

**Richard M. Davidson, PhD**  
Andrews University  
Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA

## **THE CREATION THEME IN PSALM 104**

### **INTRODUCTION**

**A** radical, even tectonic, paradigm shift in modern critical scholarship has occurred in the last few decades that has come to view creation, and not just salvation history, as foundational to the rest of the Old Testament canon.<sup>1</sup> Much attention has rightly been given to the creation accounts in Genesis, since in the theological ground plan of the Old Testament, Genesis 1 through 3 have been situated as the introduction to the canon, and the entire rest of the canon regularly harks back to and builds upon this Edenic pattern.<sup>2</sup> Not nearly

---

1. This is evidenced, for example, by the collection of essays, *God Who Creates* ed. William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride Jr. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), whose contributors document the “tectonic shift...nothing short of a paradigm shift from a once-exclusive stress upon the mighty interventions of God in history to God’s formative and sustaining ways in creation” (“Editors’ Preface,” xi). The first chapter, by McBride, is titled “Divine Protocol: Genesis 1:1–2:3 as Prologue to the Pentateuch.” Succeeding essays show how creation theology is foundational to other parts of the Hebrew Bible. See also Jesus M. Arambarri, “Gen 1,1–2,4a: Ein Prolog und ein Programm für Israel,” in *Gottes Wege suchend. Beiträge zum Verständnis der Bibel und Ihrer Botschaft. Festschrift für Rudolf Mosis zum 70. ed. Franz Sedlmeier* (Würzburg, Germany: Echter, 2003), 65–86; and Gustaf Wingren, “The Doctrine of Creation: Not an Appendix but the First Article,” *WW* 4, no. 4 (1984): 353–71.

2. An emerging consensus on this point is apparent within both evangelical and liberal Old Testament scholarship. John Rankin, “Power and Gender at the Divinity School,” in *Finding God at Harvard: Spiritual Journeys of Thinking Christians*, ed. Kelly Monroe (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 203, summarizes: “Whether one is evangelical or liberal, it is

as much study has been given to the numerous references to creation in the Psalms, which, by their sheer volume, surpass that of Genesis 1 through 3. References or allusions to creation appear in over 50 of the 150 psalms of the Psalter.

In the Psalter, the psalmists usually situate their explicit references and allusions to creation amidst expressions of other concerns. Creation motifs are utilized to highlight numerous aspects of divine activity, such as the election of Israel, the Exodus, the deliverance of the psalmist from trouble, and God's ongoing providence and preservation of His creation. But there is one psalm that, from beginning to end, has as its subject God's creation of the world, namely, Psalm 104—hence, the focus upon this particular psalm in this study. Other creation psalms will be examined in a separate study.

In this study, the particular focus is upon data from Psalm 104 that may shed light upon the issues of the origins of the heavens and earth. I will trace possible intertextual relationships between this psalm and the creation accounts of Genesis and explore any unique perspectives on origins found in the Psalms that do not appear in Genesis 1 through 3. The conclusion will bring together the various theological strands as they relate to creation in general and issues of origins in particular.

## QUESTIONS OF INTRODUCTION

### DATE AND AUTHORSHIP

There is no superscription for Psalm 104 in the Hebrew Bible. However, the Greek (LXX) and Latin (Vulgate) versions give as the heading "A Psalm of David." This is no doubt due to the identical *inclusio*, with the words "bless the LORD, O my soul,"<sup>3</sup> found at the beginning and end of both Psalm 103 and Psalm 104—the former of which does contain the superscription *mizmôr lēdāvid*, "A Psalm of David." These are the only two psalms in the entire Psalter that have

---

clear that Gen 1-3 is the interpretive foundation of all Scripture." Richard M. Davidson, "Back to the Beginning: Genesis 1-3 and the Theological Center of Scripture," in *Christ, Salvation, and the Eschaton: Essays in Honor of Hans K. LaRondelle*, ed. Daniel Heinz, Jiří Moskala, and Peter M. van Bemmelen (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Old Testament Department, Andrews University Theological Seminary, 2009), 5-29.

3. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations in this chapter are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

the phrase “bless the LORD, O my soul,” let alone feature this phrase used as an *inclusio*. Beyond the *inclusio*, other common features link the two psalms. The last stanza of Psalm 103 ends with an evocation of God’s cosmic rule, and Psalm 104 begins with this same evocation. A striking number of verbal connections are also scattered throughout the two psalms.<sup>4</sup> “Such links suggest a common authorship for these two psalms, and this impression gets even stronger when their subject-matters are taken into account.”<sup>5</sup> We will explore the connections in subject matter below. In the final canonical arrangement of the Psalter, where these psalms are placed back to back, it seems very likely that they are meant to stand together as Davidic psalms. The omission of the inscription for Psalm 104 may be for theological reasons, to link this psalm more closely with the previous one, revealing the continuity of theological themes between the two. In the discussion that follows, the author will be spoken of as the psalmist, although, for reasons stated above, this psalmist is probably David himself.

Some have seen a link between Psalm 104 and “The Hymn to Aten,” composed in the fourteenth century BC, during the monotheistic Amarna Revolution and during the reign of Ikhnaton (Amenophis IV); this hymn honors the sun disk Aten as the supreme and sole creator.<sup>6</sup> It is plausible that the composer of Psalm 104 was

4. For a summary of the major linguistic connections between these two psalms, see Paul E. Dion, “YHWH as Storm-god and Sun-god: The Double Legacy of Egypt and Canaan as Reflected in Psalm 104,” *ZAW* 103 (1991): 43, 44.

5. Dion, “YHWH as Storm-god,” 44. See also my discussion below for the theological continuity between the two psalms. For others suggesting a single authorship for both Psalm 103 and 104, see, for example, Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 4th ed. (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), 447; and V. Steven Parrish, “Psalm 104 as a Perspective on Creation Thought in the Worship and Reflection of Preexilic Israel” (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1989), 11.

6. See “The Hymn to the Aton,” in *ANET*, trans. John A. Wilson, 370, 71; and the discussion of parallels between Psalm 104 and the Hymn to Aten, and possible implications of such parallels, in Dion, “YHWH as Storm-god,” 58–69. For the full range of scholars who have examined these parallels, see Dion, “YHWH as Storm-god,” 59n65. Compare also Jon Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 53–65; and Eckhard von Nordheim, “Der Grosse Hymnus des Echnaton und Psalm 104: Gott und Mensch im Ägypten der Amarnazeit und in Israel,” in *Theologie und Menschenbild*, ed. Gerhard Dautzenberg et al. (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang, 1978), 51–73. Dion, “YHWH as Storm-god,” 60, cites the six most cogent parallels between Psalm 104 and the Aten Hymn (his quotations from the Aten Hymn are taken from *AEL*, vol. 2, 96–99; the line numbers are from V. A. Tobin, “The Intellectual Organization of the Amarna Period” [PhD diss., Hebrew University, 1986]):

(1) Paralleling Psalm 104:20–21, is Aten Hymn, 24–33: “When you set in western lightland, / Earth is in darkness as if in death; . . . Every lion comes from its den. / All the serpents bite; Darkness hovers, earth is silent, / as their maker rests in lightland.”

acquainted with the Hymn to Aten and utilized some of its imagery in his composition.<sup>7</sup> But the number of parallels between the two compositions is comparatively few: only some 17 of the 149 lines of The Hymn to Aten show any similarities to Psalm 104,<sup>8</sup> and these few parallels are never precise. Furthermore, the entire focus of the two compositions is completely different (which will be discussed later). Hence, even if the composer of Psalm 104, who is perhaps David, did know of the Egyptian hymn and borrow some of its phraseology, he pressed the imagery into the service of his own original composition, and the language he did borrow may well have been with polemical as well as aesthetic intent (as argued later). The same can be said for alleged parallels between Psalm 104 and Ugaritic literature.<sup>9</sup>

### LITERARY ARTISTRY AND THEOLOGICAL DEPTH

Scholars have recognized this psalm as one of the most, if not the most, intricately and exquisitely crafted literary productions in the entire Psalter or perhaps anywhere else in literature.

---

(2) Paralleling Psalm 104:22–23 is Aten Hymn, 34–41: “Earth brightens when you dawn in lightland, / When you shine as Aten of daytime; / As you dispel the dark, / As you cast your rays, / The Two Lands are in festivity. / Awake they stand on their feet, / You have roused them; / Bodies cleansed, clothed, / Their arms adore your appearance, / The entire land sets out to work”

(3) Paralleling Psalm 104:24 is Aten Hymn, 68, 93: “How many are your deeds, . . . / How excellent are your ways, / O Lord of Eternity!”

(4) Paralleling Psalm 104:25, 26 is Aten Hymn, 49–52: “Ships fare north, fare south as well, / Roads lie open when you rise; / The fish in the river dart before you, / Your rays are in the midst of the sea.”

(5) Paralleling Psalm 104:27, 28 is Aten Hymn, 76–78: “You set every man in his place, / You supply their needs; / Everyone has his food.”

(6) Paralleling Psalm 104:29 is Aten Hymn, 121, 22: “When you have dawned they live, / When you set they die.”

7. A number of critical scholars seem to minimize the possibility of any knowledge of the Egyptian Hymn by the psalmist, because they date the Hymn to Aten to the fourteenth century BC and Psalm 104 to the fifth century BC. Others accept the psalmist’s awareness of the Hymn to Aten but are perplexed to know how that awareness could bridge a gap of almost a thousand years: “It is hard to explain this relationship between Egyptian poems of the XIVth century, and a psalm which may not be older than the Vth century. And yet, it is a fact; somehow, the biblical writer had access to this source of inspiration, and used it.” See Dion, “YHWH as Storm-god,” 61, 62. But if David is indeed the composer of Psalm 104, the time spread is not nearly so great, and with the strong Egyptian influence in Israel during the time of David and Solomon, such connections are not nearly so puzzling, especially since the Hymn to Aten was written during the only period of monotheism in Egypt, a period that may have held fascination for the monotheistic writers in Israel.

8. This is the count of the *SDABC*, vol. 3, 865, in its “Additional Note on Psalm 104.” Other scholarly analyses posit more extensive parallels.

9. For discussion of these possible parallels, and implications, see especially, Peter C. Craigie, “The Comparison of Hebrew Poetry: Psalm 104 in the Light of Egyptian and Ugaritic Poetry,” *Semitics* 4 (1974): 15–21.

The psalm is remarkable for the movement and vividness of the images that crowd into the picture of creation. In this respect it is probably unsurpassed in literature. Someone has said that it would be worth studying Hebrew for ten years if as a result of that study the student could read this psalm in the original.<sup>10</sup>

Psalm 104 not only contains a wealth of literary artistry but is composed with incredible theological depth. As William Brown puts it, "Psalm 104 was composed with unabashed joy and freedom of expression, and yet it exhibits a theological sophistication scarcely matched by any other psalm. Here, rigorous thinking and rapturous wonder find a compelling convergence. The world, as grand and manifold as it is, is inscribed with coherence and conviviality."<sup>11</sup> Such theological depth is especially apparent as the psalmist insightfully interprets the creation narratives of Genesis.

### PSALM 104 AS INNER BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 1 THROUGH 3

If the Genesis creation narratives were written by Moses (fifteenth century BC), as assumed in this study,<sup>12</sup> and if Psalm 104 was written by David (tenth century BC), as argued above, then Psalm 104 is clearly dependent upon Genesis 1 through 3 and not vice versa. There is general consensus, even among critical scholars who do not accept the Mosaic authorship of Genesis 1 through 3 nor the Davidic authorship of Psalm 104, that Psalm 104 "is a poetic retelling of the Genesis story, and it therefore falls under the rubric of 'inner biblical interpretation.'"<sup>13</sup> There is wide recognition among

10. *SDABC* 3:863. Cf. Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 70: "Ps. 104 . . . must be reckoned as poetry of the highest level."

11. William P. Brown, "The Lion, the Wicked, and the Wonder of it All: Psalm 104 and the Playful God," *Journal for Preachers* 29, no. 3 (2006): 15.

12. For support for the Mosaic authorship of Genesis, see, for example, Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1991); R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1969), 495–541; Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1985); Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Chicago: InterVarsity, 1968), 112–35; John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 1–79; and Herbert M. Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 51–78.

