouds. Power (1926:187) examines the use of the word in different texts and translations and concludes that it is best translated as a “dark smoke cloud”, because of the symmetrical parallelism in Psalm 148 and “laws of Hebrew imagery, which allow clouds to be poetically designated as smoke, and of the requirements of the context”.

Kraus (1993b:564) mentions the sequence “earth and heaven” as part of the layout of the hymn in relation to verses 1 and 7, and that it also occurs in Genesis 2:4.<sup>16</sup> This is one of the most critical chiasmic patterns in the psalm, A-heaven B-earth (v 1) B-earth A-heaven (v 13), as it provides an *inclusio* combining the first two stanzas as a unit. In verse 13, there is a change of thought, characters, and purpose, and a new stanza begins. Although many scholars combine verses 13 and 14 in their structure of this psalm,<sup>17</sup> the previous inclusion with the chiasmic pattern heaven-earth-earth-heaven, closes the first two sections (as a bipartite structure), indicating that a new section is to follow. The chiasmic pattern can be regarded as part of a merism designating creation as a cosmic whole (Hossfeld & Zenger 2011:631).

Hillers (1978:327) views verse 14 as a closing petition that follows the two sections, verses 1-13. Verse 14 focuses on the actions of YHWH when it comes to Israel as his people.<sup>18</sup> One of the difficulties in verse 14a is how to translate קרן, as it is usually translated with “horn”, denoting strength and upliftment. Schmutzer and Gauthier (2009:161-183) maintain that it should be understood within the phrase “to raise the horn” to convey metaphorical and literal historical elements, as

‘horn’ in this set phrase describes the judgment of Israel’s enemies while simultaneously proclaiming Israel’s restored reputation on an international scale.<sup>19</sup>

16 See also Psalm 102:26, which could be considered a chiasmic structure with Psalm 102:20.

17 For these arguments, see Prinsloo (1992:51-53) and Van der Lugt (2014:555-562).

18 See the full discussion on verse 14 in Hossfeld & Zenger (2011:631, 633-635).

19 Goulder (1998:295) interprets the horn in the context of military success, bringing it in relation to Psalm 149:9.



### 3.2 The structure of Psalm 148

Taking the remarks in the previous sections into account, the structure of Psalm 148 can be summarised as follows:<sup>20</sup>

Stanza	Strophe	Verses	Psalm 148
Superscription			Praise Yah!
I		1a-6b	Praise YHWH from the heavens
	A	1a-4b	Heavenly beings, spatial objects and powers
		2a-b	Heavenly beings
		3a-b	Spatial objects and waters above the earth
	B	5a-6b	Praise the Name of YHWH
		5b-6a	Reason for praise: YHWH created all
II		7a-13c	Praise YHWH from the earth
	C	7a-12b	Praise from the earth
		7a-8a	Water spectacles below and above the earth (living and non-living)
		9a-10b	Earthly realms and their animals
		11a-12b	Human beings on earth
	D	13a-13c	Praise the Name of YHWH
		13a-13c	Reason for praise: for exalted is his name alone; his majesty is above earth and heaven
III	E	14a-c	Israel's praise
		14a-b	Raising and praise for his people
		14c	His people are close to him
Subscription			Praise Yah!

The structure of Psalm 148 indicates that the psalm consists of two significant spatial developments. The first is the cosmic whole, presented with the first two stanzas in the chiasmic pattern of verses 1 and 13, which concludes in the declaration that “his majesty is above earth and heaven”, confirming the universal royal rule and kingship of YHWH. This links with the separation model, a God is viewed as separate and distinct from all creation. The second spatial development is that of stanza III or verse 14, when the psalm takes a whole new focus as the relation between YHWH and his people becomes the focal point. The relationship between these two spatial developments is discussed in the next section.

