

RAYMOND R. HAUSOUL

# GOD'S FUTURE



# FOR ANIMALS

*From Creation to New Creation*

Foreword by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

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GOD'S FUTURE FOR ANIMALS  
From Creation to New Creation

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## Foreword

THE DOMAIN OF SYSTEMATIC theology has been traditionally limited to what is considered to be the classical doctrines. As important and central as that may be, it has also resulted in the neglect of a number of themes and issues with weighty theological significance. These include race, environment, animals, ethnicity, inclusivity, violence, and colonialism. It is refreshing to note that Raymond R. Hausoul in this fine study, based on his doctoral dissertation, makes an effort to address one of these challenging contemporary topics, namely the place of animals in creation and new creation.

In twentieth-century theology, the centrality and comprehensive nature of eschatology has been rediscovered, including the personal and the communal dimensions of the Christian vision of the “End.” But even then, a fundamental weakness still remains, namely the lack of a cosmic orientation. After Karl Barth rediscovered the centrality of eschatology to theology, Karl Rahner, Jürgen Moltmann (both of whom Hausoul examined in his dissertation), and Wolfhart Pannenberg rediscovered the implications and significance of a cosmological eschatology. From this perspective, a consistent systematic-theological engagement of the destiny of animals is a part of a comprehensive, cosmological eschatological vision.

The future of God’s kingdom, the epitome of Christian hope, encompasses all of creation and is not limited only to humans, nor the earth alone; rather, it includes the whole vast cosmos. This is the proper framework for a contemporary eschatology—even though, as mentioned, this most expansive horizon has not been at the center of Christian theology so far. Instead, the focus on the human destiny has been the focus of Christian hope as, quite early in the history of theology, the wider context of the kingdom of God was marginalized. Its meaning was reduced to a hope for a personal “sweet by and by” exit from this world! The biblical

testimonies of a new earth were forgotten because the wide and inclusive domain of the hope for the coming of God's kingdom was replaced by merely personal redemption.

As in his doctoral dissertation, in this book Hausoul points to the final consummation in which matter (physicality) and time are not so much "deleted" as they are transformed. As a result, the relationship between the individual and collective hope will not be separated from the destiny of the universe in light of the fact that the Christian hope of the eschatological consummation includes the whole of God's creation. It is nothing less than the integration of the real history of human beings with the whole of creation. This holistic and earthly eschatological vision is wonderfully developed and highlighted in this programmatic book on *God's Future for Animals*. Because the new creation is based on the resurrection of Christ and consummated through the Spirit of God, it also reshapes the physical world in its transformation of the whole cosmos. It is a transformation of the present nature beyond what "natural" emergence has brought about.

Rightly, Hausoul doesn't view the new creation as a replacement of the present creation. New creation is not a second *ex nihilo* or a working out of the natural processes of the cosmos. He interprets the new creation as a transformation of this present creation. Doing so, he seeks to convince his readers that eschatology involves the complete transformation of the world by a radically new act of God, beginning at Easter and continuing into the future.

The demand for such a comprehensive and all-embracing eschatology is challenging. From the perspective of the evangelical movement, the author's own constituency, this kind of constructive work is pioneering.

Speaking about the new heaven and the new earth requires also a proper methodology—particularly when the final hope encompasses the future of animals. A part of the methodological considerations is the search for a suitable language and rich imagination. As Alister E. McGrath notes in the beginning of his *A Brief History of Heaven*, "From a Christian perspective, the horizons defined by the parameters of our human existence merely limit what we can see; they do not define what there is to be seen."<sup>1</sup> Theological imagination, as much as it has to be anchored in the wider human pursuit of truth, should bravely, though also carefully, rush in where angels fear to tread. Modern and contemporary theologians

1. McGrath, *Brief History of Heaven*, 1.

have tended to be so overly cautious that they may have also missed the rewards of the discovery of the radically new and unanticipated.

For the theologian, the guiding tradition is the biblical-historical and contemporary theological wisdom, the deposit of faith. However, that tradition is neither a straitjacket that limits the creative pursuit of knowledge nor a basis for mere repetition and defense. A sympathetic critique of tradition is also a part of the task. As I have argued in my five-volume series, *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*, “Systematic theology is an integrative discipline that continuously searches for a coherent, balanced understanding of Christian truth and faith in light of Christian tradition (biblical and historical), the context of the historical and contemporary thought, cultures, and living faiths. It aims at a coherent, inclusive, dialogical, and hospitable vision.”<sup>2</sup> It is easy to see that Hausoul’s book aims at a similar kind of comprehensive vision of theology in which eschatology encompasses not only the human destiny but also makes space for a proper hope for animals, God’s creatures. This book shows the way towards a more holistic, multifaceted, and progressive vision of Christian doctrine of the “End.”

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2. Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*, 1.



## Preface

ONE BEAUTIFUL SUMMER EVENING, I talked with friends about my research on the new heaven and the new earth. While enjoying a refreshing glass of red wine, the thought arose to write a book about animals in the present and the new creation.

Motivated, I realized that this was a very challenging subject. It was a subject about which not much had been written in Christian literature. However, in recent years several works have appeared on the relationship between the environment and Christianity. Nevertheless, in these publications, the place of the past and future of animals was only touched upon briefly. Scholars draw our attention to other relevant themes about animals, such as dealing with growing environmental problems and the bio-industry. As far as I know, books that focused on God's treatment of animals in the original creation were not much available in the present time of that creation and the future new creation. That observation has not changed since I completed the manuscript for this book.

This book was a pleasant relaxation for me. It was an oasis in which I could regularly indulge myself in addition to my busy work as a pastor, researcher, and lecturer. Writing it demanded genuine creativity when it came to exploring new paths in Christian doctrine. At the same time, caution was needed to stick to the biblical history of interpretation. I hope to have found a healthy balance in this. May the final result encourage new discussions about this in the Christian congregation and doctrine.

I am grateful for my friends Els Devoldere, Déborah Giampietro, Lisanne van Dam, Arjen van Trigt, Dimitri Vanderheede, and Nathan Vanharen. They all provided comments on an earlier edition of this book and helped to make the clarity stronger. Of course, I am fully responsible for the final result. Finally, a sweet "thank you" to my wonderful wife, Belinda, and my sons Adriël and Ilja. All of you gave me the time to

fascinate and bore them for hours with all kinds of discoveries in the search for the animals in God's present and future creation.

Ieper/Ypres, Spring 2021  
Raymond R. Hausoul

# 1

## God Loves Animals

PERHAPS YOU ARE ONE of the many earthlings who had to learn all kinds of fascinating details at school from an early age. Countless mathematical and linguistic formulas and charts still haunt our minds when we are older. Yet, far fewer people ask questions about the *big picture* of the world. The focus on fine details in mathematics, physics, geography, history, biology, and so forth threatens to overshadow the perspective on the *big picture*. In recent years, we have become increasingly aware in science that we have such highly specialized knowledge that no one can get an overall view of the greater whole.