13. Adele Berlin, "The Wisdom of Creation in Psalm 104," in *Seeking out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Ronald L. Troxel et al. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 75. For the foundational critical studies of the relationship between Genesis 1 and Psalm 104, which

Old Testament scholars that Psalm 104 not only interprets the Genesis creation accounts but also follows the same basic order as the days of creation in Genesis 1. So, for example, Walter Zorn writes, “A summary of the creation account is contained in the psalm, similar to the record in Genesis chapter one. . . . Following the order of creation as given in Genesis, he [the psalmist] shows how God, in successive stages, was preparing for the welfare and comfort of his creatures.”<sup>14</sup> W. T. Purkiser comments: “The major section of the psalm is given to present the magnificence of the creative acts described in Genesis 1. The order of topics follows that of the original creation account, beginning with light and concluding with man.”<sup>15</sup> Derek Kidner likewise argues that “the structure of the psalm is modeled fairly closely on that of Genesis 1, taking the stages of creation as starting-points for praise.”<sup>16</sup> Other similar statements could be multiplied.<sup>17</sup>

---

conclude that Psalm 104 is directly dependent upon Genesis 1, see especially, Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 453: “The psalmist thus has the narrative material [Erzählungsstoff] of Gen. 1 before his eyes” (trans. in Parrish, “Psalm 104,” 191); Paul Humbert, “La relation de Genèse 1 et du Psaume 104 avec la liturgie du Nouvel-An israélite,” *RHPR* 15 (1935): 1–27 (see his conclusion on p. 20: “There is an incontestable dependence of this psalm [i.e., 104] in relation to Gen. 1” [trans. in Parrish, “Psalm 104,” 391–92]); and A. van der Voort, “Genèse 1:1 à 2:4a et le Psaume 104,” *RB* 58 (1951): 321–47. For further bibliography, see Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, WBC, 21 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), 23, 24.

14. Walter D. Zorn, *Psalms*, vol. 2, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 2004), 264, 266.

15. W. T. Purkiser, “Psalms,” in *Beacon Bible Commentary*, vol. 3 (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill, 1967), 356.

16. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, TOTC (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1975), 368. Kidner nuances his analysis with the following observation: “But as each theme is developed it tends to anticipate the later scenes of the creation drama, so that the days described in Genesis overlap and mingle here.” More than noting with a general statement the linkages between Genesis 1 and Psalm 104, Kidner points out the linkages in his comments on specific verses and also provides the following helpful summary of the correspondences between the two creation accounts:

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Day 1 (Gn. 1:3–5)   | light; Psalm 104:2a                                     |
| Day 2 (Gn. 1:6–8)   | the “firmament” divides the waters; 104:2b–4            |
| Day 3 (Gn. 1:9, 10) | land and water distinct; 104:5–9 (+10–13?)              |
| “ ” (Gn. 1:11–13)   | vegetation and trees; 104:14–17 (+18?)                  |
| Day 4 (Gn. 1:14–19) | luminaries as timekeepers; 104:19–23 (+24)              |
| Day 5 (Gn. 1:20–23) | creatures of sea and air; 104:25, 26 (sea only)         |
| Day 6 (Gn. 1:24–28) | animals and man (anticipated in 104:21–24)              |
| “ ” (Gn. 1:29–31)   | food appointed for all creatures; 104:27, 28 (+29, 30). |

17. See, for example, Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *EBC*, vol. 5, 657: “The poetic version of Creation [in Psalm 104] is complementary to the prosaic of Genesis 1.” Again, H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1969), 722: “What is its relation to the creation account found in Gen. 1? This psalm is not based directly on this Scripture passage, but it does show familiarity with it and may well be regarded as a free treatment of the known facts of creation with particular attention to various other factors that the concise account of Gen. 1 could not have brought into the picture.” Throughout

Franz Delitzsch classifies this psalm as the “Hymn in Honour of the God of the Seven Days.”<sup>18</sup> He then summarizes its contents: “The Psalm is altogether an echo of the heptahemerion (or history of the seven days of creation) in Gen. i.1–ii.3. Corresponding to the seven days it falls into seven groups. . . . [I]t begins with the light and closes with an allusion to the divine Sabbath.”<sup>19</sup>

Jacques B. Doukhan’s dissertation on the literary structure of the Genesis creation story contains a penetrating analysis of the literary structure of Psalm 104 and its parallels with the Genesis creation accounts.<sup>20</sup> Doukhan’s delineation of the seven days of creation week as portrayed in Psalm 104 builds upon both thematic and terminological correspondences. Thematically, the following outline emerges:<sup>21</sup>

---

his commentary on the psalm, Leupold refers to the days of creation in Genesis 1. He points out that verse 2a “parallels the work of the first day of creation” (724) and verses 2b through 4 constitute “a reference to the work of the second day of creation” (724). He continues: “On the third day of God’s great creative work dry land and water were separated. This aspect of creation is now under consideration (vv. 5–9)” (725). Regarding verses 13 through 18, he writes, “The work of the second half of the third day of creation interests the writer chiefly in this section, except that he combines with it the thought of the living beings that come into existence on the sixth day inasmuch as vegetation is the primary article of diet of these beings. So the sixth day gets only incidental attention” (727). Regarding verses 19 through 23, Leupold comments, “In the pattern that the writer is following we have arrived at the fourth day’s work of creation, the work of providing the heavenly bodies in their various functions” (728). The description of verses 24 through 36 is seen as “a part of the work of the fifth day when the birds of the heaven and fish of the sea were brought into being” (729). Some critical scholars acknowledge the parallels between Psalm 104 and Genesis 1:1–2:4; but based upon their critical presuppositions of dating both passages to late in the preexilic Israelite history (or even after), they do not see the psalmist as directly dependent upon Genesis 1, but rather argue that “both passages reflect the liturgical practice of the Jerusalem Temple.” See Bernhard W. Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism in the Bible* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1987), 91–93. Anderson shows how Psalm 104:1–4 is based upon Genesis 1:6–8, verses 5–9 on Genesis 1:9–10, verses 10–13 on Genesis 1:6–10, verses 14–18 on Genesis 1:11–12, verses 19–23 on Genesis 1:14–18, verses 24–26 on Genesis 1:20–22, and verses 27–30 on Genesis 1:24–30. Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 718, writes: “Minor differences aside, the order of the creative acts in the psalm is clearly that of the Genesis Yahwist myth. The date of both documents seems to be approximately the same.”

18. Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, n.d.), 125.

19. *Ibid.*, 127, 28. Like Kidner, Delitzsch clarifies that the psalm does not rigidly treat each day of creation in each successive section: “It is not, however, so worked out that each single group celebrates the work of a day of creation; the Psalm has the commingling whole of the finished creation as its standpoint, and is therefore not so conformed to any plan.”

20. Jacques B. Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story: Its Literary Structure*, AUSDDS, 5 (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1978), 84–87.

21. Quoted (with footnotes) in Doukhan, *Genesis Creation Story*, 84, 85.

*Day One:* motif of Light (Ps. 104:2a)

*Day Two:* creation of Firmament, reference to the waters above (Ps. 104:2b–4)

*Day Three:* appearance of the ground: formation of the earth plants (Ps. 104:5–18)

*Day Four:* luminaries to indicate seasons and time (Ps. 104:19–23)

*Day Five:* first mention of animals in terms of creatures;<sup>22</sup> allusion to birds;<sup>23</sup> and reference to the sea and living beings in it (Ps. 104:24–26)

*Day Six:* food for animals and humankind; gift of life by God for animals and humankind<sup>24</sup> (Ps. 104:27–30)

*Day Seven:* glory of God;<sup>25</sup> allusion to the revelation on Sinai<sup>26</sup> (Ps. 104:31, 32).<sup>27</sup>

Doukhan shows that there are also thematic connections between Psalm 104 (in the sections dealing with humankind) and the second Genesis creation account (Gen. 2:4b–25). Terminologically, Doukhan points out how each of the seven sections of Psalm 104 shares significant, common wording with the corresponding section of the Genesis creation narrative (Gen. 1:1–2:4a).<sup>28</sup>

In his article on creation in the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, William Shea examines the correspondences between the creation week of Genesis 1:1–2:4a and Psalm 104<sup>29</sup> and presents an outline similar to that of Doukhan and others. Shea points out

22. Up to now, the animals are mentioned merely in connection with the creation of the earth (as inhabitants) and the creation of the luminaries (as their indications of daily life); only from day five on are the animals concerned as created.

23. The word קנין, which means “properties or riches,” echoes the word תבנית of verse 17 (“to make the nest”) and may therefore, by means of the alliteration, refer to the idea the former word conveys. This is a common practice in Hebrew poetry.

24. Humankind is implied here in the reference back to the ships of verse 26.

25. The concept of *kābôd* belongs especially in the Psalms to the imagery of God as King of the earth, i.e., its Creator (see Ps. 145:11; 29:2, 3). On the other hand, this concept is clearly associated with the theophany on Sinai (see Exod. 24:16, 17).

26. See Exodus 19:18. The Israelites did not know volcanoes (see Calès, p. 270). This reference to Sinai in direct association with the very concern of creation points to the Sabbath.

27. I would only add to Doukhan’s structure that verses 33 through 35 also seem to belong to the seventh day, revealing the nature of worship called for on the Sabbath. See below for further discussion.

28. See Doukhan, *Genesis Creation Story*, 86.

29. William H. Shea, “Creation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series, 12, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), 430, 31.

that Psalm 104, in following the order of events of the six days of creation, often “utilizes an anticipation of what would come about from those days; it looks forward to their potential, their function, and their benefit.”<sup>30</sup>

Delitzsch expresses it the other way around, stressing the psalmist’s focus upon the present condition of the world: “The poet sings the God-ordained present condition of the world with respect to the creative beginnings recorded in Gen i.1–ii. 3.”<sup>31</sup> In light of the use of the word *bārā*’, “create,” in Psalm 104:30 with regard to God’s continued preservation of His creation, it is not inappropriate to speak of Psalm 104 as describing both the original creation (*creatio prima*) and the preservation of creation (*creatio continua*) by YHWH, the sovereign Creator. Thus, the poetic depiction of the events of creation includes not only completed action (indicated in Hebrew by the perfect inflection of the verb and/or the [past] participle) but also ongoing action (indicated in Hebrew by the imperfect inflection and/or the [present] participle). The psalmist presents the creation account in dialogue with real life in the here and now. Our primary focus in what follows will be upon insights concerning ultimate origins (and not *creatio continua*) that emerge from this psalm. It is assumed that the psalmist not only penetrates the meaning of the Genesis creation narratives he interprets, but as a poet inspired by the Spirit,<sup>32</sup> he is also capable of supplying new insights into issues of origins that may not be found explicit, or at all, in the Genesis creation accounts.

## PSALM 104 AND ISSUES OF ORIGINS

### DAY ONE (VV. 1–2A)

In the first section of Psalm 104 (following the introductory “Bless the LORD, O my soul”), verses 1 to 2a, the psalmist praises God utilizing the motif of light found in the first day of creation week (Gen. 1:3–5): “O LORD my God, You are very great; You are clothed

30. Shea, “Creation,” 430.

31. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3, 127.

32. A high view of Scripture assumes this of all the writers of the psalms (as well as the other books of Scripture), but if the composer of Psalm 104 is David (as suggested above), then it must be noted that David explicitly claims inspiration by the Spirit in 2 Samuel 23:2: “The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.”

with splendor and majesty, covering Yourself with light as with a cloak.” Whereas in Genesis 1:3, God says, “Let there be light,” Psalm 104 gives more detail regarding that light. Shea points out how this statement in Psalm 104:1–2a solves an unanswered question arising from the Genesis creation account regarding the source of light in creation before the appearance of the sun and moon on the fourth day: “From His radiant glory the light of Creation issues. Psalm 104 provides an answer to the long-standing question about the source of the light on the first day of Creation: The light that surrounded the person of God provided light for the earth.”<sup>33</sup> As God Himself provides the light on the first day, He makes a theological statement that creation is ultimately not anthropocentric (human centered) or heliocentric (centered in the sun) but theocentric (centered in God).<sup>34</sup> The God-centered nature of creation is a dominant theme throughout the entire psalm.