### 3.3 Spatial reading of Psalm 148

In Psalm 148, everything between the heavens and the earth is called to praise YHWH. In the call, the underworld (*Sheol*) is excluded, but the water above the heavens (v. 4b), the waters of the earth and the deep or primal ocean (v. 7b) are called to praise that is typically associated with chaos. From the perspective of the three-tiered worldview, the underworld is

20 See Briggs and Briggs (1907:538-541) and Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:635).

therefore excluded. Verses 1-5 call the inhabitants of the heavenly domain to praise YHWH. In verse 6, the reason for this praise is presented (strophe B): God's generative command created them. God's sovereignty and power are over all creation; no power on heaven or earth can change or prevent what he created (v. 6). In other ancient Near Eastern worldviews, the gods had to battle chaos to show their creative abilities and power (see Tucker Jr. & Grant 2018:1019). Creative power lies with YHWH. Spatially, it must be noted that, in Psalm 148, God is not present in heaven, as in Psalms 103:19-21 and 104:1-4. Instead, the relational perspective of God is that of distance between him and the creation, as also noted in Nehemiah 9:6 (see Hossfeld & Zenger 2011:636).<sup>21</sup> Strophe A focuses on the angels and heavenly hosts that need to praise YHWH and all the celestial inhabitants, such as the sun, moon and stars. In ancient Near Eastern traditions, these inhabitants were connected to powerful deities and were considered divine beings. In Psalm 148, they are created and do not possess any power. The same goes for the cosmic waters (see Gen. 1:7) in verse 4, as they represent an element of chaos and power; in this text, they are part of creation, and YHWH has power over them.

The second stanza, verses 7-13, moves the call to praise towards the earth and all its inhabitants. Strophe C, verses 7-12, calls all the water spectacles below and above the earth (living and non-living), the earthly realms and their animals, and all human beings to praise YHWH. As with the previous section, all forms of power associated with the earth are stricken away as the chaotic power of the primeval waters of the earth is tamed by YHWH and called to praise. The sea monster, associated with chaos and power in ancient Near Eastern tradition (such as the Leviathan, Rahab, the crocodile, Behemoth, and Tannim; see Job 41:1-34, Pss. 74:14, 89:10; Isa. 51:9) is also called to praise YHWH and stripped of showing any dominance or power. The life-giving meteorological powers in nature such as rain, hail, and storms are all directed to praise YHWH. The mountains, typically identified in ancient Near Eastern traditions as the home of the gods, are demythologised and stricken with any association of power. The plants and animals are also called to praise YHWH. Only in the last verses of strophe C are all human beings called to praise YHWH, whether in positions of power or not, male or female, young or old. It is interesting to note that the kings, rulers, and judges in verse 11, who are in positions of geopolitical power from different regions and nations, are called to praise YHWH. No explicit references have been made to YHWH's own people (see

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21 Allen (2002:393) assumes that the reference to angels and the heavenly hosts implies that they are worshipping from the celestial palace or temple of YHWH. This is not indicated in the text and should not be assumed.

Hossfeld & Zenger 2011:637-638; Tucker Jr. & Grant 2018:1021). Again, the distance between God and his creation is noticeable. No mention is made of a temple or any other orientation, except that all praise should be directed towards YHWH.

The chiasmic structure, A-heaven B-earth (v. 1) B-earth A-heaven (v. 13), between verses 1 and 13 provides an *inclusio* combining the first two stanzas as a unit, exclaiming a totality of praise towards YHWH. Spatially, the chiasmic structure reinforces the idea that in Psalm 148, YHWH is viewed as separated from creation. Everything in heaven and earth is oriented towards him, and all power and creative power is with YHWH. In this orientation, YHWH is at the centre of orientation, not a holy place or temple, and all is directed towards him. Anything not praising YHWH is considered off-centre.

At first glance, verse 14 does not seem to be part of the remainder of the psalm or viewed as a later addition by many scholars (Segal 2013:687).<sup>22</sup> For Brueggemann and Bellinger (2015:614), Psalm 148 is a double call to praise. On the one hand, verses 1-13 call all on heaven and earth to praise YHWH. On the other hand, verse 14 focuses on the covenant community of Israel. God is the one who gives them strength. They regard this verse as a base for praise that illustrates the superior relationship between YHWH and the elected Israel. For Weiser (1971:838), verse 14 justifies the hymn, where the cultic community is assured of YHWH's nearness, salvation, and new vitality. It is the last of these that Weiser interprets the image of the "exalting of the horn", as he compares it to Psalms 89:17 and 132:17. For Segal (2013:687), verse 14 brings a tension between God's universal reign and the special relationship with Israel as the covenant people. This relationship is reinforced by the fact that twice in verse 14, it is mentioned that Israel is God's people. For Segal (2013:687), it is unclear in verse 14 if "God's act bring praise to the people, or is their role to give praise?" For him, it is both, and ultimately, the insight that verse 14 brings is the "exclusive possession of Israel". It recalls that God is near Israel, and Israel is near God (Deut. 6:4). For Goldingay (2008:734), this is a climax in the psalm when the people, who may come close to YHWH, are named.

Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:631, 633-635) approach the problem of verse 14 by indicating that it must be viewed as a redactional transition to Psalm 149 and to integrate verses 1-13 within the larger collection of Psalms 146-150. Tucker (2014:190-196) also interprets Psalm 148 in its larger context, within Book V of the Psalter and specifically within Psalms 146-150 (the

22 Some scholars argue that Psalm 148:14 is misplaced and should be the introduction to Psalm 149 (MacKenzie 1970:221-224; Wilkinson 2002:108).

concluding Hallel). He indicates how human power is deconstructed in Book V, reinforcing YHWH as the sole source of deliverance. For him, this continues in Psalms 146-150. Psalm 148, as a political critique, creates an onomasticon of all the parts of creation that need to praise YHWH, including the typical human powers. All human power and hierarchical place in creation have been stripped away, as they are now only part of the created order that must give praise to YHWH. Verse 13 confirms spatially YHWH's royal rule הָיָה עַל-אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם ("His majesty is above earth and heaven"). All of creation stands under the power of YHWH. Wilkinson (2002:109) makes the following remark regarding verse 14:

Israel's power is now embodied in their worship of God. The liturgy of this hymn thus draws the congregation to exercise power not in a political or militaristic fashion but by means of praise. If this psalm was composed during the post-exilic period as some have argued, then this shows a reinterpretation of earlier psalms. These were composed when the Jewish people were enjoying military and economic success under the strength of the Davidic monarchy. Here in the powerlessness of their political circumstances they find power in praise.<sup>23</sup>

Brüning (1996:11) indicates that "ultimately, Ps 148 aims to describe the cosmological task of the people of God as a theological poem". For him, Israel, as the people, has the task of representing the entire cosmos before God.

As Psalm 148 is post-exilic, verse 14 strengthens a community in desperate need of restoration<sup>24</sup> after a time of war and destruction. In this process, verse 14 reinforces their identity in God as their God and creator, who brings salvation and holds them close. In the following section, a spatial comparison is made between Psalm 148 and Colossians 1:15-20.

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23 According to Brüning (1996:11), "Dazu hat Gott seinem Volk Macht gegeben. Israels Lobgesang – das Psalmengebet – hat eine stellvertretende und universale Bedeutung für die ganze Schöpfung. Wenn Israel Gott mit Lobgesang naht, dann kann, darf und soll es seine Stimme dem gesamten Kosmos zur Verfügung stellen. Auch den größten und staunenswertesten Geschöpfen, wie beispielsweise Sonne, Mond und Sternen, die in der Umwelt Israels als Gottheiten verehrt werden, soll Israel seine Stimme leihen (Ps 148,3). Ja, durch seinen Mund sollen sogar die Elemente, die in Israels Umwelt als chaotisch und dämonisch gelten, zu Wort kommen, die tanninim = »Seeungeheuer« und die Phomöt = »Tiefen« (Ps 148,7)."

24 See also Goulder (1998:295).

## 4. PSALM 148 IN DIALOGUE WITH COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

### 4.1 A spatial reading of Colossians 1:15-20

Colossians 1:15-20 is considered to be a Christological hymn.<sup>25</sup> According to White (2018:106), a minority of scholars argue that it is not unthinkable that the hymn might have been written by Paul himself, although it is unlikely. It is more likely that, at this stage, Paul's writings were already present in the early Christian tradition and influenced the hymn's poetic language,<sup>26</sup> style, and context.<sup>27</sup> White (2018:107) continues by stating that the hymn's original shape, structure, and background are still intensively discussed in current research and that many scholars believe that certain sections of verses 15, 16, 18, and 19 could be from the original hymn. Scholars approach the background of the hymn from different perspectives, from pre-Christian gnostic text, Rabannic Judaism, and Hellenistic Judaism. The latter focuses on a more inclusive perspective concerning gentile Christians (O'Brien 1982:37-39). What is certain is the influence of Old Testament wisdom traditions in the text.