Fortunately, Christians have a growing desire to look again at Christian doctrine from the *big picture* perspective. One of those related questions is the crucial question of God's way with the animals in the history of salvation. This book wants to give an impetus to this. It intends to reflect from a new approach on the place of the animals in the story of creation (chapters 2–3), in the drama of the first human disobedience (chapters 4–5), in its further consequence in the story of salvation (chapters 6–7), and in the future completion of the new heaven and the new earth (chapters 8–13).

In plain language, we could formulate the critical questions as follows: How does God treat animals? Do animals also have a place in Christ's work of salvation? Will there later be animals on the new earth? These are questions about which there is not much discussion in Christian literature. In Christian theology, the world of animals is considered a *terra incognita*—an unknown territory. Thus, it is a great challenge to

reflect on these questions more responsibly and offer openings for a constructive follow-up discourse. That is the goal I have in mind with this book and to which I invite the reader warmly. It will be an adventure in search of the animals in God's plan of salvation.

### 1.1 CHRISTIAN ANIMAL QUEST

Over the last few years, there has been a growing focus on animal welfare. This attention does not only take place in our media. There is also more attention to animals and the environment in theological reflection than before. We live in a time when there is a positive reflection on the relationship between humans and animals. In churches and conferences, preachers pay more attention to the special blessing God has for animals.

Of course, this does not mean that there was little attention for the animal in the past. The Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras of Samos (~570–510 BC)—yes, this is the famous discoverer of the theorem  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ —is known to have been a great lover of animals. When Pythagoras went to the market, he liked to buy several living animals to give them their freedom. He held the animal in high esteem. During a barbecue, this mathematical genius would only have enjoyed a tasty vegetable burger. Meat did not enter his mouth. The impact of Pythagoras's choice was so significant in his time that people called anyone who did not eat meat a “follower of Pythagoras.” From the nineteenth century onward, our society introduced the new term “vegetarian” for people who followed the “diet of Pythagoras.”

From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, there has been a powerful urge to treat nature and its creatures responsibly. Many are touched when they hear how millions of animals suffer because of what people do. Whales are exterminated for the sake of “scientific research.” Elephants are killed to sell their ivory tusks. Kangaroos are slaughtered and processed into dog food, sneakers, and souvenirs for tourists. Shark fins are cut off while the animals are still alive. Young seals are skinned alive. Chimpanzees are caught and used in the laboratory, not to mention the many chickens, cows, pigs, sheep, and other animals that are industrially modified to provide better eggs, milk, and meat.

Besides, several indicators are pointing in the direction of an impending global environmental crisis of unprecedented proportions. Concepts such as “sustainable agriculture,” “environmental terrorism,” and

“bio-industry” have become part and parcel of the social debate. What role does the Christian faith have in all of this? Do we find indications in the Christian tradition and biblical traditions that support our reflection on this?

In addition to the many good media sources and various other popular and scholarly publications, let us be motivated to contribute on the topic of animals from a Christian perspective. These reflections on God’s view of animals are essential. This becomes visible when we realize that the idea sometimes arises that the Christian faith is a crucial cause of today’s environmental problems (cf. chapter 3). For example, studies of religion assume that the rejection of the idea that everything is god (pantheism) or that everything has a soul or spirit (animism) is one of the environmental crisis’s foundations. For this reason, activists in ecological ethics are fiercely critical of “Christians and their faith.” They feel strengthened by the fact that Christian doctrine does not pay much attention to God’s vision of animals or nature. “Animals can rightly feel slighted by the lack of attention they receive from commentators,” writes Australian Old Testament scholar John Olley.<sup>1</sup> The medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas (~1225–74) even dares to state that a wrong view of creatures leads to a false conception of God and leads people away from God.<sup>2</sup>

Anyone familiar with the biblical testimony realizes that in the tremendous Judeo-Christian themes of creation, covenant, redemption, and future expectation, animals do not play merely a peripheral role. God creates land animals and humans on the same day as partners, side by side. Noah fills his ark with animals and people to find salvation during the flood. Moses talks about humans and animals in his teaching. The prophets follow him in their picturesque panoramas of the future by not losing sight of the animals.

## 1.2 THE BIBLE STARTS WITH GENESIS

It sounds like kicking down an open door when I say that the Bible does not start with the liberation of God’s people in Egypt, but with the creation in Genesis. Anyone who reads the Bible from the first pages cannot get rid of the impression that God has a particular interest in this creation. The first two chapters of Genesis colorfully describe how God

1. Olley, “Mixed Blessings,” 131.

2. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.3.

created the earth and planted a garden in the land of Eden. From the beginning, God longs for a planet on which a multitude of people reflect his glory. Therefore, our salvation is part of the higher plan that God has with creation. Speaking about God's grace and justification precedes talking about creation. As such, salvation expresses itself in thankful words about creation, such as, "My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Ps 121:2). In this respect, creation and salvation belong together.

Still, it is striking that Christian doctrine focuses mainly on the redemption of God's people. Very often, the themes we encounter in the Bible, such as Jesus Christ, humanity, God's Spirit, the church, the future, are mainly related to the topic of salvation and deliverance. That gives the impression that the Bible is not much interested in its opening theme, creation. An example of this can be found in the work of the German theologian Walter Zimmerli. In his often reprinted *Old Testament Theology in Outline*, the theme of creation is only dealt with in the fourth part. The reason for this is that in the Old Testament, the exodus from Egypt is the central point of orientation.<sup>3</sup> This is a bizarre observation, on which the Heidelberg Old Testament scholar Rolf Rendtorff (1925–2014) consciously wants to focus the attention of his colleagues:

The Hebrew Bible begins with creation. Old Testament Theologies usually do not. How is that? The answer is obvious: because of the theology of the respective authors of Old Testament Theologies.<sup>4</sup>

So the cause lies in the fact that there is an excellent reflection in Christian doctrine about God's way with people and that there is a minimal reflection about God's way with creation as a whole.<sup>5</sup> Christian doctrine is thus indirectly read back into the biblical testimony so that even for the Old Testament scholar—who knows that his Bible begins with Genesis 1—it seems only to be about God's way with humanity. The nonhuman world all too often falls outside the radar of Christian and theological reflection.

In my book *The New Heaven and the New Earth*, I have shown how complexly and unconsciously the influence of theological presuppositions

3. Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology*.