#### DAY TWO (VV. 2B–4)

Psalm 104:2b–4 describes the creation of the firmament, with focus upon the waters above (separated from the waters below, described in the next section), corresponding to the second day of creation week (Gen. 1:6–8). Utilizing poetic similes and metaphors and a string of active participles, the psalmist depicts YHWH as the One Who is “stretching out [the atmospheric]<sup>35</sup> heavens like a curtain, laying the beams of His upper chambers in the waters, making the clouds His chariot, walking upon the wings of the wind, making the winds His messengers, flaming fire, His

33. Shea, “Creation,” 430. Regarding the separation of light and darkness on the first three days of creation, I note the parallel with the Exodus experience of Israel at the Red Sea (Exod. 14:19, 20), where the pillar of cloud or fire of God’s presence served to separate between darkness (for the Egyptians) and light (for Israel).

34. These verses also indirectly speak to the nature of Adam and Eve’s clothing in the garden. Genesis 2:25 states that they were “naked,” a word which in Hebrew does not mean totally naked (as the word for “naked” used in Gen. 3), but “not clothed in the normal manner [from the perspective of after the Fall].” Genesis 1:26 states that humans were created both in God’s “image” [*selem*] and after his “likeness” [*dēmût*], expressions which together indicate that they were like God both in outward appearance and inward character. If God’s outward appearance was to be clothed with garments of light and glory, as stated in Psalm 104:1–2, then it is not unreasonable to infer that Adam and Eve were similarly clothed. For further discussion, see Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 55–57.

35. That God was stretching out atmospheric heavens and not a solid dome, as often argued by scholars, has been demonstrated by Randall W. Younker and Richard M. Davidson, “The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome: Another Look at the Hebrew Term *rāqia’*,” *AUSS* 49 (2011): 125–47.

ministers.”<sup>36</sup> By repeated use of active participles in verses 1 through 4, the author places emphasis upon the Doer (“the one who”) and not so much the deeds. The phraseology of “stretching out the heavens like a curtain” highlights the ease with which God creates (in contrast to the other ancient Near Eastern accounts of creation by struggle and conflict).<sup>37</sup> It also gives further support to the conclusion that the Hebrew word *rāqîaʿ* (usually translated “firmament”) in Genesis 1 does not refer to a solid dome, as many modern scholars have asserted.<sup>38</sup>

The language of this section, as well as other portions of the psalm, have been seen by some scholars to parallel the portrayals of the Canaanite storm god, Baal, the “Rider of the Clouds,” in Ugaritic literature.<sup>39</sup> If such parallelism exists and if the psalmist consciously employs language from Ugaritic poetry (as seems probable for such psalms as Psalm 29),<sup>40</sup> the motivation of the psalmist is not only to employ vivid poetic imagery to describe YHWH but also to insist polemically that it is YHWH, not Baal, Who is the true “Rider of the Clouds” and the One Who controls the elements of nature, including the atmosphere and the storms.

### DAY THREE (VV. 5–18)

Psalm 104 verses 5–18 correspond to the third day of creation week (Gen. 1:9–18), which involved the gathering of the waters under heaven within divinely ordained boundaries, the appearing of the dry ground, and the formation of vegetation on the earth. Verses 5 and 6a switch to the perfect inflection (completed action, which

36. Translation mine, to reflect the series of participles in this passage. In light of the usage of the Hebrew word *rûaḥ* in verse 3 clearly to refer to “wind,” it seems preferable to view the plural *rûaḥôt* in the next verse to “winds” as messengers (as in most modern versions) and not to angels as “spirits” (as in the KJV, NKJV, and LXX), although the latter interpretation cannot be ruled out.

37. For the significance of this statement in Scripture (from a critical perspective), see, for example, Norman C. Habel, “He Who Stretches Out the Heavens,” *CBQ* 34 (1972): 417–30.

38. See Younker and Davidson, “The Myth of the Solid Dome.”

39. See especially, Dion, “YHWH as Storm-god,” 48–58, for parallels between Canaanite storm-god imagery and language of Psalm 104. Dion points to two main “mythological ingredients,” namely, “the image of YHWH’s watery upper chambers in heaven (v. 3)” and “YHWH’s manifestation or epiphany in the storm, using the clouds as a chariot, and taking winds and flashes of lightning into his service.” See also Craigie, “The Comparison of Hebrew Poetry,” 10–21; and John Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 28–34.

40. For discussion and bibliography on the connection between Psalm 29 and Ugaritic poetry, see, for example, Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, WBC, 19 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), 241–46.

may be taken here in the sense of perfect tense) and set the background for the events of day three by referring to the origin of the *tohû wābōhû* (“unformed-unfilled”) state of the earth described in Genesis 1:1, 2 (prior to the events of the first day): “He [has] established [Qal pf. of *yāsad*] the earth upon its foundations, So that it will not totter forever and ever. You [have] covered [Piel pf. of *kāsā*] it with the deep as with a garment.” As the Master Builder, God has established the earth and its foundations with such permanence that “it will not totter [Niphal impf. of *môt*] forever and ever [*‘ôlām wā‘ed*].” The identical word “deep” (Heb. *tēhôm*) in verse 6a is found in Genesis 1:2: “And darkness was over the surface of the deep [*tēhôm*].” The fact that the deep here is compared to a piece of clothing comports with the unmythologized understanding of the term in Genesis 1 (contrary to a common interpretation, which suggests that in Gen. 1 the term alludes to the ANE chaos monster Tiamat and implies the same struggle as in other ANE creation stories).<sup>41</sup>

Verses 6b–9 then vividly and elaborately describe the divine command and activity in causing dry land to appear, which in Genesis 1:9 is depicted by a single brush stroke: “Then God said, ‘Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear’; and it was so.” In the poetic elaboration of the divine fiat and action, the verbal tenses, though describing past time, shift to the imperfect inflection to heighten vividness by a sense of immediacy:<sup>42</sup>

The waters stood [lit. “were standing”] above the mountains. They fled at Your blast, rushed away at the sound of Your thunder,— mountains rising, valleys sinking—to the place You established for them. You set bounds they must not pass so that they never again cover the earth. (NJPS)

Although the waters of the deep in Psalm 104 are not mythologized as a chaos monster with whom YHWH must struggle, nonetheless

41. See Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Fountains of the Great Deep,” *Origins* 1 (1974): 67–72. For discussion (with bibliography) of the ancient Near East *Chaoskampf* between the storm-god and the sea monster and its possible parallels in Psalm 104, see, for example, Dion, “YHWH as Storm-god,” 53–55.

42. Patrick Miller points out that “The perfect and imperfect tenses that dominate this section of the psalm are probably all to be understood as referring to past events in creation. The parallelism of *qtl* and *yqtl* forms in v. 6 and the return to the *qtl* at the end of this section in v. 9 suggest a past tense translation of the *yqtl* verbs, *contra* NRSV.” Patrick D. Miller Jr., “The Poetry of Creation: Psalm 104,” in *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner*, ed. William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride Jr. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 90.

there is a hint of the tremendous power behind their waves as they envelop the earth. Though not constituting chaos,<sup>43</sup> the power of the deep in its *tohû wābōhû* state displays properties of “what might potentially be chaos,”<sup>44</sup> and God’s command described by the neutral verb “said” in Genesis 1:9 is intensified in Psalm 104 to a divine “rebuke” (*gě’ārâ*) of the waters. In response to the divine rebuke the waters “fled” (*nûs*), or “hurried away” (*hāpaz*). Such language may actually constitute a polemic against Canaanite mythology of the *Chaoskampf*, affirming that YHWH, unlike the storm god in the Canaanite combat myth, did not have to struggle to subdue the sea; the sea obeyed his voice!

Psalm 104 also provides details about earth’s topography as it came forth from the Creator’s hands: there were mountains! According to verse 6, mountains existed under the surface of the watery deep, even in the unformed-unfilled condition of the earth described in Genesis 1:2. According to verses 7 to 8, dry land appeared as a result of new activity of mountain uplift and valley depression: “They [the waters] fled at Your blast, rushed away at the sound of Your thunder,—mountains rising, valleys sinking—to the place You established for them” (NJPS).<sup>45</sup> What may be inferred

43. I deliberately avoid using the term “chaos” to describe the condition of the planet before creation week. The terms *tohû* and *bōhû* in Genesis 1:2 do not imply a chaotic, unorganized state, as many have claimed but rather a state of “unproductiveness and emptiness.” See David Toshio Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation*, JSOTSup, 83 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1989), 155, 56.

44. Miller, “Psalm 104,” 90.

45. Some modern versions, such as the KJV, NKJV, NRSV, and NIV, translate the Hebrew expression to mean that the waters went over the existing mountains, and down into the valleys and not that mountains rose and valleys sank (e.g., NIV: “they [the waters] flowed over the mountains, they went down into the valleys”), taking the grammatical construction to be accusatives of place after verbs of motion (see *GKC*, para. 118d–f); but the translation taking this clause as an explanatory parenthetical line, following the normal Hebrew word order of verb, followed by subject is to be preferred: “mountains rising, valleys sinking” (NJPS) or “the mountains rose; the valleys sank down” (NASB; cf. ESV, JPS, NLT, RSV). This is supported by the context, since according to verse 6 the waters already were standing above the mountains. The alternative translation “depends upon . . . imagery that violates the natural order of things (waters moving up and down mountains).” See David G. Barker, “The Waters of the Earth: An Exegetical Study of Psalm 104:1–9,” *GJJ* 7 (1986): 78. Support for this translation is also found in the poetic meter of the passage: all the surrounding verses of this stanza of Psalm 104 may be scanned as 3:3 meter, but this one verse (v. 8) is to be scanned as 4:4, thus indicating that it is set apart from the other verses, which describe the action of the water. Even more striking evidence is found in the orthography of verses 7 through 9: in verses 7 and 9, where the subject of the verbs is clearly the waters, these verbs (all in the imperfect 3mp) consistently (all three times) add the paragogic nun (probably for “marked emphasis,” *GKC*, para. 47m), even when the verb is not in the pausal position (v. 9); but in verse 8, the verbs (also in imperfect 3mp) do not add the paragogic nun, thus implying a subject different from the waters, namely, the mountains and valleys respectively. That

from Genesis 2—four rivers coming from a common source flow in four different directions imply that they must begin from an elevated place like a mountain—is made explicit in Psalm 104:8. Leupold graphically sets forth the implications of this verse: “We can scarcely conceive the stupendous upheavals and readjustments that took place at that time and on so vast a scale. But none of this movement was left to blind chance. . . . Everything was continually under perfect divine control.”<sup>46</sup>

This section of Psalm 104, when viewed in the context of what precedes and what follows, has primary reference to the third day of creation and not to the Genesis flood. Other biblical references associate creation with the formation of mountains (Prov. 8:25, 26; Ps. 90:2). The phrase stating that the waters “will not return to cover the earth” should probably also be interpreted as primarily referring to creation, inasmuch as other clear references to creation have parallel language of God setting boundaries for the sea (Prov. 8:29; Job 38:10, 11).<sup>47</sup> But since the psalm was written after the worldwide flood recorded in Genesis 6 through 9 (when creation was reversed back to its unformed-unfilled state as at the beginning of the third day of creation), the psalmist may also allude to the Genesis flood in

---

the word for “valleys” (*bēqā’ôṭ*) is feminine plural and the verb *yārad* (of which it is the subject) is parsed as imperfect masculine plural does not present a problem; in Hebrew, it is not unusual for a feminine plural to be matched with a masculine plural verb when the verb is in the imperfect third person, since in the Hebrew language there is a “dislike of using the 3rd plur. fem. imperf.” (*GKC*, para. 145p). See Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3, 130, 31, for further evidence that verse 8a “is a parenthesis which affirms that, inasmuch as the waters retreating laid the solid land bare, mountains and valleys as such came forth visibly” (*ibid*). For an earlier overview of various positions on this text (most of which are still represented in more recent studies), see Edmund F. Sutcliffe, “A Note on Psalm XIV 8,” *VT* 2 (1952): 177–79.

