The theological dialectic of creation and death in Hebrew Bible wisdom traditions
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PSALM 104: FIGURING DEATH AMIDST AN ABUNDANCE OF LIFE

Psalm 104 is a hymn celebrating YHWH’s works of creation. In its final form elements from various literary and theological traditions are fused together, resulting in its complex character.\(^{164}\) Israelite creation theologies encountered in Genesis 1:1-2:4a (P), Genesis 2:4b-3:24 (J), the wisdom texts of Proverbs 8 and Job 38-40 and Deutero-Isaiah are echoed in Ps 104.\(^{165}\) For this reason it has been suggested that the composition of Ps 104 should be ascribed to a sage from the postexilic period that created his theological wisdom from the most important aspects of ancient Israel’s religious heritage, while also incorporating, transforming and reapplying elements from the literature of its Umwelt. While much disputed, its purpose of composition and historical setting remain elusive.\(^{166}\) The focus of this chapter will rest on the doxological tone of the creation theology and theological construct of God as creator in Ps 104, and to what extent this doxology of creation and creator allows room for the phenomenon of death. Can death figure within a context of abundance of life?

Divine creation and providence are central themes in Ps 104, while the theme of death has a seemingly peripheral place.\(^{167}\) But it is significant that the theme of death is present within the framework of this doxology of creation and life. This raises the question concerning the theological topos of death within the framework of the creation theology of Ps 104. This question becomes more pertinent when taken into consideration that death in Ps 104 is directly related to YHWH, the creator (vv 29-30), which stresses the psalm’s acute awareness of creation’s dependence on the creator.\(^{168}\)

Does Ps 104 present death as an inherent, natural part of the created order, or does it

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\(^{165}\) A. Deissler, Die Psalmen (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1964), 407.

\(^{166}\) Some argue for a cultic setting, but it could also have accompanied a Festgottesdienst at which time it was recited. Cf. Deissler, Die Psalmen, 407-8.


\(^{168}\) Pss 139:8-10; 31:16, 6; 84:3 provide further examples of an acute awareness of life’s dependency on the creator.
present a theological problem within the context of the psalm? Or does the presence of the theme of death within such an overtly doxological context offer a piece of theological realism, i.e. that the psalmist did not turn a blind eye to the dark edges of well-ordered and beneficial divine creation (v 35)?

In this chapter we will firstly consider the demarcation of the text (§2.1), followed by a consideration of the style, structure and thematic division of Ps 104 (§2.2), and a translation of the text (§2.3). An analysis of Ps 104 (§2.4) will provide the background for the thematic discussion (§2.5), while the chapter will be drawn to a close by some conclusions (§2.6).

### 2.1 Delimitation of the Text

Ps 104 shares some stylistic features and theological tones with its neighbouring psalms. But despite the editorial process that gave shape to the fourth book of the HB Psalter, Ps 104 managed to maintain a distinct theme and theological voice. In its present form Ps 104 opens and closes with a summons to praise (הויי אָל הַשִּׁיר ובנ) in vv 1a and 35b, constituting a literary unit that may be studied independently. It is the present form of Ps 104 that concerns us here, and not how it received this form. Yet, the literary relation of Ps 104 in its final form with Ps 103 and 105 is complex. For this reason the literary setting of Ps 104, as part of the fourth book (Pss 90-106) of the HB Psalter, cannot be ignored.

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169 M.D. Goulder, “The Fourth book of the Psalter.” *JTS* 26 (1975): 269-89 discusses the arrangement of the psalms in Book IV and views it as a unified collection. Also J. Schnocks, *Vergänglichkeit und Gottesherrschaft: Studien zu Psalm 90 und dem vierten Psalmenbuch* (BBB 140; Berlin: Philo, 2002), 242 who argues that Ps 104 has been placed in its present literary context, which is indicated by redactional attempts to make it fit.

170 E.S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms 2 and Lamentations* (FOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 221.