4. Rendtorff, "Some Reflections on Creation," 204.

5. Kärkkäinen, *Hope*, 16; Kärkkäinen, *Creation*, 59–60. An example of a Christian doctrine that subordinates creation to the doctrine of salvation is Barth, *Creation: The Work*.

flows into biblical reflection.<sup>6</sup> It suffices here to mention seven different points which cause thoughts on God and creation to remain in the background of our proclamation.

1. The idea that God cares mostly for humans and that animals are given a subordinate place therein, serving only as illustrations or scenery.
2. The association of biblical creation stories with other creation stories, wherein the biblical storyline is not taken theologically seriously.
3. The assumption that the theme of creation belongs to the natural sciences and only causes controversy.
4. The idea that ecclesiastical sacraments and services are meant for people and not for other creatures or creation as a whole.
5. The emphasis on the spiritual, non-physical reality of life, and the lesser appreciation of the corporal and physical reality.
6. A variety of end-time scenarios, in which God is often presented as the Destroyer of this creation and the Creator of a new creation.
7. The little attention paid to the Old Testament testimony in the theological proclamation.

In this book, we want to put the reflection on creation high on the list. We will primarily focus on the core question, “What can we say about God’s way with animals in the light of biblical revelation and Christian doctrine?” We will start with the original creation and continue our research in the direction of the new heaven and the new earth. In doing so, the first and last two chapters of the Bible are connected. What God creates, in the beginning, finds its completion in the new heaven and the new earth. Anyone who reads the vision of the new creation in Revelation 21–22 will discover many references to the first creation in Genesis 1–2.

This relationship once again shows that God’s salvation is part of the greater whole, the *big picture*. What God does in redemption is related to creation. Therefore, theologians typified the salvation time between Genesis 1–2 and Revelation 21–22 as “continuous creation” (*creatio continua*). After all, God creates new things in his work of salvation as well. For example, Jesus testifies to the learned Nicodemus about new birth

6. Hausoul, *New Heaven*.

(John 3:3), and Paul writes that whoever is in Christ is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

Because these new things use what *already exists* in salvation, some prefer not to use the term “creation” because it is not *radically new*. Instead, they speak of God’s providence and use the word “creation” only for something completely new.<sup>7</sup> The Bible does not make this distinction. Terms from the first creation return in the age of redemption and the realization of the new creation. The prophet Isaiah, especially, likes to do this. So God “created” Israel in history (בָּרָא, *bārā*, Isa 43:1–2), just as God “created” the first creation (בָּרָא, *bārā*, Gen 1:1). God “formed” the people (יָצַר, *jātsar*), as well as God “formed” Adam and the animals (Isa 45:12; Gen 2:7, 19). God announces the redemption of Israel as something “new” (חָדָשׁ, *chādāsh*, Isa 42:9) and typifies the redemption of all creation (people, animals, and land) as something “new” (חָדָשׁ, *chādāsh*, Isa 43:19). Jeremiah also maintains this language and calls a husband’s love for his wife something “new” (חָדָשׁ, *chādāsh*, Isa 31:22). God remains the Creator in this and will not be relegated to a Manager of the first creation. The work of salvation is a unique dimension of God’s action as a Creator. The past does not entirely determine the present and future. God brings about new things in this creation. Animals are also crucial in this and are part of the grand plan that God has prepared for creation. So, what did that original state of creation look like when God created the animals in Genesis 1?

7. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 175; Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 88–89.

## 2

# Paradisiacal Conditions

### 2.1 MAJESTIC CREATION EPIC

#### 2.1.1 The Artificial Structure of Genesis 1

GENESIS OPENS THE BIBLICAL story impressively. The story of creation is filled with beauty and glorious exaltation. It testifies to a God who reveals himself royally to this world as a loving Creator. Through the living Word, all things are created in power and wisdom. All living beings receive living space. The creation story in Genesis 1 is characterized by beautiful composition and magnificent compactness. It offers a colorful introduction to the biblical drama. It is useful to dwell at the beginning in more detail on this event because we will refer back to this early beginning of the biblical story several times in this book. The story of creation is the beginning of everything that God makes and everything that God continues. It is not only about humanity but also about the incredible story of God with animals. A complete overview of this description is thus appropriate in this chapter.

In the story of creation, it becomes clear how everything finds its place and time. We read about the known reality of our life on earth: earth and heaven, light and darkness, water and land, plants and trees, the sun, moon, and stars, fish and birds, terrestrial animals, and people. The only unknown is the “dome” or “firmament” on the second and fifth days. We can daily observe everything else. It is all related to each other and exists only through the choices God makes at that moment.

The seven creation days in Genesis 1 can be divided into a pattern of six plus one: six days and one day of rest. The six creation days can be

divided into two blocks of three days. These two blocks form a parallel with each other through the pattern: light, water, land. The first block is characterized by separation, while the second block is characterized by filling the created spaces.<sup>1</sup>

On the first day, God *separates* darkness from light. On the second day, God *separates* water below and water above the “dome.” On the third day, God *separates* water and land. On this third day, God causes the earth to produce all kinds of plants and trees. In the next three days, the different areas created in creation are filled with all sorts of objects that can move in front of us. On the fourth day, God *fills* the heavens with the sun, moon, and stars to indicate day and night. Their fixed careers characterize the sun and moon. On the fifth day, God *fills* the sky with birds and the water with fish. They enjoy even greater flexibility than the celestial bodies and can also reproduce. They are blessed by God right away, which is the very first time this happens. “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind,” it sounds from God’s mouth (Gen 1:24). On the sixth day, God lets the earth *be filled* with living land animals, which the land brings forth. Then God creates humans, which may be characterized by procreation and even greater flexibility. Compactly this can be placed in the following structure.

Day 1: Light   darkness 1. Separation between light and darkness.	Day 4: Light carriers 1. Big light, small light, stars.
Day 2: Water   water 1a. Water under the firmament. 1b. Water above the firmament.	Day 5: Water animals and birds 1a. Aquatic animals. 1b. Birds flying along the firmament.
Day 3: Land   water 1. Water and land are separated. 2. Land summoned to bring forth fauna.	Day 6: Terrestrial animals and people 1. Land summoned to produce flora. 2. Creation of humans.
Day 7: Day of rest Creation process complete. A new weekly rhythm starts.	

1. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 94, relates this separation in Genesis 1 to the later priestly task. In Leviticus, divorce is the first task mentioned after the priests (Lev 10:10; 11:46–47). Furthermore, the priest is responsible for filling God’s temple with the dynamics of worship (firstfruits, etc.). Separation and filling belong together.