46. Leupold, *Exposition of Psalms*, 726.

47. I agree with Paul Seely in rejecting the view of those within creation science who take these verses as referring primarily to the Flood and not creation week. See Paul H. Seely, “Creation Science Takes Psalm 104:6–9 Out of Context,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 51, no. 3 (September 1999): 170–74. I disagree, however, with Seely (170) in his contention that Noah’s flood is not alluded to at all in Psalm 104 and in his insistence that the flood was not a global event. For biblical evidence in support of a global flood, see my studies, “Biblical Evidence for the Universality of the Genesis Flood,” *Origins* 22, no. 2 (1995): 58–73; *id.*, “Biblical Evidence for the Universality of the Genesis Flood,” in *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary: Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement*, ed. John Templeton Baldwin (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), 79–92; and *id.*, “The Genesis Flood Narrative: Crucial Issues in the Current Debate,” *AUSS* 42 (2004): 49–77. The question arises how the psalmist can refer to creation in his statement that the sea would no more cover the earth, when the waters, in fact, did cover the earth at the Flood. In reply to this question, Seely (172) points out that “v. 9b is a rhetorical statement made for the purpose of emphasizing God’s power and sustaining control over nature as he keeps the sea from engulfing the land. (Cf. Jer 5:22 where the point of mentioning God’s setting a boundary for the sea is to obtain respect for God.)”

his assurance that the waters “will not return to cover the earth,” in parallel with the clear reference to the Flood in Isaiah 54:9.<sup>48</sup>

Miller perceptively notes that in the psalmist’s description of verses 5 through 9, “The creation of the earth thus occurs in two stages, both of which are the Lord’s doing: the covering of earth with the deep and the movement of these waters to places where they may function in a constructive way” (see vv. 10–13).<sup>49</sup> This may provide further support for a two-stage creation being described in Genesis 1, with the creation of earth in its unformed-unfilled water-covered state occurring “in the beginning” before creation week (Gen. 1:1, 2) and the causing of dry land to appear, occurring on day three of creation (vv. 9, 10). Elsewhere there is evidence of this two-stage creation within Genesis 1 and other Old Testament creation passages, such as Proverbs 8.<sup>50</sup>

The poetic interpretation of the third day of creation week places special emphasis upon the water involved in God’s creative activity, including not only the primordial deep (*těhôm*) that existed prior to creation week (Gen. 1:1–3) and the gathering of the water together within boundaries so that dry land might appear on day three proper (vv. 9, 10), but also the water that God employs to moisten the earth in His continuing preservation of His creation. Verses 10 to 12 describe the water in the form of springs, which God continually “sends forth” (Piel participle of *šālah*, v. 12) to “give drink to every beast of the field” (v. 11) and provide habitat for “the birds of the heavens” (v. 12).

Verse 13 depicts the rain water from “His upper chambers” by which God is “watering [Hiphil participle of *šāqā*] the mountains.”<sup>51</sup> The reference to rain does not imply that rain was created during creation week—the Genesis creation account specifically precludes this (Gen. 2:5, 6). Rather, the verses of this section of Psalm 104 describe God’s *creatio continua* (preservation of the world or

48. For support of the view that, in these verses, there is reference both to creation and the Flood, see, for example, Walter Harrelson, “On God’s Care for the Earth: Psalm 104,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 2, no. 1 (February 1975): 19; and Dieter Schneider, *Das Buch der Psalmen*, vol. 3 (Wuppertal, Germany: R. Brockhaus Verlag, 1997), 30, 31, 34, 35. This is contra both Barker, “The Waters of the Earth,” 57–80, who interprets verses 5 through 9 as referring exclusively to the Flood, and Seely, “Creation Science,” passim, who refuses to see any allusion to the Flood in this passage.

49. Miller, “Psalm 104,” 91, notes that references to “earth” (*’ereṣ*) in verses 5 and 9 form an *inclusio* (envelope construction) around this section.

50. Richard M. Davidson, “The Biblical Account of Origins,” *JATS* 14, no. 1 (2003): 21–25.

51. Translation mine to show the participial force of the original Hebrew.

providence) after the *creatio prima* of creation week (and the rain that came at the time of the flood and after) for the purpose of satisfying the needs of His creatures: “The earth is satisfied [*šāba*] with the fruit of His works” (v. 13).<sup>52</sup>

These verses may, like previous ones in the psalm, also contain an implicit polemic against central tenets of Canaanite religion. The Hebrew poet insists that it was YHWH Who freely and graciously provided the water necessary for the earth’s fertility, without need for humans to arouse and stimulate Him by means of sexual orgies on the high places as in the pagan fertility cults.<sup>53</sup>

Verses 14 through 17 move to a description of vegetation that was created on the third day of creation week. Verse 14 describes the two main kinds of vegetation created by God: “The grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation [*ēšeb*] for the labor of man, so that he may bring forth food from the earth.” This harks back not only to the description of God’s creation of vegetation on the third day in Genesis 1:11, 12 but also alludes to the vegetarian diet provided for the land creatures that were created on the sixth day (Gen. 1:29, 30): “every green plant” for the nonhuman species (v. 30) and “every plant [*ēšeb*] yielding seed . . . and every tree which has fruit yielding seed” for humans (v. 29). The post-Fall benefit of God’s creation of vegetation for humans is displayed as the psalmist refers to the delicacies of wine, oil, and bread, which strengthen and gladden the heart of man (vv. 14, 15). There are three evidences of God’s bountiful provision for human needs. In these verses, the psalmist emphasizes what was already implicit in Genesis 1, namely the purposefulness of God’s creative activity in providing for and bringing joy (*šāmaḥ*, v. 15) to His creatures.

Verses 16 and 17 turn from the edible vegetation to the majestic “trees of the LORD.” God’s care for the trees is underscored as they “drink their fill” (*šābaʿ*, “become satisfied”), and these mighty trees,

52. On this passage, see especially, Th. Booij, “Psalm 104,13b: ‘The Earth Is Satisfied with the Fruit of Thy Works,’” *Bib* 70 (1989): 409–12. Booij (411) paraphrases verse 13b: “The earth and all creatures upon it are satisfied with the things prepared through thy works.” He then summarizes what he sees as the implications of this verse and the context of verses 10 through 18: “As a result of YHWH’s acting, the earth receives all it needs: the soil is drenched . . . , animals may quench their thirst, the trees (dwelling-place of birds) are watered, the cattle have a grassy meadow, man has bread, wine and oil for celebrating life. V. 13b is a summary, a conclusion from what precedes . . . , preparing further description: ‘The earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works!’”

53. For discussion of Canaanite fertility cult theology, see Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 92–97.

including the cedars of Lebanon and the fir trees, in turn, demonstrate purposefulness in providing habitat for the birds. Verse 18 concludes this section with one more look at the majestic high mountains and cliffs, again underscoring the purposefulness of their creation: the mountains are “for the wild goats,” the cliffs are “a refuge for the *shephanim* [coney or rock badgers].” Walter Harrelson summarizes this divine purposefulness for the creatures described in this section of the psalm:

God made fir trees for the storks to nest in, and he made storks to nest in the fir trees. He made high, inaccessible mountains for the wild goats to run and jump upon, and he made wild goats to do the jumping and cavorting. He created the vast expanse of rock-covered earth in eastern Jordan for rock badgers to live and play in, and he created rock badgers for the rocks. Storks and goats and rock badgers do not serve mankind. They do what is appropriate to them, and God provided a place that is itself fulfilling its function when it ministers to the needs of its special creatures.<sup>54</sup>

#### DAY FOUR (VV. 19–23)

The next section of Psalm 104, verses 19 through 23, provides a poetic interpretation of the fourth day of creation week as described in Genesis 1:14–19. The psalmist does not feel the need that Moses did in Genesis 1 to use the circumlocution “greater light” for the term “sun” (Heb. *šemeš*) and “lesser light” for the term “moon” (Heb. *yārēah*); apparently, he was not worried that he might be misunderstood to describe deities when he gave the actual names for the celestial bodies (Ps. 104:19). The psalmist also does not follow the order in which the celestial bodies are presented in Genesis 1. Instead, he first refers to the moon and then the sun: “He made the moon for the seasons; the sun knows the place of its setting” (v. 19). In the verses that follow, it is the night that is first described (vv. 20, 21), followed by the day (v. 22). This seems to be the poet’s way of highlighting the evening-morning sequence of the days in creation, without explicitly stating as much.<sup>55</sup>

---

54. Harrelson, “On God’s Care for the Earth,” 20.

55. See Leupold, *Exposition of Psalms*, 728: “The beginning is made with the moon, perhaps because the Hebrew day began with the evening.” Similar also, Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3, 134: “The moon is mentioned first of all, because the poet wishes to make the picture of the day follow that of the night.”

As in Genesis 1:14, for the psalmist, the moon exists for the purpose of marking *mô'ădîm*, “seasons” (v. 19). But beyond this purpose, the night, over which the moon rules, is purposeful in the post-Fall condition of the world to provide time for animals to prowl and seek their food: “You appoint darkness and it becomes night, in which all the beasts of the forest prowl about. The young lions roar after their prey and seek their food from God” (vv. 20, 21). The night is for the animals, but the day is for the purpose of providing time for humans to labor: “When the sun rises they [the animals] withdraw and lie down in their dens. Man goes forth to his work and to his labor until evening” (vv. 22, 23). The reference to human “labor” (*‘abôdâ*, from the verb *‘abad*) may hark back to the description of human labor (*‘abad*) in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15) and, particularly, to the depiction of human labor outside the garden (3:23), showing that the psalmist was providing a poetic interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3 as well as Genesis 1.

Although the composer of Psalm 104 is selective in his use of materials from the Genesis creation accounts, it does not appear accidental or arbitrary that he omits any reference to the stars when dealing with the creation on the fourth day. As has been pointed out elsewhere,<sup>56</sup> the grammatical structure of Genesis 1:16 implies that the stars were not created on the fourth day but already existed before the commencement of creation week. By not mentioning the stars in this section of the psalm, the poet seems to lend further support to that conclusion.

### DAY FIVE (VV. 24–26)

As will be pointed out below, this psalm not only follows the sequence of the days of creation but also reveals a chiasmic symmetry among these days. The central verse of that chiasm is verse 24, in which the psalmist exuberantly extols YHWH for His works of creation: “O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; the earth is full of Your possessions.” This verse looks both backward and forward in the psalm (note the word “works,” which harks back to Ps. 104:13 and forward to v. 31) and may be seen as a transition between day four and day five. It links YHWH’s creation with wisdom; in a later-inspired creation poem

---

56. Davidson, “Biblical Account of Origins,” 38.

(Prov. 8), this Wisdom will be set forth as a hypostasis for the divine Son of God, the pre-existent Christ.<sup>57</sup> The Hebrew expression *qinyānekā*, translated by the New American Standard Bible and some other versions as “Your possessions,” in the context of this psalm should probably be rendered “your creatures”<sup>58</sup> (i.e., the ones created)—or better, “your creations”<sup>59</sup>—again, highlighting the dominant creation theme of the psalm.<sup>60</sup>

While verse 24 is the central verse in the psalm, pointing both backward and forward, at the same time it has language that may be linked specifically to day five of creation (and beyond). As Doukhan points out: “Up to now the animals are mentioned merely in connection with the creation of the earth (as inhabitants) and the creation of the luminaries (as their indications of daily life); only from day five on, are the animals concerned as created.”<sup>61</sup>

Psalm 104 verses 24–26 focus on the fifth day of creation week in Genesis 1, during which God made the birds of the air and the inhabitants of the sea (Gen. 1:20–23). The creation of the birds is not explicitly mentioned in this section, perhaps because they have already been referred to (twice) in connection with the description of the purpose of the vegetation of the third day (Ps. 104:12, 17). However, there is probably a subtle allusion to the birds in the intertextual echo between the rare Hebrew term *qinyān* (“possessions, creature, creation”) in verse 24 and a similar-sounding, rare Hebrew term *qānān* (“to make a nest”) in verse 17.<sup>62</sup> This echoing allows the psalmist in verse 24 “by means of the alliteration, [to] refer to the idea the former word conveys. This is common practice in Hebrew poetry.”<sup>63</sup> Without actually mentioning the birds in verse 24, the psalmist is able to allude to them (and their building of nests) by means of the alliterative echo between verse 17 and verse 24.

57. See Richard M. Davidson, “Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity,” *JATS* 17, no. 1 (2006): 33–54.

58. As represented by, for example, ESV, NAB, NIV, NJB, NLT, NRSV, AND RSV.

59. As translated in NJPS.

60. See also Genesis 14:19, 22, where the verb *qānā*, from which the noun *qinyān* in Psalm 104 derives, is better translated “Maker or Creator of heaven and earth” (as in RSV, NRSV, NIV, NJPS, NLT) rather than “Possessor of heaven and earth” (NASB, KJV, NKJV).

61. Doukhan, *Genesis Creation Story*, 85.

62. The noun *qinyān* appears only twice in the Psalms (here and in the next psalm, 105:21). The piel form of the verb *qānān* appears only here in the book of Psalms.