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25 Traditionally, New Testament scholars include the following texts as being considered New Testament Christ hymns: Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20; (2:14-15); Eph. 1:10; 1:20-23; [2:14-16]; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:1-4 (also 2:14-15; 17-18; 5:7-9; 12:2); 1 Peter 2:22-24; 3:18, 21; John 1:1, 3-5, 9-11, 14, 16. This list can be extended if one includes the epiphany hymns (Mountain 1994:9). For further clarification on the meaning, use, and criteria of hymns in the New Testament, see Vollenweider (2010) and Edsall and Strawbridge (2015). Vollenweider (2010:225-226) regards Colossians 1.15-20 as a hymn that meets the typical criteria for a hymn in the New Testament. Although the text is part of a prose text, it has numerous characteristics of hymnic language, for example, back-referencing pronouns, participial style, polysyndetic *καί*, short kola, and universal preditions. On a syntactical level, the text is part of a longer sentence in Chapter 1. We should be cautious about reconstructing the original hymn as, in his opinion, "the need to postulate an older piece of tradition is again limited, quite apart from the fact that its reconstruction is almost no longer methodologically controllable. With regard to the content-related tensions between the hymnal part and the argument in the epistolary context, especially in 2.9-15, a hermeneutic explanation rather than a literary-critical explanation is likely to prove to be less methodologically complex."

26 For a discussion on the poetic imagery in Colossians 1:15-20, see the work of Wright (1990:444-468).

27 On the debate whether Colossians 1:15-20 is Pre-Pauline or Pauline, see Helyer (1983:167-179).

The structure of Colossians 1:15-20<sup>28</sup> can be summarised as follows:<sup>29</sup>

Stanza	Strophe	Verse	Colossians 1:15-20
I		15-18b	Firstborn of all creation in whom were created all in the heavens
	A	15-16	Jesus the agent in creation
		16	a: for in him (αὐτῷ) were created (ἐκτίσθη)
			b: all things (τὰ πάντα)
			c: in the heavens (οὐρανοῖς)
			d: and on the earth (γῆς)
			d: the visible (ὁρατά)
			c: and the invisible (ἀόρατα), whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities
	B	17-18b	Christ, the Lord of the universe and head of the church
		17	b: all things (τὰ πάντα)
		a: through him (αὐτοῦ) and to him (αὐτόν) have been created (ἐκτίσται)	
		18a	Christ as head of the body, the church
II	C	18b-20	Christ, the agent in reconciliation
		18b	Firstborn from the dead
		19-20a	Reconciliation
		20b	The climax of reconciliation: "the things on the earth and the things in the heavens".

Wilkinson (2002:145) indicates several scholars who have contributed to identifying the role of Jesus as well as parallels in Colossians 1:15-20 regarding the creation and new creation. These parallels include "who is" the image of the invisible God (v. 15a) and the beginning (v. 18b); "he is the firstborn" of all creation (v. 15b) and from the dead (v. 18c); "he is pre-eminent" as he is before all things (v. 17a) and that he might be pre-eminent in all things (v. 18d); the Son unifies as in him all things hold together (v. 17b) and he reconciles all things (v. 20a), and everything is related to him in creation (v. 16b) and in new creation (v. 20c).

28 See Heil (2010:64-74); Bruce (1984:54).

29 Behr (1996:247-265) proposes a chiasmic reading and structure of Colossians 1:15-20, including verses 13-14, as part of the traditional hymn. For him, verses 13-14 are integral to the chiasmic paralleling with verse 20. He structures the text as follows (Behr 1996:248):

- A Deliverance, redemption, and the forgiveness of sins,
- B He is the image of the invisible God,
- C First-born of all creation
- D He is before all things and in Him all things hold together,
- E and He is the Head of the body, the Church,
- D He is the arche,
- C First-born from the dead
- B For Him (God) was pleased to let all fullness dwell,
- A Reconciliation to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.

According to Schweizer (1990:97), the purpose of the *hymn* in the first stanza is to praise Christ as the “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, in whom, through whom, to whom all things were created”, and the head of the body, the church. The second stanza focuses on identifying Christ as “the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, in whom, through whom, to whom all things were reconciled”. Only in the end does the focus fall on reconciliation. Spatially, the first stanza is a confirmation that Christ is the firstborn of all creation. Everything in heaven and earth is created in him and through him. This includes the visible, invisible, thrones, dominions, principles, and powers. The last two can be viewed as elements from the cosmos. This implies that he was before all things, and all things have been put together in him (see Van Kooten 2019:112-113, 121).