This schematic representation expresses several parallels. On the first and fourth days, God acts at once: light. On days two and five, two steps belonging together are recognizable (1a + 1b). On the third and sixth days, two separate actions are present (1 + 2). This creates a confirmation of the pattern of  $2 \times 3 \text{ days} + 1 \text{ day} = 6 \text{ days} + 1 \text{ day}$ .

We see this pattern of  $6 + 1$  again when Moses ascends Mount Sinai to receive the Torah: “The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; on the seventh day, he called to Moses out of the cloud” (Exod 24:16). For the last time in the Bible, we come across this pattern in the book of Revelation. The seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls are there divided into the same model of  $6 + 1$ . Between the first six stamps (Rev 6:1–17) and the last stamp (8:1), there is an interlude (7:1–17). Between the first six trumpets (8:6–9:21) and the seventh trumpet (11:14–19), there is an interlude (10:1–11:13). And between the first six bowls (16:1–12) and the last bowl (16:17), there is another interlude (16:15). In this way, the first week of world history, as described in Genesis 1, is a model for God’s way with creation as a whole. With its seven-day week cycle, this calendar was already known to the western Semitic peoples of Mesopotamia. Their monthly calendar mentioned the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of the month. This calendar was based upon the different phases that the moon carried on as an indication of time.

Because of this background, the days in Genesis 1 have been conceived as defined weekdays, as we still know them.<sup>2</sup> Each day begins in the evening, goes into the morning, and ends in the evening. The evening then is the beginning of the next day. This method of determining times is still common in Jewish culture. Sunset determines when a new day begins, and after six working days follows the Sabbath, which is inspired by the pattern of Genesis 1 (Exod 20:11; 31:17). In our Western culture, the day starts at midnight and continues for twenty-four hours. Several Jews and Christians chose not to interpret the days in Genesis 1 as days of twenty-four hours.<sup>3</sup> For example, the French-Jewish interpreter Rashi (1040–1105), who was officially born as Shlomo Yitzchaki, believed God had created everything in one day. The reason for this was Genesis 2:4, where it was said that God made heaven and earth “in the day” (בַּיּוֹם, *be-jôm*). According to Rashi, the creation happened on the sixth day of the

2. McCabe, “Defense of Literal Days,” 113–20.

3. Samuelson, *Judaism*, 139; Williams, *Systematische Theologie*, 1:146–54; Lewis, “Days of Creation,” 452.

Jewish month of Sivan. According to Jewish tradition, this sixth day of Sivan was also the day Moses received the Torah on Mount Sinai. Therefore the other days in Genesis 1 were only different “segments” of this one day.<sup>4</sup> A much earlier rabbi, called Nechemiah (~150 AD), already stated that God made creation in one day. In the days that followed, the earth produced just what God had already made.<sup>5</sup> The principles that God had laid down in it became visible.

### 2.1.2 Three Days of Separation

#### *Day 1: Light Comes, Darkness Departs*

On day one, the first command of God is heard in Genesis 1. God calls out “light,” and “darkness” departs. As a servant, light takes the place that God as King commands. Traditionally, readers of the biblical story of creation realize that this light was already there. It existed before the celestial bodies, such as the sun and the stars, gave their shine. Therefore, the light of the heavenly bodies is not seen as the source and cause of all light. Sun, moon, and stars do not receive the high position in the Bible that they get in many religions. There is a light that existed earlier than that of the stars.<sup>6</sup>

The light in the story of creation contrasts with the darkness of the primeval flood. God's Spirit floated like a dove over the water of this flood. Although the translation “God's wind” is also possible in Genesis 1:2, the combination with the vivid “floating” and the Person of God pleads for “Spirit.”<sup>7</sup> The Spirit of God stroked over the ink-black primeval flood, which was characterized by baldness and emptiness. The earth was

4. Ben Jitschaki (Rashi), *Complete Tanach*. Cf. Buber, *Midrash Tanhuma*, 1; Kara, *Yalkut Shimoni*, 6.

5. Zlotowitz, *Bereishis 1:1—28:9*, 30.

6. Jewish tradition believes that God created the celestial lights on the first day and did not give them their place in the vault of heaven until the fourth day. Cf. Neusner, *B. Hagigah*, 12a; Zlotowitz, *Bereishis 1:1—28:9*, 39. This explanation presupposes that God created creation in one day. The earth produced what God had created in the next six days (see chapter 2.1.1). From Genesis 1:15 it can be concluded that God “made” the heavenly bodies only on the fourth day, so he did not merely “place” them there.

7. Zlotowitz, *Bereishis 1:1—28:9*, 38; Ben Jitschaki (Rashi), *Complete Tanach*; Ouro, “Earth of Genesis 1,” 59–67. See for the translation of “God's wind”: Neusner, *B. Hagigah*, 12a; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 16–17; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 49–50. Cf. Tg. Onq. on Genesis 1:2.

as ferocious as a desert. It was an inhospitable place that had not yet received the orderly form that God wanted to give it. That is why God said, “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3).

In this light of the first day, Jewish interpreters thought inextricably of the Messiah. “This is the light of the Messiah,” it is written in their sources.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, that meaning carries the light also in texts like, “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you” (Isa 60:1), and, “In your light we see light” (Ps 36:9b). Possibly this is also the background of statements such as, “God is light and in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5), and Jesus’ own words, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5).

Christians gladly joined this Jewish view of the light in Genesis 1. From the heavenly city in Revelation, we learn, “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev 21:23). The light of the Messiah is far above the light of the celestial bodies. Is this why the light is already there on the first day, and the heavenly bodies appear only on the fourth day? Does this mean that everything God created could only be organized because this light was placed in the first place? From a Christian perspective, I would answer these questions with “yes.” There is no creation without putting the Messiah first and highest. The light of Genesis testifies of the Firstborn of creation. This idea corresponds with Paul’s thoughts of the Messiah:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col 1:15–17)

The light in Genesis 1 comes first and is the first who receives God’s “it was good.” Consequently, Jewish and Christian interpreters rightly distinguish this light from heaven’s light in their works and relate it to the light of God’s new creation. The light of the first day already bears witness to the light of the coming century.<sup>9</sup> The light of Genesis challenges us and gives us vision.

8. Freedman and Maurice, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 62.1; Samuelson, *Judaism*, 117.

9. Hausoul, “Protologie,” 11–29.

*Day 2: Segregation of Water*

On day two, God makes a “dome” (NRSV), “vault” (NIV), “expanse” (ESV, NASB, NIV84) or “firmament” (NKJV, Vulgata). The Hebrew term *רָקִיעַ/rāqīaʿ* is used elsewhere for thin adhesive material, such as “hammered out gold leaf” (Exod 39:3) or “expanse” (Ezek 1:22; 10:1). It is also compared to a cast mirror (Job 37:18) or a window of the heavens, which God can open for the flood (Gen 7:11–12). These indications emphasize the solidity of the material rather than its flatness.<sup>10</sup> Some related this plane of heaven to a tent, “You stretch out the heavens like a tent” (Ps 104:2), and “Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in” (Isa 40:22). Creation then takes the form of a palace, which God builds and provides with a protective roof.<sup>11</sup> From this background, many saw in the creation story the description of a sizeable macrocosmic temple that later found its miniatures in the microcosmic temples on earth.<sup>12</sup> This relationship between God’s sanctuary on earth and his sanctuary in heaven is also expressed in the call, “Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament!” (Ps 150:1).