63. Doukhan, *Genesis Creation Story*, 85.

The main emphasis of this section is upon the creatures of the sea. Verse 25 provides an overview: “There is the sea, great and broad, in which are swarms without number, animals both small and great.” The poetic representation in this verse is short, but paucity of poetic lines is offset by their length. Verse 25 constitutes the longest metrical line of the psalm, the only one that may be scanned with the unusually long metrical count of 4:4:3.

Along with the fish comes the somewhat surprising mention of ships, human-made vessels, in contrast with the works of God: “There the ships move along” (v. 26a). However, the mention of ships is not so surprising when one realizes that the focus of this section is upon the things that move along “there” (*šām*, repeated in vv. 25, 26), that is, in the sea. The psalmist, describing the ongoing benefits of creation week, does not hesitate to fill in the picture of the teeming life in the sea by noting the movement of the ships.<sup>64</sup>

In the next breath, the psalmist describes the sea creature Leviathan (v. 26b). Although elsewhere in Scripture Leviathan is described in terms that are likely redeployed from ancient Near East mythology—as a rebellious sea monster that has to be conquered and destroyed by God (see Ps. 74:14; Isa. 27:1)<sup>65</sup>—in this psalm Leviathan is depicted as one of the giant sea creatures, which God “formed to sport in it [the sea]” (Ps. 104:26b).<sup>66</sup> This is reminiscent of the picture of Leviathan found in Job 41. It is a creature “formed” (*yāšar*) by God. In Genesis 2:7, 19, we learn that God “formed” (*yāšar*) Adam, the large land animals (“beasts of the field”), and the birds. Now, from Psalm 104:26, we learn that at least one of the sea creatures was also “formed” (*yāšar*) by God. Furthermore, this verse tells us the purpose of God’s creating Leviathan, namely “to sport/play [*šāḥaq*]” in the sea! Here, we have allusion to a theology of divine play,<sup>67</sup> which is further elaborated

64. Some have suggested that the reference to ships is actually to *fishing* vessels, and thus, the allusion here is to the fish in the sea that are caught by fishing ships. However, there is no indication in the text that the ships are limited to fishing vessels, and the dominant motif in this section is movement: the unnumbered sea creatures mentioned are the *remeš*, which means “moving things.” Likewise, the ships are said to “move along” (Heb. *hālak*, lit. “to walk or go”).

65. For discussion (with bibliography) of Leviathan in the context of ancient Near East mythology, see, for example, John Day, “Leviathan,” *ABD*, vol. 4: 295, 96.

66. See Christoph Uehlinger, “Leviathan und die Schiffe in Ps 104:25–26,” *Bib* 71 (1990): 499–526.

67. For elaboration of this motif of the psalm, see Brown, “Psalm 104 and the Playful God,” 15–20.

upon in Proverbs 8, with Wisdom (the Son of God) mediating between creatures and YHWH in their joyous play!<sup>68</sup> This insight into the joyous and celebrative attitude of God while creating expands the understanding of His character from what might be learned only from the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2.

### DAY SIX (VV. 27–30)

Land animals and human beings, created on the sixth day according to Genesis 1:24–31, have already been mentioned in an ancillary way in earlier verses of Psalm 104, where the poet describes God’s provision for their food. In this section, the psalmist refers back to that depiction: “They all wait for You to give them their food in due season. You give to them, they gather it up; You open Your hand, they are satisfied [as in v. 13] with good [*tôb*]” (vv. 27–28). The word “good” (*tôb*) harks back to the repeated refrain in Genesis 1 and 2 that what God created was “good” (*tôb*)<sup>69</sup> and in particular to the sixth day of creation, where the term is used by God twice (Gen. 1:25, 31). It may also allude to Genesis 2:18, where Adam’s existence without a partner was described as “not good” (*lô’ tób*), and therefore by implication, God’s supplying him with a partner is “good” (*tób*).

A crucial aspect of the sixth day emphasized by the psalmist in this stanza of Psalm 104 is God’s giving life to humans and land animals by filling them with His breath, as described in Genesis 2:7 (Adam) and in the Flood narrative (other land creatures as well).<sup>70</sup> In this same passage, he also alludes to the post-Fall state of the world in which death occurs as God withdraws His Spirit or breath from His creatures and they return to dust (see reference to Adam, Gen. 3:19): “You hide Your face, they are dismayed; You take away their spirit, they expire and return to dust. You send forth Your Spirit [*rûah*] they are created [*bārā*]; And You renew the face of the ground” (Ps. 104:29, 30).<sup>71</sup>

68. See Davidson, “Proverbs 8,” 51–53.

69. Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 2:9, 12, 18.

70. See also Genesis 6:17; 7:15, 22, where all land creatures are described as possessing in their nostrils “the breath of life.”

71. Note the similarity of language with Ecclesiastes 3:19–22, which also alludes to Genesis 1 through 3. See Radiša Antic, “Cain, Abel, Seth, and Meaning of Human Life as Portrayed in the Books of Genesis and Ecclesiastes,” *AUSS* 44, no. 2 (2006): 203–11. There is no hint in this passage that death existed before sin. Rather, as pointed out throughout this study, the psalmist blends his description of creation (*creatio prima*) with depictions of life in the here and now (*creatio continuo*).

The term *bārāʾ*, “created,” which describes the activity unique to God in effortlessly bringing into existence something totally new, is used in Genesis 1 and 2 particularly (although not exclusively)<sup>72</sup> to describe the creation of humans during the first creation week (Gen. 1:27). But Psalm 104:30 shows that every creature on earth who has been born since that first creation week is the product of God’s continuing creative (*bārāʾ*) work. While Genesis 1 gives special place to humans in the creation account as having dominion over the animals, and other psalms (such as Ps. 8) underscore this role of humans vis-à-vis the animal kingdom, Psalm 104 emphasizes the similarity of all God’s creatures having the breath of life. All are ultimately dependent upon God for their life and sustenance.<sup>73</sup>

This stanza ends on a note of hope: “You [YHWH] renew the face of the ground” (Ps. 104:30b). This phraseology is a reversal of the curse of Genesis 3:19 (“By the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground”) and of the destruction at the time of the Flood (“Thus He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land” [Gen. 7:23]). In His ongoing providential care for His creation, God continues to renew (Heb. *ḥādaš*) the face of the ground, i.e., “replenish the surface of the ground” (NET) with land animals and human beings.

### DAY SEVEN (VV. 31–35)

As we have noted above, numerous scholars have recognized that Psalm 104 follows the same basic order as the six days of creation in

72. The term *bārāʾ* is also used in general descriptions of Genesis 1:1 and 2:3, 4 to describe God’s creation of “the heavens and earth” and “all His work,” which He had created and made; it is likewise used to describe the effortless creation of the “great sea monsters” (*tannînim*) of Genesis 1:21, inasmuch as this term also described ancient Near East mythological sea monsters with whom the gods struggled, and the term here shows that such was not the character of the great sea creatures that God created during creation week.

73. Alfons Deissler, “The Theology of Psalm 104,” in *Standing before God: Studies on Prayer in Scripture and in Tradition with Essays in Honor of John M. Oesterreicher*, eds. Asher Finkel and Lawrence Frizzell (New York: KTAV, 1981), 37: “With the exception of Ps 104 there is no other text in the Hebrew Bible viewing humans and animals on an even footing. Here God’s living breath, which is applied in Gen 2 to man alone, refers equally to the animals.” I would add perhaps Ecclesiastes 3:18–21, along with Psalm 104. This is not to say that the Psalm makes no distinction at all between animals and humans. To the contrary, as we have pointed out below, humans are given the purpose of cultivation (vv. 14, 23), as commissioned by God in Eden (Gen. 2:15; 3:17–19). Also, as Deissler points out (*ibid.*, 38), in the final stanza of the Psalm, as the human being addresses God directly, “The dialogue with the Creator bespeaks human responsibility for creation: the ‘horizontal posture’ of his existence in this world is maintained by the ‘vertical posture’ of his relationship with God.”

Genesis 1. What is surprising about the analysis of these scholars, however, is not what is said but what is overlooked! Kidner, H. C. Leupold, and others point out the development of thought in Psalm 104:2–30 that so closely parallels the six consecutive days of creation in Genesis 1. But in the commentary on the final verses of the psalm (vv. 31–35) there is little attempt to connect this last section of the psalm with the Genesis creation account. If the first thirty verses of Psalm 104 have a clear parallel, section by section, with the sequence of the six days of creation, why is there little recognition of the possibility that the last section of Psalm 104 might parallel the seventh day of creation, the Sabbath?

Fortunately, what has been largely, if not entirely, overlooked by many recent commentators has been recognized and emphasized in that classic nineteenth-century Old Testament commentary by Delitzsch. As we have noted, Delitzsch labels this psalm the “Hymn in Honour of the God of the Seven Days”<sup>74</sup> and summarizes its contents as “altogether an echo of the heptahemeron (or history of the seven days of creation) in Gen. i. 1–ii. 3. Corresponding to the seven days it falls into seven groups . . . [I]t begins with the light and closes with an allusion to the divine Sabbath.”<sup>75</sup> In the final section of the Psalm, verses 31 through 35, Delitzsch finds a clear allusion to the Sabbath: “The poet has now come to an end with the review of the wonders of the creation, and closes in this seventh group . . . with a sabbatic meditation. . . .”<sup>76</sup>

This “sabbatic meditation” begins with the poet’s wish: “Let the glory of the LORD endure forever; Let the LORD be glad in His works” (Ps. 104:31). The psalmist “wishes that the glory of God, which He has put upon His creatures, and which is reflected and echoed back by them to Him, may continue for ever, and that His works may ever be so constituted that He who was satisfied at the completion of His six days’ work may be able to rejoice in them.”<sup>77</sup>

Especially significant in linking this final stanza of the poem to the Sabbath is the close relationship between the reference to the poet’s rejoicing in YHWH (v. 34) and the reference to YHWH’s rejoicing in creation (v. 31): “Between ‘I will rejoice,’ ver. 34, and ‘He shall rejoice,’

74. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3, 125.

75. *Ibid.*, 127, 28.

76. *Ibid.*, 136.

77. *Ibid.*

ver. 31, there exists a reciprocal relation, as between the Sabbath of the creature in God and the Sabbath of God in the creature."<sup>78</sup>

There is also an eschatological implication of the sabbatical meditation in the poet's linkage of rejoicing in creation with the destruction of the wicked:

When the Psalmist wishes that God may have joy in His works of creation, and seeks on his part to please God and to have his joy in God, he is also warranted in wishing that those who take pleasure in wickedness, and instead of giving God joy excite His wrath, may be removed from the earth . . . ; for they are contrary to the purpose of the good creation of God, they imperil its continuance, and mar the joy of His creatures.<sup>79</sup>

The link between the final stanza of Psalm 104 and the Sabbath of Genesis 2:2–4 is finally receiving some attention in more recent scholarship. For example, without explicitly mentioning the Sabbath, Virgil Howard writes: "The psalm empowers poet and hearer to imitate God by taking time to enjoy the creation (Gen. 2:2–3). Such moments of 'resting' in the creation are crucial not only for human recreation but also for the survival of the world itself, for it can entice one out of the mode of using and into the mode of revering."<sup>80</sup> Dieter Schneider remarks concerning the concluding prayer of the Psalm: "Just like God is experiencing Sabbath joy over his creation, so the prayer will rejoice in Jahwe."<sup>81</sup>

Two Seventh-day Adventist scholars have called special attention to the Sabbath allusion in Psalm 104:31–35. In his doctoral dissertation, Doukhan points out the thematic and terminological parallels between Genesis 1:1–2:4a and Psalm 104, as cited above.<sup>82</sup> With regard to the relationship between the seventh day of creation week and Psalm 104:31–32, he notes the thematic correspondence of the glory of God in creation and the allusion to the revelation on Sinai in verse 32, and then draws the implication: "This reference to Sinai in direct association with the very concern of creation points to the Sabbath."<sup>83</sup>

---

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Ibid.*

80. Virgil Howard, "Psalm 104," *Int* 46, no. 2 (1992): 178.

81. Schneider, *Das Buch der Psalmen*, vol. 3, 39, translation mine. The German reads: "Wie Gott sich seiner Schöpfung gegenüber in der Sabbatfreude befindet, so will der Betende sich freue(n) in Jahwe." See his full discussion, *ibid.*, 3:38, 39.

82. Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story*, 84–87.

83. *Ibid.*, 85n5.