171 T. Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie: zwischen Mythos und Erfahrung: Psalm 104 im Horizont altorientalischer und alttestamentlicher Schöpfungs-Konzepte.” in: T. Krüger, *Kritische Weisheit: Studien zur weisheitlichen Traditionskritik im Alten Testament* (Zürich: Pano Verlag, 1997), 91-120 (114) places the emphasis on the final form of the text, while H. Spieckermann *Heilsgegenwart: Eine Theologie der Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 21-49 attempts to track the traces of a particular Vorlage of the Psalm. Both analyse Ps 104 as a literary unit. The suggestion of Spieckermann, *Heilsgegenwart*, 32, 46, 48 concerning the developmental stages of Ps 104 is noteworthy. He distinguishes between a shorter pre-exilic version, and an expanded post-exilic version, arguing that the basic design of Ps 104 consists of three parts (I: 1a-8; II: 10f, 14-19, 20-23; III: 24 a-b, 27-29a, 30, 33), that praises God’s presence in the world, as well as his loving care for the cosmos and creature alike. Thus Ps 104 became a creation psalm by means of extensive redactional labour (v 5-7, 8), 9, 12f, 19, 24ab, 25f, 29b, 31f, 34, 35a), laying the claim on divine creation, rather than providence. See also M. Köckert, “Literargeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Beobachtungen zu Ps 104,” in: R.G. Kratz et al., *Schriftauslegung in der Schrift: Festschrift für Odil Hannes Steck zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (BZAW 300; Berlin; NY: de Gruyter, 2000), 259-279. He regards vv 1a-2a, 11, 13b, 20-24a, 27-29a, 30, 31, 33-34 as a first expansion after 700 BCE, while 5-9, 16-18, 19, 24b, 25-26 presents further postexilic expansions.

172 D.M. Howard, “Editorial Activity in the Psalter,” in: J.C. McCann (ed.), *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 68. He argues that “the reading of individual psalms can only be enhanced when these are considered in light of their neighboring psalms, and the reading of the Psalter as a whole is likewise enhanced when its larger themes are highlighted.”

173 The Psalter is mostly divided into five books, namely 1-41 (I); 42-72 (II); 73-89 (III); 90-106 (IV); 107-150 (V), which is the result of editorial activity in the Psalter. Howard, “Editorial Activity in the Psalter,” 68 points out that “most studies on the editorial activity in the Psalter approach it either at the
In Ps 103 (1a, 22c) and 104 (1a; 35b) the phrase ϵλατα ιενον αυτολαμαντα forms an inclusio and provides a formal relation between these two psalms, provoking the thought of common authorship. But formal linkages do not have to be equated with common authorship. Ps 103 is a Davidic psalm (David) and some scholars suggest that Ps 104 presents a continuation of Ps 103. In particular that it presents an elaboration of the cosmic reign of YHWH proclaimed in Ps 103:19-22. This implies that Ps 104 should be read in light of Ps 103, in which the theme of death is also present (vv 14-16). But these formal aspects are not sufficient reason to regard psalms 103 and 104 as “twin psalms.” The formal relations are best ascribed to editorial labour, while the difference in theme and content suggests an independent literary hand. In Ps 103 it is specifically the steadfast love (δνξ) of YHWH that is celebrated, while His work (χριον of creation is the focus of praise in Ps 104. The first person praise with which Ps 103:2 commences is continued in the remainder of the psalm, but in Ps 104 the focus of the praise quickly shifts to the creator.

Some formal relations also exist between Ps 104 and 105. The phrase ϵλαται in Ps 104:35b provides a formal link to Ps 105a, which reads ϵλαται κατα, i.e. “give praise to YHWH.” The use of vocabulary such as χυ (noun, “musing”) in Ps 104:34, and

higher level of collections and large, organizing principles, or at the lower level of links between adjacent psalms, and some do so on both levels.”

174 G.H. Wilson, “Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms,” in J.C. McCann (ed.), The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 75 points to a noticeable shift as one moves from the first three books of the Psalter into the forth. While most of these psalms are untitled, they do reflect a sustained, thematic unity that focuses on the kingship of YHWH.

175 Spronk, Beatific Afterlife, 287-289 points to the value and difficulty in comparing Ps 103 (later) and 104 (earlier), since the two psalms apparently stems from two different historical periods. If both texts are located in the exilic-postexilic context, formal linkages do not have to indicate a common authorship. See also L.C. Allen, Psalms 101-150 (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), 26.

176 For Ps 104 the LXX and Vulgate add δαλ, thus establishing a link between Ps 103 and 104.


179 This is argued by P.D. Miller, “Poetry of Creation Psalm 104,” in: W.P. Brown and S.D. McBride (eds.), God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W Sibley Towner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 101-102, stating that “The poetic praise of God as creator and sustainer of the world must be read and heard with the preceding thanksgiving to God for compassion, mercy, and forgiveness.” Similarly the thematic links with Ps 145:4, 10 and Ps 33:4-7 should not be overlooked.

180 Other formal relations include the use of υδι in 103:5 and 104:30; the characterisation of humankind as dust (τριος) in 103:14 and 104:29; the reference to YHWH’s heavenly residence in 103:19 and 104:2; the reference to the angels as the servants of YHWH in 103:20-21 and 104:4.