So on the second day, God creates an immovable surface of heaven that protects the earth from the water like a dam. This surface of heaven separates the original mass of water from the primeval flood. Heaven is then connected to the water mass above it. According to the Jewish Talmud, the Hebrew words for “heaven” and “water” are therefore connected. “Heaven” (שָׁמַיִם, *shāmajim*) can be dissected in “water” (מַיִם, *majim*) and “there” (שָׁם, *shām*).<sup>13</sup> The meaning of heaven then is “there is water.” The psalmist even calls this water to praise God: “Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!” (Ps 148:4).

In the interpretation of Genesis 1, the mention of this celestial surface raises questions. Does the writer claim that there is a hard dome in the sky that blocks the rainwater? Although details about heaven’s character are missing, the story of creation mentions that the surface above is called “heaven” by God (Gen 1:8). The psalmist also uses this synonym, “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims

10. Zlotowitz, *Bereishis 1:1–28:9*, 45; Ben Jitschaki (Rashi), *Complete Tanach*.

11. Skillen, “Seven Days,” 126; Van Leeuwen, “Cosmos, Temple, House,” 72–77; Jaki, *Genesis 1*, 9, 22–23, 26–27, 279.

12. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 84–89; Kline, *Images*, 21, 39; Fisher, “Creation at Ugarit,” 319.

13. Neusner, *B. Hagigah*, 12a.

his handiwork” (Ps 19:1). The first part of this verse says the same as the second part of it. In concrete terms, biblical scholars interpret the Hebrew *רָקִיעַ/rāqīʿa* in Genesis 1:6 as the clouds of heaven or the atmosphere.<sup>14</sup> The reason for this is that nothing remains of a solidity, vault, firmament, or dome in the sky. The plane of heaven then dissolves into the air.

A challenge in explaining the Hebrew *רָקִיעַ/rāqīʿa* with the celestial clouds or atmosphere are the celestial bodies attached to the *רָקִיעַ/rāqīʿa* (Gen 1:17) and the birds that fly along with the *רָקִיעַ/rāqīʿa* (v. 20). Birds fly miles below the atmosphere, and celestial bodies are miles above the atmosphere. Birds “along” and celestial bodies “on” the vault are then out of the question. After all, creation is not an aviary with hanging lamps, where birds whiz along the roof. Even those who look up can see with the bare eye a big difference in distance between birds and stars. So this explanation remains a challenge.

After God has separated the water, no evaluation takes place on the second day. An “it was good” is missing in the Hebrew text. Only on the third day do we hear it. Then it even sounds twice, “It was good” (Gen 1:10, 12). The work that began on the second day is thus finished on the third day. Then the water beneath the plane of heaven gets its definitive name. On the second day, the earth is still covered with water and does not yet offer enough space for life.

### *Day 3: Solid Ground and Sea*

On the third day, the water is given its fixed place. All the water flows to one place so that the dry land appears. The land is freed from the sea. Jewish tradition connects this event with the future: also, in the new creation, God will deliver the land from the sea.<sup>15</sup>

The land must then produce young green. This gives the earth a mediating role in the creation of the flora. Plants and trees appear and testify for the first time to the freshness of life on earth. According to Rashi (1040–1105, Shlomo Yitzchaki), the flowers, plants, and trees were then very clean in appearance. Their “ugly” deformities would only come as a

14. Hilbrands, “Veraltetes Weltbild,” 193; Zlotowitz, *Bereishis 1:1–28:9*, 47; Seely, “Firmament,” 227–40.

15. Freedman and Maurice, *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus*, 27.4; Freedman and Maurice, “Midrash Rabbah: Ecclesiastes,” 3.15. The same thought appears in Egyptian tradition: Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 102–4.

result of human disobedience in Genesis 3.<sup>16</sup> The later Jewish philosopher Maimonides (1135–1204) thought God created only fruit-bearing trees on the third day. Trees that do not bear fruit appeared after the events of Genesis 3.<sup>17</sup>

Then, for the second time, it sounds on the third day that “it was good” (1:10, 12). This “double goodness” is for Jews a reason to marry on the third weekday (cf. John 2:1). By the way, I wanted to do the same. However, this had nothing to do with Jewish culture, but with my Dutch “economic” culture. Marrying on a Tuesday was free in Vaals (Netherlands). Still, my wife and I had to choose a Friday, so that our guests from faraway Germany could make it a weekend. In the end, it turned out to be a day of “double goodness.”

### 2.1.3 Three Creation Days of Filling

#### *Day 4: Hanging Lamps and Hanging Clocks*

Day four is also characterized by light. This is not the Messiah's light, as on the first day, but the light of the celestial bodies. God made the great light, the small light, and the stars. They helped distinguish between day and night, giving seasons, days, weeks, months, and years. Like a celestial calendar, these lamps, in the vault of the sky, indicate when days of rest and other feasts take place.

Consciously the biblical story of creation speaks of a “great” light and a “small” light. The terms “sun” and “moon” are not used. Presumably, because many peoples on earth worshiped the sun and moon as gods—some examples of this are the ancient Indian Vedas in which Surya is the sun god, the Mesopotamian religions in which Shamash is the sun god, ancient Egypt in which Aten and Ra are sun gods, and where we also find the city of Heliopolis (“city of the sun”), the many European gods, such as the Norwegian Sól and Heimdal, the Germanic Sunna or Sigel, the Irish Lughm, the Celtic Belenos, the Roman Phoebus Apollo, and the Greek Helios, who were all worshiped as sun gods. In these cultures, we also know several moon gods, such as the Indian Varuna, the Mesopotamian Utukku, the Sumerian Inanna, the Akkadian Nanna, the Babylonian Sin, the Egyptian Thoth, the Phoenician Aphrodite, the

16. Ben Jitschaki (Rashi), *Complete Tanach*.

17. Zlotowitz, *Bereishis 1:1–28:9*, 53.

Greek Selene and Artemis, the Roman Luna, the Celtic Cailleach, and the Norwegian Máni. Sun and moon were thus awarded sacrilegious worship from ancient history up to the present time. However, in the story of creation, the sun and moon are merely hanging lamps on the vault of the sky. There, as servants of God, they fulfill the function of hanging clocks to indicate the times. In this capacity, they show people and animals in which part of the day we find ourselves. Day and night, animals derive their rhythm of life from it. The fifth day concerns them.