Doukhan also points to the fact that both the introduction and conclusion of Psalm 104 (vv. 1, 33, and nowhere else in the Psalm) bring together the two names of God in Genesis 1 and 2: “Elohim” (used alone only in Gen. 1:1–2:4a and together with the tetragrammaton in Gen. 2:4b–25) and “YHWH” (used with Elohim in Gen. 2:4b–25), which may imply the poet’s recognition of the unity and complementarity of the two accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2.<sup>84</sup>

The other Adventist scholar to call particular attention to the Sabbath allusion in Psalm 104 is Shea. Shea elaborates on the parallel between the seventh day of creation week and the final verses of Psalm 104:

In Genesis the account of Creation week goes on to describe the seventh day. The psalm has something similar. On the Sabbath we recognize that God is our Creator; we honor Him in the commemoration of Creation. That is the first thing mentioned in Psalm 104:31. When God finished His creation, He said that it was “very good.” In Psalm 104 He rejoices in His works (verse 31).<sup>85</sup>

Shea’s major contribution to the Sabbath theology of Psalm 104 may be in drawing out the significance of what is described in the next verse: “He looks at the earth, and it trembles; He touches the mountains, and they smoke” (v. 32). Shea comments: “This is the picture of a theophany, the manifestation of God’s personal presence. This is what happens on the Sabbath when the Lord draws near to His people and makes Himself known. Struck with reverential awe, they render Him worship.”<sup>86</sup> As Shea points out, that worship is depicted in the final verses of the psalm:

Human beings bring worship and honor and glory and praise to God (verse 33). This is not a onetime occurrence: The psalmist promises to carry on this activity as long as life lasts. The praises of the Lord are on the lips of the psalmist continually. Silence is another part of worship. In verse 34 the psalmist asks that silent meditation upon the Lord may be pleasing to God. Finally, this reflection upon worship ends with rejoicing (verse 35).<sup>87</sup>

---

84. *Ibid.*, 89, 90.

85. Shea, “Creation,” 431.

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Ibid.*

There appears to be sufficient evidence to conclude with a high degree of probability that Psalm 104 not only refers to the first six days of creation week, but also, in its final stanza, alludes to the seventh-day Sabbath of Genesis 2:1–4a. Significant insights into Sabbath theology and praxis emerge from Psalm 104:31–35, including themes of God’s glorification and rejoicing in His created works (v. 31), the theophanic presence of God (v. 32) leading to reverential awe and exuberant singing and praise in worship of God (v. 33), meditation upon and joy in the Lord (v. 34), and the wish-prayer for an eschatological end of the wicked who refuse praise God (v. 35).

### THE CHIASTIC SYMMETRY AMONG THE DAYS OF CREATION

The inspired composer of Psalm 104 not only structures his composition in the sequence of the days of creation but also sets forth a symmetrical arrangement among these days. While many scholars have recognized the symmetrical arrangement of the Genesis creation days in the form of a panel structure (or block parallelism),<sup>88</sup> the psalmist’s close reading of the Genesis creation account has also apparently detected a chiasmic pattern among these days, the structure of which he employs in his composition along with the linear six-day structure we discussed earlier. Recognizing this chiasmic structure goes far in explaining what elements of the various days of creation were highlighted by the psalmist in order to poetically display the chiasm, while also remaining faithful to the six-day flow of Genesis 1. The chiasmic structure of Psalm 104, as it has emerged from my study of the psalm, may be schematically diagrammed like this:<sup>89</sup>

88. See page 110 for my discussion of this block parallelism of Genesis 1.

89. After observing this chiasmic structure of the psalm, I encountered another analysis of the psalm that posits a concentric structure (or chiasm), namely, the work of Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, WBC, 21 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), 32. Allen’s analysis is based upon the evidence of an *inclusio* at the beginning and end of the psalm (as I have also noted); the distribution of the verb *‘āšā*, or “to make,” at regular intervals throughout the psalm: verses 4, 13, 19, 24 (twice), 31; and other terminological markers. He suggests that the psalm contains five strophes arranged in a concentric pattern: A (vv. 1–4), B (vv. 5–13), C (vv. 14–23), B’ (vv. 24–30), A’ (vv. 31–35). The strophe divisions that Allen points out are largely the same as what I have observed, but he does not factor into his structure the thematic sequence of materials that matches the seven days of creation in Genesis 1. For example, his strophe C (vv. 14–23) runs roughshod over a clear shift in subject matter from vegetation (vv. 14–18) to the celestial luminaries (vv. 19–23). Allen’s analysis may well point out concentric strophic divisions of the Psalm, while still allowing for a thematic chiasmic arrangement in the psalm that incorporates but also transcends strophe divisions (which I am

- A Introduction or *inclusio* (v. 1a): “Bless the Lord, O my soul”
- B Day One (vv. 1b–2a): praise and theophany; “YHWH, my God”
- C Day Two (vv. 2b–4): emphasis upon the wind, spirit, or breath (Heb. *rûah*, two times)
- D Day Three (vv. 5–18): emphasis upon the deep, sea waters, and the springs
- E Day Four (vv. 19–24): moon, sun, and climactic exultation<sup>90</sup>
- D’ Day Five (vv. 25, 26): emphasis upon the sea and its moving things
- C’ Day Six (vv. 27–30): emphasis upon the spirit or breath (Heb. *rûah*, two times)
- B’ Day Seven (vv. 31–35a): theophany and praise; “YHWH, my God”
- A’ Conclusion or *inclusio* (v. 35b): “Bless the Lord, O my soul.” Coda: “Hallelujah.”

## A THEOLOGY OF PSALM 104 AND ITS ADJACENT PSALMS

### TWO MAJOR THEOLOGICAL THEMES: *CREATIO PRIMA* AND *CREATIO CONTINUA*

Two terms that stand out in bold relief in Psalm 104 are “works or made” (Heb. *ma’ăšeh* and *‘āsâ*; vv. 4, 13, 19, 24 [two times], 31) and “satisfy” (Heb. *šāba’*; vv. 13, 16, 28). These constitute the two main theological points of the psalm: God’s initial “works” of creation (*creatio prima*) and His continual “satisfying” or providing for His creation (*creatio continua*). While other biblical creation accounts (such as Gen. 1) focus upon God’s initial creation, Psalm 104 is virtually

---

proposing). Still, another suggestion for symmetrical strophic couplings of the psalm’s eight strophes comes from Terrien, *Psalms*, 710, 11: I (Light) and VIII (Glory) (vv. 2–4, plus 31–34); II (Earth) and VII (Terrestrial Creatures) (vv. 5–9, plus 27–30); III (Spring and Rain) and VI (The Great Sea) (vv. 10–13, plus 24–26); and IV (Vegetation) and V (Night and Day) (vv. 14–18, plus 19–23). For discussion of the principle of concurrence, in which multiple structural patterns may be superimposed on each other in a single passage of Scripture by the biblical writer, see, for example, Henry van Dyke Parunak, “Structural Studies in Ezekiel” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1978), esp. 75, 76.

90. Note that the apex of the Psalm, verse 24, moves from a bicolon (3:3 meter) that predominates in the psalm to a tricolon (3:3:3 metrical pattern). The only other places where the poetic meter of the Psalm expands to tricolon are in verse 25 (4:4:3 metrical pattern), discussed above, and verse 29 (3:3:3 metrical pattern), where the psalmist depicts creatures’ expiration and return to dust in the section of the psalm describing the sixth day of creation.

unique in emphasizing God's continuing creation. In the assessment of Harrelson,

Here we confront a picture of creation different from any creation stories or motifs in the entire Hebrew Bible, so far as I can see. God the creator works continually at the task of creation. . . . All life depends at every moment upon the quickening spirit of God. There is no life without the divine breath. . . . [The psalmist in Psalm 104] is portraying a direct dependence of all things, all life, upon the active presence of God, in every moment, for all time.<sup>91</sup>

Psalm 104 uniquely and powerfully joins both the initial and the continual work of divine creation. As Patrick Miller remarks: "Surely no text of Scripture speaks more directly and in detail about the creation and about what God did and does in creation and in the sustaining of creation than does this psalm."<sup>92</sup>

### **HISTORICITY AND LITERALITY OF THE GENESIS CREATION NARRATIVES**

After affirming the theological importance of Psalm 104 as a creation text, Miller joins others who have argued that, since the psalm is written in poetry, its report of creation (or that of Gen. 1–2 either) is not to be interpreted literally, as really having happened as described: "Here [Psalm 104], however, there is no external report vulnerable to literal and scientific analysis. One cannot analyze Psalm 104 that way. It is poetry, and we know not to interpret poetry literally."<sup>93</sup>

Hebrew poetry does indeed contain an abundance of imagery, which must be recognized and interpreted as such. But it is incorrect to conclude that after taking into account the obvious imagery involved, Hebrew poetry should not be interpreted literally. Quite the contrary, in the Hebrew Bible the poetic genre does not negate a literal interpretation of the events described (e.g., Exod. 15; Dan. 7; and some 40 percent of the Old Testament, which is in poetry). In fact, biblical writers often wrote in poetry to *underscore* what is literally and historically true.<sup>94</sup> The poetic representation of the seven days of creation

---

91. Harrelson, "On God's Care for the Earth," 21.

92. Miller, "Psalm 104," 96. For many of the insights in the paragraphs that follow on the theology of Psalm 104, I am particularly indebted to Miller (*ibid.*, 95–103), although I do not agree with his denial of the literality of creation as it is depicted in this psalm.

93. *Ibid.*

94. Often in Scripture when something of special importance is being stated, the writer or speaker breaks forth into poetry! Note already in Genesis 1 through 3 the poetic summary of

in Psalm 104 does not negate the literality and historicity of the Genesis creation week any more than the poetic representation of the Exodus in Psalms 105 and 106 negates the literality and historicity of the Exodus events or the poetic representation of the Babylonian captivity in Psalm 137 negates the literality and historicity of the exile.<sup>95</sup>

### PURPOSEFULNESS, BEAUTY, AND JOY OF CREATION

Psalm 104 not only assumes and builds upon the literality of the Genesis creation accounts but reaffirms and amplifies the sense of orderliness and purposefulness that emerges from Genesis 1 and 2. Everything is created “in wisdom” (v. 24), in an orderly way, and has its purpose. The psalm also underscores and develops the sense of beauty and pleasure that God’s orderly, purposeful creation brings, not only to His creatures but also to God Himself. This is already implied in Genesis 1, as God proclaims His works good and beautiful (the meaning of the Heb. *tôb*), but it comes into full expression in the exquisitely wrought turns of phrases and plenitude of imagery in Psalm 104, climaxing with the exclamation: “Let the LORD be glad in His works” (v. 31). This aesthetic, pleasurable quality of God’s creation also contains an element of joy (note the threefold use of *šāmah*, “be glad,” in vv. 15, 31, 34b)<sup>96</sup> and even playfulness (Heb. *šāḥaq*, “sport/play,” in reference to the Leviathan of v. 26).

### POST-FALL PERSPECTIVE

At the same time, Psalm 104 often describes God’s created world from the perspective of how it functions after the Fall. Notice, for example, the reference to rainfall from God’s upper chambers (v. 13), in contrast to the mist that rose from the ground in pre-Fall Eden (Gen. 2:5, 6); the existence of predatory activity on the part of animals (vv. 20, 21), in contrast to the original vegetarian diet of all animals (Gen. 1:29, 30); the cultivation of the earth by humans at labor (vv. 14, 23; cf. Gen. 3:18), in contrast to the pre-Fall tending and keeping of the trees and plants in the Garden of Eden (2:8–15); and the existence of sinners and wicked people who need to be consumed (v. 35; cf.

---

God’s creation of humanity (Gen. 1:27), the record of the clearly poetic, ecstatic utterance of the first man after the creation of woman (Gen. 2:23), and God’s legal sentence upon the guilty after the Fall (Gen. 3:14–19).

95. See Davidson, “Biblical Account of Origins,” 10–19, for evidence supporting the literality of the seven-day creation week in the Genesis creation narratives.

96. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 295, titles this psalm “Joy in God’s Creation.”

Gen. 3), in contrast to a perfect world without sin in pre-Fall Eden (Gen. 1, 2). These references of the psalmist are not to be taken as contradicting the picture presented in Genesis 1 and 2; they are in keeping with the psalmist's poetic strategy to blend his depiction of the seven days of creation week with a view of God's continued preservation in its post-Fall condition. The psalmist does not teach death and predation before sin, as some have claimed.