181 J.L. Mays, “The Question of Context in Psalm Interpretation,” in: J.C. McCann (ed.), The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 19. He regards the “sinners” as the objects of YHWH’s δει in Ps 103. In contrast, Ps 104 has a general focus. Cf. Krüger, Psalm 90 und die Vergänglichkeit des Menschen, 88. He does however regard the “God fearing” as the focus of Ps 103.

182 Gerstenberger, Psalms 2 and Lamentations, 221.

183 Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 101. For Wilson, “Shaping the Psalter,” 79 the so-called wisdom frame of Book IV provides a unifying element, drawing Book IV and V together. As such Ps 90 (11-12)
ψυχ (verb, “sing”) in Ps 105:2 provides another link.\textsuperscript{[184]} The verbs in Ps 104:33-34 that indicate the psalmist’s intention of joy (“sing” – ψυχ; “sing praise” - ρρᾶ “meditate” - ἑχ; “pleasing” - βρ[; and “rejoice” - Ἰρά] follows a similar sequence in Ps 105:2-3 (ψυχ; ρρᾶ ἑχ; Ἰρά Ἰρά), with the verb ὁλόθθοσ inserted before the last verb (Ἰρά).\textsuperscript{[185]}

Despite these formal linkages, the difference between Ps 104 and 105 concerning theme and content is even greater than between Ps 103 and 104. Ps 104 is a creation psalm, celebrating the works of YHWH. Ps 105 and 106 constitute twin historical psalms,\textsuperscript{[186]} and are thematically of a different nature.\textsuperscript{[187]} In the larger context of Ps 101-106 the theme of repentance is prominent, but this theme lacks in Ps 104. In view of this repentance theme, Ps 104 in its present location can be regarded as an affirmation of the universal sovereignty of YHWH.\textsuperscript{[188]} Thus, the present setting of Ps 104 is of theological significance. Yet the framework of Ps 104, which connects it with Ps 103 and 105, also suggests that Ps 104 forms a literary unit. This, coupled with the fact that it is thematically distinguishable from its neighbouring psalms, allows for a consideration of Ps 104 as literary and theological unit.

2.2 The Style, Structure and Thematic Division of Ps 104

Psalm 104 is best described as an individual hymn of doxology, which is indicated by the opening and closing self-exhortation in vv 1 and 35 (Ὑάτα ὑμνύρσκο), as well as the personal references in vv 33-34.\textsuperscript{[189]} It is further characteristic of Ps 104 that it combines a hymnic participial style with direct address to YHWH.\textsuperscript{[190]} This hymnic style and doxological character is further indicated by the structure and build-up of the text. Elaborate investigations into the structure of the Ps 104 are scant,\textsuperscript{[191]} despite the incoherence in terms of thematic structure.\textsuperscript{[192]} In this study Fokkelman’s division of Ps 104 into seven stanzas (1-4; 5-9; 10-13; 14-18; 19-23; 24-30; 31-35) is regarded as providing a good framework for the interpretation of the text.\textsuperscript{[193]} The structural divisions of most commentaries are comparable with that of Fokkelman.\textsuperscript{[194]}