### *Day 5: Aquatic and Aerial Animals*

On the fifth day, God fills the water, far below the plane of heaven, and God supplies the air space, close to the plane of the sky, with animals. In the water, living creatures must swarm, and above the earth, along with the celestial vault, birds must fly. Although plants and trees are also characterized by life, “living beings” is only used for animals and humans in the story of creation (Gen 1:20–21, 24, 30; 2:7, 19).

As animals of water and air, fish and birds represent the two extremes of the earth. As a result, the sea’s deepest point and the sky’s highest point stand side by side. Elsewhere in the Bible, birds and fish are typically placed together side by side (Gen 1:26, 28; Ps 8:9; Ezek 38:20; Hos 4:3; Zeph 1:3).

God creates the great sea creatures, all other aquatic animals, and various birds (Gen 1:21). The “great sea creatures” (ESV, NIV, NKJV) were traditionally seen as “great sea monsters” (NASB, NRSV). One of these sea monsters is the mythical Leviathan, which threatens the waters.<sup>18</sup> Jewish tradition states that God did not want this Leviathan to multiply. That is why God killed the female partner of this monster. According to this legend, the flesh of this animal is kept for the righteous. They will consume it in the new heaven and the new earth.<sup>19</sup> The biblical story of creation does not tell us anything about these things. It does not force us to think of the “great sea monsters” as winding mythological creatures. With the “great sea monsters,” we think of the giants of water, which we as humans fear. An example of this can be found in *Moby Dick* (1851),

18. Neusner, *B. Baba Batra*, 74b; Samuelson, *Judaism*, 126.

19. Zlotowitz, *Bereishis 1:1—28:9*, 62; Ben Jitschaki (Rashi), *Complete Tanach*. Cf. 4 Ezra 6:52; 2 Baruch 29:4; Neusner, *B. Baba Batra*, 74a–75b; Neusner, *B. 'Abodah Zarah*, 3b; Neusner, *B. Hullin*, 67b; Freedman and Maurice, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 7:4; 11:9.

the old novel by the American writer Herman Melville (1819–91). In this novel, the keen captain Ahab hunts fanatically the white whale, Moby Dick, because he lost his leg in an earlier confrontation with this animal.

The text in Genesis leaves no ambiguity that enormous sea creatures such as whale sharks, basking sharks, orcas, and whales are nothing but creatures of God. They do not deserve human worship any more than the sun and moon do. They are all beautiful creatures. Today, we are still witnesses to these numerous birds and fish that exist on earth. The life of each of them is a discovery in itself. Birds and fish know what it is like to travel miles and live their lives on earth efficiently. God blesses them in this life. Also, they are the first creatures to have the honor of hearing God's voice: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth" (Gen 1:22). That blessing is desperately needed for a life in the (later) endangered waters and air.

#### *Day 6: Land Animals and Land Dwellers*

On the sixth day, God speaks the most, out of all the creation days in Genesis 1. First of all, God creates terrestrial animals on this day. They are allowed to walk on the green-red "colorful robe" that God brought out on the third day. The animals are distinguished into the domestic animals, the crawling animals, and the wild animals. They consist of recognizable groups and multiply within those groups according to their nature.<sup>20</sup> "God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good" (Gen 1:25).

Speaking of "species" can raise questions. Does this mean that the species are not allowed to mix? For example, is crossing two species like a donkey and a horse into a mule forbidden? Are biotechnological interventions prohibited? Is the extermination of species wrong? We must be careful not to interpret "of every kind" or "according to their nature" as a precept. After all, nowhere does the story of creation require us to preserve the visible order of species or see it as immutable. An answer to whether biotechnological interventions are unlawful is not explicitly to be found in the biblical text. We only read that every living creature has the same right to life as humans. The Jewish rabbi Nathan the Babylonian (second century) made an exception only for mosquitoes, insects,

20. E.g. Neville, "Differentiation," 209–26; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 153, 157.

fleas, and other irritating animals. He stated that God did not create these animals on the sixth day. After all, nowhere in the entire Bible are they mentioned as “living creatures.” According to Rabbi Nathan, together with many other nasty animals, they only came into being after humans’ disobedience in Genesis 3.<sup>21</sup> As a result, the original creation in Genesis 1 looked very different from today. What the absence of those insects meant for the edible flowers and plants is a good question. A soil without insects is terrible for plant development, and without insects, there is no fertilization possible for many flowers.

However, God did not only want to be surrounded by galaxies, seas full of fish, primeval forests full of birds, and rainforests full of chimpanzees and crocodiles. That is why God created humans in his image and likeness. This gives humans a unique privilege. No star, tree, or animal except the human is the representative of God on earth. God did not create people as soloists or loners. God chooses to create humanity, both masculine and feminine. Man and woman are equal to each other.

God took the risk that humans could choose for or against their Creator. The great Jewish scholar and mystic Rabbi Akiva ben Josef (40–137 AD) point to the words “image” and “likeness” in Genesis 1:26. He states that every person is an image-bearer of God, but not every person chooses to resemble God. The image comes from God. The likeness lies in the hand of humans. The fact that humanity faces this choice between blessing and curse is reflected in the lack of evaluation. An evaluation does not appear after the creation of the first humans. On the sixth day, we only learn that God calls the creation of the tame, crawling, and wild animals “good” (Gen 1:25). This is lacking in the creation of humanity. It is all the more striking when we realize that the sixth day is related to the third day, where precisely this double “good” is present (1:10, 12).

In the end, it does sound like a blessing to humans. They may be fruitful, multiply, populate, and subdue the earth. Thus humans receive control “over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen 1:28). This command for multiplication puts a red line through the thought that the first humans only had sexual contact with each other after Genesis 3. God blessed Adam and the great fathers, like Noah and Abraham, explicitly with fertility (Gen 1:28; 9:7; 15:5). He also added that productivity would be a characteristic of the promised land (Lev 26:9, 21–22). Everything

21. Samuelson, *Judaism*, 121.

that lives is characterized by fertility as early as Genesis 1. This fertility is reflected in the very first blessings God expresses in the story of creation. According to the Torah, there would not even be infertile women left in Israel by obedience to God (Exod 23:26; Deut 7:14). Jewish tradition based on this blessed fertility the thought that Adam and Eve went to bed and got up with two or five kids in the morning.<sup>22</sup> Sexual intercourse in the garden of Eden was a very fruitful event because God's blessing was connected with it.