Everything is oriented towards him, and all creative power and power in heaven and earth are seated in him. Those in power from all over the earth are bound to him (see Cavin 2013:142-145). The following section confirms that as the firstborn from creation and death, as noted later in the hymn, Christ became the first in everything, in creation (vv. 15-17) and re-creation (vv. 18b-20) (see Van Kooten 2019:114). Christ becomes a cosmic body, wherein everything is reconciled through him and to him, becoming the centre of everything. That said, one also needs to take into account the spatial relational connection between God, Christ, and creation. The language found in this hymn is relational and not that of distance. Even the term “firstborn” (vv. 15 and 18), as used for Christ, indicates a connection between Christ as the Son and God as the Father. Furthermore, everything (v. 16) in creation is connected to Christ and the church, which is the body (v. 18).<sup>30</sup> This relation does not affect Christ’s primacy over creation (see Niles 2023:196-200). Although special mention is made of the Church as the body of Christ, the hymn confirms the relation between Christ and all of creation and all things are reconciled to him, whether on earth or in the heavens. The chiasmic pattern A-heavens B-earth (v. 16) and B-earth A-heaven (v. 20) confirms and reinforces this point. The *inclusio* confirms that all of creation, including the church, are all reconciled to him.

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30 According to Lohse (1982:43), the body originally was a reference to a cosmic body and Christ was the head of this body. By inserting the church, the author is providing a new interpretation to body in the text. This would be considered a possible expansion of the original hymn.

## 4.2 Spatial comparison between Psalm 148 and Colossians 1:15-20

The first similarity between Psalm 148:1-14 and Colossians 1:15-20 is that they both exhibit a unique chiasmic pattern A-heavens B-earth and B-earth A-heaven, which spatially display a merism of totality concerning all of creation and God as the creator. In both these texts, the relation of God towards that of creation is viewed from a distance. In Psalm 148, all creation is focused on YHWH and orients their praise towards YHWH. Psalm 148:1-13 brings the entire creation into worship together with the monotheistic statements recurring in verses 5 and 13 that only YHWH's name may be praised, indicating a theological rather than an anthropological focus. Praise is, in its totality, focused on YHWH as the divine creator and not on human beings. This is echoed in Colossians 1:16 with the focus that all of creation, the visible and invisible, are created through and for him (cf. Estes 2014:38). The difference is that with the Colossians text, the relation, although distant, shows a clear connection between God, Christ and all of creation.

The next similarity is that, in both these texts, power is stripped away from creation and seated in God and Christ. Psalm 148:1-13 exclaims that all power is with YHWH, but in verse 14, power is also placed with the people of God, Israel establishing their identity in God and their particular relation as being near to God. This image develops further in Colossians 1:15-20, where all creation is reconciled in Christ and not only the church (people of God). The relation of all of creation becomes intimate with Christ. One would have assumed that those close to God would only be the church, which is described as the body, but as the church is already part of Christ, part of his body, all of creation is now brought close to Christ through reconciliation (through the blood of Christ on the cross).

In both texts, God is placed at the centre of orientation, as all creation is called (Ps. 148) and reconciled (Col. 1:15-20) towards YHWH. To be off-centred is to be disoriented towards this worldview created in these texts. God is separated from creation and found outside of creation. The centre moved from the typical ancient Near Eastern spatial orientation where God is found on his throne, and the centre is the holiest of holiest in the temple on the temple mount. Rather than being directed to the temple to be in direct contact with God, now all of creation is directed towards God. The question is no longer where God can be found to be in contact with him, but directing ourselves to God/Christ as everything is now reconciled to him and for him.



## 5. CONCLUSION

The worldview presented as part of the Old Testament's ancient Near Eastern spatial orientation has a temple mount at its centre, where the vertical and horizontal axis meets. To be at the centre of the temple mount is to orient ourselves to be in contact with God, to be at the centre. In the texts of Psalm 148 and Colossians 1:15-20, the centre is moved away from the temple mount, where God is typically indicated as sitting on a throne in heaven, to God as the centre of orientation, situated outside of creation. In both these texts, power is situated within the creator God. A change takes place in the relationship between God and creation from Psalm 148 to Colossians 1:15-20, where in Psalm 148, Israel is viewed as the people near YHWH, all of creation is close to Christ in Colossians, as all of creation is reconciled to him.

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Chiaستiese struktuur