reflects in part the concern of the wisdom tradition, contrasting the sovereignty of God with the transience of humanity.\textsuperscript{[184]} For Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 102 Ps 104 leads into the “national” hymns of Psalms 105 and 106.\textsuperscript{[185]} Idem, 102. It is the only occurrence of this combination in the HB.\textsuperscript{[186]} For the relation of these two psalms in later traditions, see G.J. Brooke, “Psalms 105 and 106 at Qumran.” RevQ 14 (1989): 267-292.\textsuperscript{[187]} Miller, Poetry of Creation, 101-102.\textsuperscript{[188]} S.E. Gillingham, The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible (OBS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 270-271. For D.C. Mitchell, The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of the Psalms (JSOTSUp 252; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 293 this implies that YHWH will deliver Israel from exile, restoring them to life as from death.\textsuperscript{[189]} Allen, Psalms 101-150, 28. The idea of a personal hymn is shared by various scholars, yet Gerstenberger, Psalms 2 and Lamentations, 226 regards Ps 104 as a personal and communal hymn.\textsuperscript{[190]} The cluster of participles in vv 2-5 (ἤφ[ “covers”; ἠθον “stretches”; ἔδωκ “lays beams”; ἔφε “makes”; ὁ ἱ “walks”; ἔβας “flaming”) serve to initiate different themes, while direct address is used for the development of these themes (vv 7, 9, 13b, 20), with exceptions in vv 1ab-b and 24-34. Cf. Allen, Psalms 101-150, 28.\textsuperscript{[191]} Allen, Psalms 101-150, 31.\textsuperscript{[192]} Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 94. Contra Krauss, Psalmen, 883 for whom “Ein thematisch genau bestimmtes Stück folgt dem anderen.”\textsuperscript{[193]} J.P. Fokkelman, Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible: at the Interface of Hermeneutics and Structural Analysis Vol. II (SSN 41; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2000), 264. He divides Ps 104 into seven stanzas, thus elaborating on the earlier suggestion of K. Fullerton, “The Feeling for Form in Psalm 104.” JBL 40 (1921): 43-56 who identified a five-line strophe structure in Ps 104. D.M. Howard, Jr, The Structure of
The opening stanza (vv 1-4) with its hymnic character is clearly “God directed” and “heaven centered”, addressing God directly (yhi a hwhy), speaking of God (second person), heaven (µymv) and light (rwa). Stanza 2 (vv 5-9) by contrast is “earth centered”, with the triple use of the negative lb (vv 5x1; 9x2) forming a ring round the stanza as a whole, ending with a reference to the earth (Årah). Likewise stanza 3 (vv 10-13) ends with a focus on the earth, Årah (v 13, an epiphora, i.e. the repetition of words at the end of sentences etc.), while the mountains (µyrh) are mentioned twice (vv 10, 13). The linear repetition of jqv (Hi, “give to drink”) in vv 11 and 13 serve to indicate the central importance of the provision of water. Stanza 4 (vv 14-18) has as subject food and safe dwelling, stressing the theme of divine providence. Here the inclusion of humanity (vwna, v 15; µda, v 23) and work (l[p, v 23; hc, rmv 24) serve to link stanza 5 to 4. Stanza 5 (vv 19-23) opens in doxological fashion with hc[ (here “to appoint”) and deals with so-called “experiential time” for all created beings, with the time for man (day) and beast (night) reversed. The reference to the sun rising and setting (vv 22-23) is reminiscent of the merism moo n / sun of v 19. In stanza 6 (vv 24-30) and stanza 7, the divine name YHWH occurs quite frequently, in contrast to its absence within the preceding verses. Stanza 6 and 7 commences with a reference to the works (hc[ rm+ second singular suffix) of God. The hymnic tone of Ps 104 increases in these verses, with the use of hwhy at the opening of stanza 6 being vocative in the acclamation of praise. However, stanza 7 and 6 are distinguished by the use of grammatical persons for God (second person in stanza 6; third and first person in stanza 7). The praise of YHWH for his work (hc[ rm) is also the theme of Stanza 7 (vv 31-35), but here in the third person “he”, in contrast with the second person “you” of stanza 6. In this way stanza 7 commences with a reference to the glory of YHWH (hwhy dwhk), and closes with a double praise of YHWH in v 35. In the following analysis of the text this proposed structural and thematic division is employed.

Psalms 93-100 (PhD dissertation; University of Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1986) identifies two important editorial techniques in these psalms, namely the “overlap/interlock” technique for binding groups together, and the “frame” that provides an interpretative context. Cf. Wilson, “Shaping the Psalter.” 76.

C.A. Briggs, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1906), 331-337 identified seven strophes, 1-4; 5-9; 10-13; 14-18; 19-23; 24-28; 29-35; K. Seybold, Psalmen, (HAT; Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 2003), 409-410 also identifies seven strophes, 1ab-4; 5-9; 10-18; 19-23; 24-26; 27-30; 31-35, regarding v 1aa as self-introduction and vv 30-35 as concluding addition. Kraus, Psalmen II, 879 identifies 8 strophes, 1-4; 5-9; 10-12; 13-18; 19-24; 25-26; 27-30; 31-35. J.P.M. van der Ploeg, Psalmen Deel II (Roermond: JJ Romen & Zonen Uitgevers, 1974), 186-187 divides the psalm into 10 strophes, 1-4; 5-9; 10-11; 12; 13-16; 17-18; 19-23; 24-26; 27-30; 31-35. McCann, Psalms, 1097 divides the psalm into five strophes 1-4; 5-13; 14-23; 24-30; 31-35. So also Mitchell, The Message of the Psalter, 293 and Allen, Psalms 101-150, 32. Allen adds a further division, arguing that the psalm forms a concentric composition, with the first and last of its five strophes being half the size of the central strophe, i.e. 1-4; 5-13 (5-9 + 10-13); 14-23 (14-18 + 19-23); 24-30 (24-26 + 27-30); 31-35. The division of the BHS, namely 1-9; 10-12; 13-18; 19-23; 24-26; 27-32; 33-35 is almost never employed.