The terrestrial animals lack this blessing of fertility on the sixth day. Rashi suspects that this is because a terrestrial animal in Genesis 3 stirred up humanity against God. The trick of the serpent then forbids blessing the animals.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the terrestrial animals are closely related to humans on the sixth day. In contrast to other Mesopotamian creation stories, both are very close to each other. They are created on the same day as humans (Gen 1:24), use the same food (Gen 1:29), are called living creatures (2:7, 19), receive both God's breath of life (Gen 2:7; Ps 104:30), share space in the garden (Gen 2:19), and share the same fate in dying (Pss 49:13, 21; 104:29; Eccl 3:19–21). In the Bible, animals and human beings are never separated. They are only distinguished. Both are part of God's creation. This connection is also shown by the fact that the Old Testament has no separate word for "nature" or "creation." A modern Hebrew word like *טבע/teva'* for "nature" was unusual at that time. So there is no abstract word for the separate collection of animals, plants, and climatological and geological data in creation. The term "creation" always includes this collection and human beings.<sup>24</sup> Also, the idea of "creation" (modern Hebrew: *יצירה, yetzirah*) does not exist in the Old Testament. The biblical texts only speak of "heaven," "earth," and "God's works" (cf. Gen 2:4; Ps 145:4, 9).

#### 2.1.4 The Seventh Day: Blessed Rest

The creation story finds its climax on the seventh day. God rests on this day from his work of creation. God blessed and sanctified this seventh day (Gen 2:3), traditionally calling it the "crown of creation." God created

22. Neusner, *B. Sanhedrin*, 38b; Freedman and Maurice, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 22:2.

23. Ben Jitschaki (Rashi), *Complete Tanach*.

24. Allen, "Hebrew View," 81.

the world for his glory. Therefore, the Bible never uses the term “crown” for humans. It takes some getting used to because Christians like to use “crown” for humans. Although God created humans beautifully and exaltedly, the Bible testifies that the crown in this creation can only be achieved if humans choose to live with God. Thus, a human being who wants to live without God is not a crown on creation. He is a fool in the eyes of God and others (Ps 14:1).

In the Age of Enlightenment, humanity left this biblical testimony far behind, and a misrepresentation arose. Human beings then saw themselves as the “crowning glory” of creation. They were only too happy to abuse this idea to control things independently of God. Humans became autonomous, and the seventh day’s testimony was set aside as the climax of God’s work of creation. However, the seventh day is the climax of the story of creation. It is a day of rest with God. While the previous six days always talked about “evening” and “tomorrow,” this description is missing on the seventh day. Day seven has no end in the story of creation. The day testifies of an open invitation, which allows Genesis 1 to work on itself. Every day had its twosome in the form of separation or addition: light–darkness, water–water, water–land, sun–moon, fish–birds, terrestrial land animals–people. Only the seventh day had not yet found a partner. Thus an invitation sounds to every human being: Do you want to be God’s partner on the seventh day? Will you accept that the relationship between God and humanity may find its most profound intimacy on the seventh day?

In later passages of the Bible, this day of rest is related to the new creation. It is an extension of the original creation in Genesis 1. It is the ultimate and definitive completion of God’s work of creation and redemption, which, like the seventh day, has no end.

The day of rest offers a foretaste of this new creation, which the Israelites must maintain with respect. On that day, people will realize that the goal of God’s creation is not creation itself or the work that people do in it. God’s desire is a creation in which people can have an intense relationship with God. Jews and Christians realized this. They saw the day of rest as a beautiful moment to have time together with God and with their family members. It was a day of relationships.

The importance of intimacy between Creator and creation on the seventh day is also evident in how God deals with the Sabbath. Thus God took rest when he provided food for the people in the wilderness. Six days a week, heaven gave manna. On the seventh day, there was rest, and no manna fell from the sky. The people were then allowed to enjoy the

double blessing they received the day before. Indeed, on the sixth day, a double portion of heavenly food fell (Exod 16:22–30). God honored and rested the seventh day. This is a testimony of the serenity of God's future new creation. We also see this in the life of Jesus Christ when he chooses to heal the sick on the day of rest, against the strict religious beliefs in his time. By Christ, the sick may also taste the tremendous peace that God wants to give creation.

## 2.2 FOUNDATION FOR GOD'S HISTORY OF SALVATION

### 2.2.1 God's Promise

God's choice for the story of creation is an inspiration for the biblical heroes of faith. It reveals that what God says happens. The calling of God brings about creation. As in a stately procession, the creation story of Genesis 1 features ten times the saying, "God said" (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29). Of these ten times, God speaks the last three times to humans (1:26–29). Furthermore, God pronounces three blessings (1:22, 28; 2:3), and we hear that everything God commands happens (1:3, 7, 9, 11, 15, 24, 30). The whole creation is entirely subservient to what God says.

The psalmists connect this speaking of God with respect: "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (Ps 33:8–9); "Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created" (148:5). Without the word of God, there is no creation. God's creation is expressed by it. This is what the Jewish tradition says: "An artist achieves nothing without hard work, but God makes all things only by the breath of the word."<sup>25</sup> In this emphasizing of the speaking Word, the biblical creation story differs from other creation stories.

This speaking of God is fundamental. The patriarch Abraham was allowed to recognize that God "calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom 4:17b). That was the basis for his belief in the promise of a son. Also, in the Letter to the Hebrews, we read, "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible" (Heb 11:3). Everyone is allowed to witness that whatever God says will happen. God stands at his word. Simultaneously, the story of creation shows that God's Spirit must

25. Bar Nafha and Buber, *Midrash Tehillim*, 18.26.

not be separated from this process. The Spirit hovers over the primordial flood in Genesis 1:2 and is present at the beginning of new life. The same place is given to the Spirit in salvation. We are born again of God's Spirit (John 3:8). Creation and redemption are therefore closely connected, as we noted earlier (chapter 1.3).

Although we often say that God created everything "out of nothing," the biblical prophets and apostles consistently use the expression that God created everything "through the word." The apostle John writes at the beginning of his Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What had come into being in him was life. (John 1:1–4a)

The Word is the beginning and the end. This testimony continued in Christian confessions, such as the Nicea-Constantinople confession. There it is confessed that the Son is "of the same Being as the Father, by whom everything in heaven and on earth is made." One can also think of the Belgic Confession, "We believe that through his Word, which is through his Son, the Father did not create heaven, earth and all creatures out of him."<sup>26</sup>

Historically, the expression that God created everything "out of nothing" comes from 2 Macc 7:28. There a mother says to her son, "Recognize that God made these things out of nothing." In doing so, she responds to the ancient notion that creation has no beginning. The church father Irenaeus of Lyon (~140–202) caused a wide spread of the expression "out of nothing" (Lat. *ex nihilo*). The reason for this was that in his time, many claimed that God did not create matter. God had left this "dirty work" to a so-called "demiurge" (craftsman). Irenaeus opposed this and emphasized that God had made the creation "out of nothing."<sup>27</sup> A "demiurge" was not involved. Nothing preceded creation.