### **HUMAN INTERDEPENDENCE AND INTEGRATION WITH THE REST OF CREATION**

One especially surprising theological feature of the psalm comes in its depiction of humans within the scheme of creation. Unlike Psalm 8, which builds upon Genesis 1:26–28 and emphasizes humanity's God-given dominion over the rest of creation, Psalm 104 emphasizes that all sensate beings whom God has created share this world together.

There is a clear distinction between humankind and the different animals, but they are talked about in parallel ways as creatures of the world God has made. Humankind assumes not a central or special place but an integral part of the whole. . . . There is thus no language of domination, no *imago dei* that sets human beings apart from or puts them in rule over the other beasts. . . . While bypassing all the complex issues of the interrelationships among these "creatures," the psalm assumes a world in which they are all present, all in their place, all doing their work, and all provided for by God's goodness.<sup>97</sup>

Psalm 104 does not deny the model of dominion that is highlighted in Genesis 1 and Psalm 8, but it stresses what may be called the model of integration.<sup>98</sup> Harrelson goes even further than integration when he describes the intrinsic importance of other created things apart from humankind: "I know of no more direct word in the Bible about the independent significance of things and creatures on which man does not depend for life. . . . God has interest in badgers and wild goats and storks for their own sakes. He has interest in trees and mountains and rock-cairns that simply serve non-human purposes. . . . *God* cares for *His* earth!"<sup>99</sup>

---

97. Miller, "Psalm 104," 99.

98. James Limburg, "Down-to-Earth Theology: Psalm 104 and the Environment," *CurTM* 21, no. 5 (1994): 344, 45.

99. Harrelson, "On God's Care for the Earth," 20.

## ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS

This study is not the place to develop the ecological concerns of the psalm,<sup>100</sup> but it must be noted that the psalm describes the interdependence of natural phenomena in such a way as to highlight what we today speak of in ecological terms.

It [the psalm] is informed by a basic ecological sense of the interdependence of things. Water, topology, and the change of seasons and day and night form an intricate system in which creatures live . . . . What has been rent asunder in the modern view of the world, with consequences for motivation and conduct only recently grasped, is held together here—knowledge of the world and knowledge of God. To intervene in the flow of water, the habitat of birds and animals, the topography of the earth, is to breach an intricate divine ecology into which human life itself is integrated.<sup>101</sup>

Recent studies on creation care frequently reference Psalm 104. Psalm 104 affirms fundamental biblical principles of environmental concern, such as the goodness of God's creation;<sup>102</sup> God's active and unceasing sustaining of the world's existence at both macro and micro levels;<sup>103</sup> His generous and loving care for both humans and the rest of the animals, birds, and fish;<sup>104</sup> the God-focused purpose, which humans share with all creation (vv. 27, 28);<sup>105</sup> God's establishment of the relationship between the earth and the water (vv. 5–9); and His provision of water for all creatures after the Fall (vv. 10–13), even for sea creatures, such as Leviathan (vv. 25, 26), and for the trees (v. 16).<sup>106</sup>

The reference to "sinners" and "wicked" in verse 35 also may call attention to ecological concerns. Although such general terms may have in view any post-Fall acts of sin and wickedness that are

100. See, for example, *ibid.*, 19–23; and Limburg, "Psalm 104 and the Environment," 340–46.

101. James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, IBC (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1994), 334.

102. See Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Earth Is the Lord's: Biblical Foundations for Global Ecological Ethics and Mission," in *Keeping God's Earth: The Global Environment in Biblical Perspective*, ed. Noah J. Toly and Daniel I. Block (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2010), 218.

103. *Ibid.*, 222.

104. *Ibid.*, 225, 232.

105. *Ibid.*, 223.

106. David Toshio Tsumura, "A Biblical Theology of Water: Plenty, Flood and Drought in the Created Order," in *Keeping God's Earth*, 170–72.

described in Genesis 3, the overall context of this psalm invites us to view these sins against the backdrop of God's good creation.<sup>107</sup>

### THEOLOGICAL CONNECTIONS WITH ADJACENT PSALMS

In our introductory remarks on Psalm 104, we noted how both Psalms 103 and 104 (and only these two psalms in the Psalter) begin and end with the same exclamation on the part of the psalmist ("Bless the LORD, O my soul") and contain many other verbal connections, all pointing to the likelihood of a common authorship. Here, we underscore major thematic connections implied by the juxtaposition of these two psalms.<sup>108</sup>

Psalm 104 expresses poetic praise to YHWH as Creator and Preserver of creation. Psalm 103 expresses thanksgiving to YHWH for His compassion, His mercy, and His forgiveness. Thus, the celebration of God's creation and His steadfast love (*hesed*) belong together. Both God's creation and preservation and His mercy and forgiveness are aspects of YHWH's manifold "works" (*ma'āšîm*; 103:22; 104:13, 24, 31). Creation cannot be separated from salvation history.<sup>109</sup>

There is also a strong terminological linkage between Psalms 104 and 105. Both psalms end with the Hebrew word *halleluyah*, or "praise the LORD." Most striking are the three key terms, which occur *in the very same order* at the end of Psalm 104 (vv. 33, 34) and at the beginning of Psalm 105 (vv. 2, 3): *zāmar* ("sing"), *śāḥ* ("meditate"; "speak of"), and *śāmaḥ* ("be glad"; "glory in"). This is

107. Miller, "Psalm 104," 103, suggests an implied link between ecological abuse of nature and the moral categories of sinner and wicked: "The context . . . makes us think of any who violate the creation, who take human life, who interfere with God's good provision for each creature, who tear down the trees in which the birds sing, who destroy Leviathan playing in the ocean, who poke holes in the heavenly tent, who let loose the forces of nature that God has brought under control in the very creation of a world. None of that is explicit in this brief concluding imprecation, but the total character of the psalm cautions us against defining the categories 'sinner' and 'wicked' too narrowly when we confine ourselves to their apparent reference in the laments of the Psalter."

108. Scholars have recently begun to recognize the theological sophistication of the final editor(s) of the Psalms, since psalms with similar theological content are grouped together. See, for example, J. Clinton McCann, ed., *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993).

109. In fact, creation and salvation history join together within Psalm 104 itself. Alfons Deissler correctly points out: "In the final stanza [of Psalm 104], however, the psalm assumes an historical dimension, that of salvation history, depicting a future world without evil. This is often unnoticed by readers and worshipers alike." Deissler, "The Theology of Psalm 104," 31. Deissler continues: "Psalm 104 knows and celebrates God of the covenant as the God of creation. Then all his works of creation are testimonies and signs not only of his power and wisdom but also of his munificence and his covenantal [sic] will. In this way creation and history fuse into 'one arch of the covenant'" (ibid., 39).

the only place in the entire Bible where such combination of terms is repeated in the same sequence. These linkages invite us to see the theological connections between the two psalms. Psalm 105 and its complement Psalm 106 carry forward the theme of salvation history found in Psalm 103 but on the national level, as they encompass the high points in Israel's entire history as a nation. As they bring book four of the Psalter to a close, they call for praise of YHWH for His "wonders" (*nīplē'ôt*; 105:2, 5; 106:7, 22). The creation of Psalm 104 is enfolded in the bosom of salvation history that surrounds it in Psalm 103 and Psalms 105 to 106. Both creation and salvation or judgment are revelations of the same wonderful, gracious, good God. Both call forth spontaneous praise from the worshiper: "Bless the LORD, O my soul. Hallelujah!" This call to praise may be viewed as one of the main purposes, if not the primary one, of all these psalms.<sup>110</sup>

## SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it may be helpful to synthesize significant details of Psalm 104 that reaffirm, amplify, or further contribute to questions of origins set forth in Genesis 1 and 2, which we have summarized under the four headings suggested by Genesis 1:1—the when ("in the beginning"), the who ("God"), the how ("created"), and the what ("the heavens and the earth")<sup>111</sup>—plus, a fifth category underscored uniquely in Psalm 104 as the why of creation.

### THE WHEN OF CREATION

Under the question of when, Psalm 104 affirms the absolute beginning of creation as a direct act of God, in parallel with the interpretation of Genesis 1:1 as an independent clause. The psalm explicitly indicates, for example, that the *tēhôm*, "deep"—which is described in connection with the unformed-unfilled condition of the

110. So for example, writes Howard, "Psalm 104," 176: "Doxology is the aim of Psalm 104." While doxology is foundational, Parrish, "Psalm 104," 342, suggests that this may not be the ultimate goal of the psalm: "No doubt creation theology led ancient Israel to praise the creator, both in the cult and the clan. But the stress upon YHWH as creator served not merely to elicit the response of praise. Rather, creation theology had the power to transform reality. Without appeal to Israel's election traditions it can be maintained that creation theology, in its own right, was—and is—a subversive theology that undercut chaotic existence in an attempt to replace it with an ordered world."

111. For a treatment of each of these questions with regard to the Genesis creation accounts, see Davidson, "Biblical Account of Origins," 4–43.

earth in Genesis 1:2—is created by God: “You covered it [the earth] with the deep [*těhôm*] as with a garment” (v. 6).

Psalm 104 also assumes the seven-day creation week, as the entire psalm systematically moves through the activities of each day as described in Genesis 1, including the Sabbath on the seventh day. As argued above, this creation week is assumed to be literal, even though the interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 is given in poetic form. The evening-morning rhythm of each day also seems implied by reference to the creation of the moon before the sun and to the night before the day (Ps. 104:19–23).

Verses 5–9 of Psalm 104 seem to lend support to a two-stage creation for the raw materials of this earth (land and water): the first stage before the beginning of creation week, during which time the foundations of the earth were laid, mountains were formed, and all was covered by the watery deep; and the second stage on the third day of creation week, during which time mountains rose and valleys sank, allowing dry land to appear from amid the receding deep, forming earth and seas.

As with Genesis 1, Psalm 104 places the appointment of the sun and moon for seasons in the midst of creation week, not at the beginning, and clarifies what is not explained in Genesis about the source of the light before day four, namely, the light with which God clothed Himself (Ps. 1b, 2a). The lack of reference to the stars in verses 19 through 23, which describe the celestial luminaries, may imply what is suggested also in Genesis 1, namely, that the stars were not created during the creation week but were already in existence before that time.

By blending into a seamless whole the account of creation week with the present conditions of the earth after the Fall, moving effortlessly and almost unnoticeably from the time of origins to the present, the psalmist may be implying relative temporal continuity between the past and present (i.e., a relatively recent and not remote creation). I find no implication, however, of a process of theistic evolution linking past and present.

There is an eschatological perspective within the when of creation. Psalm 104:5 gives the promise that the earth and its foundations “will not totter forever and ever.” There is assurance that this planet will never cease to exist. Furthermore, from a post-Flood perspective, the psalmist indicates that the waters, which once covered the earth but

were assigned their boundaries, “will not return to cover the earth” (v. 9). Verse 30 seems to point beyond the present life-death cycle to the future: “You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the ground.” As Deissler correctly observes, “God’s final ordering word does not apply to death but to life. . . . The final verse [v. 30] corroborates this future-oriented view, which points to the renewal of the present while the old is not destroyed but transformed.”<sup>112</sup> The language of verses 24 through 30 actually may imply the (eschatological) resurrection of marine and terrestrial creatures.<sup>113</sup>

With regard to Genesis 1:1, it has been suggested that the term *bĕrēʾšīt*, “in the beginning,” was deliberately chosen by Moses to rhyme with *bĕʾaḥārīt*, “in the last days” (NKJV) in Genesis 49:1; Numbers 24:14; and Deuteronomy 31:29 in order to illustrate the eschatological perspective of the Torah from the very first verse.<sup>114</sup> In similar fashion, the psalmist in Psalm 104 depicts a perfect world created by God and ends his poetic meditation with the wish-prayer: “Let sinners be consumed from the earth and let the wicked be no more” (v. 35). He looks forward to the day when all who have marred the perfect creation will be gone and the earth can once again fully reflect God’s original intention in its creation.<sup>115</sup>

112. Deissler, “Theology of Psalm 104,” 37.

113. G. R. Driver, “The Resurrection of Marine and Terrestrial Creatures,” *JSS* 7, no. 1 (1962): 12: “Few, if any, readers of the Old Testament seem to have noticed that, as the text [of Psalm 104:24–30] stands and as it can only be read without violating normal standards of interpretation, they are committed to the strange doctrine of the resurrection not only of man and of birds and beasts but also of Leviathan and the ‘creeping’ or rather ‘gliding things innumerable’ which swim in the sea (Ps. civ. 10–30).” Driver points out that the “all of them” (v. 27), which “are re-created” (v. 30), “must mean all, not some, of them, sc. of God’s creatures, whether men and beasts and birds or fishes, mentioned in the course of the psalm” (*ibid.*, 17). Although Driver acknowledges that this is the meaning of the text in its present form, he assumes such meaning to be objectionable (*ibid.*) and, thus, suggests radical excision of the phrase “and they return to their dust” (v. 29) as a gloss, so that the text does not speak of death at all but creatures that “gasp” for breath when God takes away their breath and then “recover health” when God sends forth His breath again.