From the beginning, people were able to maintain God's creation and rework the available material. They had to realize that God was also the Creator of the animal world. According to many, this indicated that we also had to take care of animals. In our time, many Christians base the

26. "Belgic Confession," 58 (§12).

27. Delio, "Is Creation Eternal?," 281; Bonting, "Chaos Theology," 324–26; Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 65–96.

ethical treatment of animals on the story of creation. Nevertheless, the fact that God is Creator is not the primary reason for biblical writers to take care of animals. For example, there is no biblical text that motivates a responsible treatment of animals because God is their Creator. Slightly, the accounting treatment is based on the respect of humanity towards animals. It is primarily a choice based on love for the other creature. We will discuss this further in chapter 7.

### 2.2.2 The Relationship between Heaven and Earth

In Genesis 1, heaven and earth are put to each other. While the first and fourth days focus on the heavenly light, the third and sixth days talk about flora and fauna on earth. In between are the second and fifth days. These days discuss both the area above (water above the celestial plane and birds along the celestial plane) and the area below (water below the ethereal plane and the aquatic animals therein).

The higher celestial spheres are not separated from the earth or described as existing outside the cosmos. Heaven and earth are in harmony with each other, as “visible matter” and “dark matter” seem to be nowadays. Later, people realized that the place where they are can be a gateway to heaven (Gen 28:16–17) and that heaven is invisibly present (2 Kgs 6:17). So, the term “heaven” is used for the visible heaven above and the invisible place of God and the angels. This connection between heaven and earth is reflected in the idea of interpreting creation in Genesis 1 as a macrocosmic temple. This macrocosmic temple can be recognized in the microcosmic temples on earth (chapter 5.1).

Researchers tried to find out to what extent the testimony of Genesis 1 was unique. Did the biblical creation story have parallels with other creation stories? Some thought this was the case and looked for similarities between the biblical creation story in Genesis 1 and creation stories in Mesopotamia, Babylonia, and Egypt.<sup>28</sup> A parallel discovery was suspected to be found in the Mesopotamian creation report *Enuma Elish*. Although there are parallels with this report, those are of such a small amount that researchers acknowledge that there is more difference than similarity with Genesis 1.

28. Tsumura, *Earth*; Johnston, “Genesis 1,” 178–94; Cohn, *Cosmos*, 3–56; Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, 27–32; Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature*, 19–42.

The conclusion is that there is no parallel between Genesis 1 and other extrabiblical creation stories from antiquity until now.<sup>29</sup> The testimony of Genesis 1 is unique and extraordinary. It resists the usual ancient representations of humans as subjugated slaves of the gods. It also opposes the old idea that only the king or lord represents the deity on earth.<sup>30</sup> Nor is it impossible to read the extrabiblical mythological representations of birth or development of the Creator or a battle between the gods in the biblical story of creation.<sup>31</sup> The creation in Genesis 1 does not arise because God overpowers an enemy power, as the *Enuma Elish* mentions. Although these conflicts are present in other mythical accounts of creation, Genesis lacks any reference to them. First and foremost is the love of God and not the battle between a multitude of primeval powers. This difference results in a different view of creation. It frames the choices a human being makes towards nature and his fellow human beings.

Nor does God, as in many other creation stories, describe humans as helpless creatures. Humans are not produced by blind magical-godly forces or pushed forward in the inevitable rhythm of the world of the gods. Nothing is beyond the control of God in creation: not the dark beginning, not the wild or threatening animals, not the ominous celestial bodies, not the dark powers. The Bible opens with a creation story that presents humans as worthy, free, and responsible for controlling God's creation. God gives people a fantastic beginning. However, what is God's purpose with all creation?

### 2.2.3 Eschatological Perspective

#### *Darkness and Light, Sea and Land*

Several elements can be derived from the biblical story of creation that point to a future fulfillment. Jews, for example, think that the light that is called on day one nearby refers to the coming of the Messiah and is concerning God's glory.<sup>32</sup> The light also refers in the Old Testament to the glory

29. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis*, 192.

30. For the idea of Genesis 1–11 as an ideological critique of Mesopotamian representations of regency, creation, and religion, see Middleton, *Liberating Image*, 185–231. Cf. Stek, "What Says the Scriptures?" 231.

31. For such a battle of the gods, see texts like Ps 74:13–14; Isa 27:1; and 51:9, where the context is not the creation of the world, but the redemption of God's people.

32. Philo of Alexandria, "Creation," 31, 35. See 4 Ezra 6:40; 2 En. 25:3.

of God (Exod 34:29; Ps 104:2; Ezek 1:26–28; cf. Isa 58:8; 60:1, 19). At the beginning of creation, the coming of the Messiah is, of course, still in the future. It finds its completion only in the new heaven and the new earth, where the Messiah is the light of the city garden (Rev 21:23). The light of the first day thus already bears witness to the light of the coming century.

In the age to come, the light will triumph over darkness. In Genesis 1, that darkness is placed before the light. According to the Jewish Talmud, it is one of the first things that God created, and that cannot exist without God's will.<sup>33</sup> This thought follows the testimony of the prophet Isaiah: "I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness" (45:6b–7a). Still, God chooses in the story of creation to speak first about the day and then about the night. This may indicate that the day has the highest priority.<sup>34</sup> It is during the day that most people prefer to enjoy life. When the sun shines, we like to walk along the sea and visit different places. At night most of us avoid walking in nature or inhabited areas and prefer to stay inside and rest. During the first six days of creation, the day's dawn indicates that creation is moving forward towards the coming of the great day of God. There is a progression in salvation history from the total darkness to the light of the new creation.

In Genesis 1, God calls the light "good" but does not say anything about the darkness. This is also the case with primordial water. After God separates the water above and the water below the firmament on the second day, no expression follows that it was "good" (Gen 1:2). The second day is the only day in which God does not say that something was good. Those familiar with the biblical story realize that darkness and the sea often have a negative connotation in the further course of God's plan of salvation. From that perspective, we can already see in Genesis 1 the potential of creation to develop in two directions. There is one direction that does creation good (pro-creation), and there is a direction that turns itself against creation (anti-creation). This theme of pro-creation and anti-creation is discussed several more times in biblical history. We will further reflect on this in chapter 7.2.2.

33. Neusner, *B. Tamid*, 32a.

34. Levenson, *Creation*, 123.