114. See John H. Sailhamer, “The Canonical Approach to the OT: Its Effect on Understanding Prophecy,” *JETS* 30, no. 3 (1987): 311; see Richard M. Davidson, “The Eschatological Literary Structure of the Old Testament,” in *Creation, Life, and Hope: Essays in Honor of Jacques B. Doukhan*, ed. Jiří Moskala (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Old Testament Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2000), 352.

115. See Howard, “Psalm 104,” 179: “We are, finally, invited to join in a song of hope, for doxology is always also eschatological vision. Because it is God’s spirit-breath that goes forth, there can be creation and re-creation (v. 40a and b), new creation, transformed creation. Because God rejoices in the divine works, the time can be envisioned when sin and wickedness will be no more (v. 35).” In Jewish tradition, Psalm 104 is chanted on the morning of the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, “as a pledge that new life will emerge out of penance and sorrow” (Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2001], 258).

## THE WHO OF CREATION

As to the who of creation, the psalmist reaffirms that God the Creator is both Elohim of Genesis 1 and YHWH Elohim of Genesis 2 and 3 (see the use of both names for God in vv. 1, 24, 31, 45). For the psalmist, both Genesis creation accounts (chap. 1 and chaps. 2–3) belong together and are part and parcel of the same narrative. The Creator is both the all-powerful, transcendent One (the meaning of Elohim) and the personal, immanent, covenant Lord (the implications of the name YHWH). As in Genesis 1 through 3, the God of creation is presented in the psalm as one of moral goodness, full of tender care for the creatures He has made, in contrast to the deities of nations surrounding Israel who are often depicted as cruel and capricious. YHWH is presented as the One God (beside Whom there is none other), but at the same time, there is mention of YHWH's Spirit being sent forth (v. 30; cf. Gen. 1:2), perhaps as an intimation of more than one person of the Godhead.

## THE HOW OF CREATION

Regarding the how of creation, Psalm 104 reaffirms the statements in Genesis 1 and 2 that God “creates” (Heb. *bārā*’; v. 30; cf. Gen. 1:1, 21, 27; 2:4a), a term which describes exclusively God’s action and refers to effortlessly producing something totally new, in contrast to the common ancient Near East views of creation by sexual procreation or by a struggle with the forces of chaos. The psalm also uses other verbs for creation found in Genesis 1 and 2: *’āśā*, “to make” (Ps. 104:4, 19, 24; cf. Gen. 1:7, 11, 12, 16, 25, 26, 31; 2:2, 3, 4, 18; plus, the related noun *ma’āśeh*, “works” in Ps. 104:13, 24, 31; not found in Gen. 1, 2); *yāsar*, “to form [like a potter]” (Ps. 104:26, used of God’s forming the sea creature Leviathan, whereas in Genesis it only refers to the first human and to the larger land animals; Gen. 2:7, 8, 19); and *nāṭa*’, “to plant” (Ps. 104:16, of the cedars of Lebanon; cf. Gen. 2:8 and God’s planting of the garden).

The psalmist adds other picturesque verbs for God’s creative activity not found in the Genesis creation account: such as *nāṭā*, “to stretch out” (the heavens, v. 2); *qārā* in Piel “to lay beams” (of His upper chambers, v. 3); *yāsad*, “to found, establish” (the foundations of the earth, v. 5, and the place for the mountains and the valleys, v. 8); *kāsā*, “to cover” (the earth with the deep, v. 6); and *šīt*, “to appoint” (darkness, v. 20). In at least one verse (v. 7), YHWH is described as creating by divine

fiat: “At Your rebuke they fled, at the sound of Your thunder [voice; cf. Ps. 29] they hurried away.”

Whereas in Genesis 1 and 2, God is depicted as a Potter (using the verb *yāṣar*, which in its participial form means “potter,” Gen. 2:7, 8, 19), an Architect or Builder (using the verb *bānâ*, “to architecturally design and build”), and a Gardener (using the verb *nāṭa*, “to plant,” in Gen. 2:8), in Psalm 104, God is all of these and many more. Consider the metaphors that depict God’s creative work:

Close and emphatic are the metaphors. Yahweh creates the world like a master builder: he “lays the beams” of his heavenly dwelling. Like a family father, he stretches the tent roof. Like a field general, he thunders at the primeval waters—they flee. Like a farm manager, he leads the quickening waters to the living beings and the fields. Like the father of a household, he distributes his goods and gifts. And all of this is done with sovereign, world-transcending power, profound wisdom, and gracious goodness. The conception of the heavenly king stands behind the whole psalm.<sup>116</sup>

The primary principle underlying how God created, both in Genesis 1 and 2 and Psalm 104, is that of separation. This involves the entire process of bringing order to the cosmos and establishing the roles and functions of that which was created. In Genesis 1 and 2, we find the term “separate” in verses 4, 6, 7, 14, and 18. There is separation between the following contrasts in both Genesis 1 and 2 and Psalm 104: day and night (Gen. 1:5, 14; Ps. 104:19–23); upper and lower waters (Gen. 1:6–8; Ps. 104:3, 6–13); earth and sea (Gen. 1:9, 10; Ps. 104:5–9); grass and trees (Gen. 1:11, 12, 29, 30; Ps. 104:14–17); greater and lesser light (Gen. 1:16–18; Ps. 104:19); birds and fish (Gen. 1:20–22; Ps. 104:17, 25, 26); God and human (Gen. 1:27; Ps. 104:33–35); male and female (Gen. 1:27; not in Ps. 104); humans and animals (Gen. 1:28–30; Ps. 104:14, 20–23); and weekday and holy Sabbath time (Gen. 2:1–3; implied in Ps. 104:31–35).

Psalm 104 gives a hint that is not mentioned in Genesis 1 as to the mechanism God used to accomplish the gathering of the water into one place and the appearing of dry land on the third day: “The mountains rose; the valleys sank down” (v. 8). As the mountains rose out of the deep, the water ran off into the sunken valleys, thus producing

116. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1989), 304.

the dry land (earth) and surrounding waters (seas). Is there some allusion here to what is now referred to as plate tectonics involving the pre-Cambrian crust and continental drift?

The descriptions of divine creation in Psalm 104, as in Genesis 1 and 2, serve as a polemic against the views of creation among Israel's neighbors. While the psalmist borrows picturesque imagery that is reminiscent of Canaanite Baal the storm-god, YHWH (not Baal) is the One Who rides on the clouds. It is clear from Psalm 104 that YHWH, unlike Baal, did not need to struggle in cosmic combat against a sea deity in creation; He simply spoke and the wind and waves (which He Himself had created) obeyed Him! In the psalm, "the reliability of earth is permanent and need not be repeated in annual cycle or crisis times; and resulting creation is unified ontologically with no remnant of cosmic dualism."<sup>117</sup> It is YHWH, not Baal, Who provides water to fertilize the earth, and this is freely given by a gracious Creator, not coaxed by humans via sympathetic magic in the fertility cult rituals. Whereas "[i]n Canaanite mythology Leviathan is a powerful primeval dragon . . . , here it is a sea creature formed by the Creator, obedient as a pet, with whom Yahweh jests and plays."<sup>118</sup>

While utilizing phraseology akin to that used in the Egyptian Hymn to Aten (the deified sun disk), Psalm 104 does not describe the sun as a deity. In fact, the sun is mentioned only in one verse of the psalm (v. 19), and "it figures as a mere creature, a cogwheel in the well-ordered cosmos designed by YHWH. YHWH is master of the sun as he is of the storm."<sup>119</sup> Such depiction of the sun by the psalmist represents an explicit polemic against not only the Hymn to Aten but also all sun worship in whatever form it may appear.<sup>120</sup> By recognizing God as the source of light from the beginning of creation, the psalmist indicates what Genesis 1 also makes clear, namely, that creation is not heliocentric (sun centered) but theocentric (God centered).<sup>121</sup>

One of the primary contributions of Psalm 104 regarding the how of creation is its emphasis upon the aesthetic quality of the creative

117. Mays, *Psalms*, 333.

118. Deissler, "Theology of Psalm 104," 35.

119. Dion, "YHWH as Storm-god," 58.

120. See, *ibid.*, 64, for evidence of widespread sun worship among Israel's near neighbors.

121. Even though the sun and the moon are placed at the center of the chiasmic relationship of the days, yet the climax of this central section is not the sun and moon (which are only mentioned in one verse, v. 19, almost in passing) but verse 24: "O LORD, how many are Your works!" Even here at the center of the chiasm, representing day four of creation week, the psalm is clearly theocentric.

process. In Genesis 1:1–2:4a, the creation week is structured in a symmetrical way similar to Hebrew poetic block parallelism, yet this parallelism does not consist of matching poetic lines but the creative acts of God Himself, Who as the Master Designer creates aesthetically. As noted earlier, Psalm 104 captures this aesthetic dimension of the divine creation in various ways, including the chiasmic structure of the psalm, the unsurpassed use of vivid imagery, and the language of joy, pleasure, and even play.

### THE WHAT OF CREATION

With regard to the what of creation, Psalm 104 seems to limit its description to the earth and its surrounding heavenly spheres (the moon and sun) and does not discuss the creation of the universe as a whole (in contrast to what may be implied by the merism “the heavens and the earth” in Gen. 1:1). As with Genesis 1:3ff., the psalm is focused upon the global habitats of our planet: the atmospheric heavens, the earth (dry land), and the seas. Whereas in Genesis 1 the creation narrative describes what is created in general categories (such as the “trees bearing fruit with seed” of vv. 11, 12, “every winged bird” of v. 21, and the “cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth” in vv. 24–25), in Psalm 104, the psalmist gives specific examples of species within these general categories (such as the “cedars of Lebanon” in v. 16, the “stork” in v. 17, and the “wild donkeys,” “wild goats,” “*shephanim*” [conies or rock badgers], and “young lions” in vv. 11, 18, and 21). Both Genesis 1 and Psalm 104 underscore the wholeness of creation, as they refer to the “all” (*kōl*) which God has made (Gen. 1:31; Ps. 104:24, 27).

In his poetic depiction of what was created, the psalmist brings together information both from Genesis 1:1–2:4a and Genesis 2:4b–25, the latter describing in more detail what was created on the sixth day mentioned in Genesis 1. For example, his poetic description of humans encompasses God’s provision for their diet (v. 14), mentioned in Genesis 1:29, and refers to their formula of creation, involving dust plus the breath or spirit of God (vv. 29, 30), mentioned in Genesis 2:7. The psalmist blends into a beautiful whole the various facets of creation delineated in Genesis 1 and 2.

In this psalm God’s work of creation is not limited to creation week; the acts of God in preserving and renewing His creation are viewed as a *creatio continua*. Consider verse 30, where the verb

*bārā*’, “create,” is used to convey the sense of God’s bringing into existence humans and animals in the here and now.

### **THE WHY OF CREATION**

The what of creation in Psalm 104, especially in its climactic allusion to the Sabbath, actually moves from the question of what to the question of why, only hinted at in Genesis 1 and 2. In Genesis 2:1–3, God sanctifies the seventh day, and from elsewhere in Scripture, we learn that God makes something holy by His presence (cf. the burning bush, Exod. 3:2–5; the sanctuary, Exod. 25:8; 40:34–38). Hence, this suggests that Sabbath is a time when God enters into an intimate personal relationship with His creatures, a time when His creatures can worship Him with joy and praise. The climax of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 is thus a call to praise and worship. In Psalm 104, creation more explicitly calls the reader to the same response as in Genesis 1 and 2: joyful worship and praise of the Creator. How appropriate that this psalm concludes with the first Hallelujah found in the Psalter!