Fokkelman, Major Poems II, 265.

Idem, 265.

Idem, 266.

Idem, 266.

Idem, 267.
1a Bless YHWH my soul. 200
1b YHWH, my God, 201 you are very great;
1b you are clothed with majesty and honour 203
2a Who covers 204 thyself with light as with a garment –
2b who stretches out the heavens like a curtain
3a Who lays the beams 205 of his chambers in the waters –
3b who makes the clouds his chariot –
4a Who makes His angels spirits;
4b his ministers 207 a flaming 208 fire

5a Who laid the foundations of the earth;
5b that it should not 209 be removed for ever
6a You cover 210 it 211 with the deep as with a garment;
6b the waters stood above the mountains
7a At your rebuke they fled;
7b at the sound of your thunder they hasted away
8a They 212 go up mountains and they go down valleys
8b to the place 213 that 214 you have founded for them
9a You have set a bound that they may not pass over;

The LXX and 11QPsa reads χρί “for David,” making the psalm part of the corpus of Davidic psalms, and brings it in closer proximity with Ps 103, which also commences with χρί. For a comparison of Ps 104 with the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls, see P.W. Flint, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Book of Psalms* (STDJ 17; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 58-59, 62, 65-66, 96-98.


Within Ps 104 YHWH is mostly addressed in the second person form of the verbs and suffixes (vv 1bc, 6-9, 13b, 20a, 24, 26b, 27-30), but also within the third person (4b, 5a, 11b, 19a). In the style of the hymn, a number of participles are also used of YHWH (vv 2-4, 10, 13a, 14). Within the Egyptian Hymn to Aton the sun god is similarly addressed with the second person, while the description of the creation is in the third person, as is the case within Ps 104. Cf. Van der Ploeg, *Psalmen*, 187.

The word pair χρά and ρυβ also occurs in Job 40:11.

The critical apparatus proposes υψ [υ] for υ [υ], the absent t suggesting haplography. The use of υψ [υ] “covers” and ρυβ [ρυβ] “stretches” is indicative of rhythm and assonance typical of poetry. Thus ρυβ does not have to be emended to ρυβ [ρυβ] as the critical apparatus suggests (the absent t presenting a case of haplography).

M. Dahood, *Psalms III, 100-150* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1970), 34 points to the Ugaritic qryt “granary” and the Akkadian qaritu, suggesting that the opening word of v 3 is identical to the Hebrew hrq “plank, boarding.” In Job 37:9 a form of hrq occurs with the meaning “storeroom,” while Ps 33:7 recounts that YHWH puts the deep into storehouses.

Cf. Ps 18:11 for the phrase ἡ ἀνάρκα [ἡ ἀνάρκα].

The LXX and Peshitta read a conjunction before the reference to “his ministers.”


Here and twice in v 9 the poetic λις is used instead of αλ.

The LXX reads το η περιβο λαι αν α υ ου, i.e. χοικ [ψκ] instead of χοικ [ψκ]. Seybold, *Psalmen*, 408 suggests the reading το [το ψκ] i.e. “sein Überwurf.”

Some manuscripts suggest a reading with the feminine suffix χοικ i.e. “you cover her,” as in v 9.

Briggs, *Psalms*, 338 described the change from the plural form χοικ within this verse as a gloss.

Seybold, *Psalmen*, 408 points to 2QPa that reads [ι] ψκ ων i.e. “to every (place).”

Some manuscripts omit the demonstrative pronoun ἡ.
9b that they turn not again and cover the earth

10a He sends the springs into the valleys
10b which run among the hills215
11a They provide drink to every beast216 of the field;
11b the wild asses quench217 their thirst218
12a By them the fowls of the heaven shall have their habitation,
12b which give a voice219 among the branches220
13a He waters the hills from His chambers;
13b the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your works221

14a He causes the grass to grow for the cattle;
14b and the herb for the service222 of man;223
14b that they may bring forth food224 out of the earth
15a And wine that makes glad the heart of man;225
15b oil226 that makes his face shine227
16a And the trees of YHWH228 are satisfied,
16b Cedars of Lebanon that he planted
17a Where229 the birds make their nests;
17b the stork - the fir trees230 are her house
18a The hills231 are a refuge232 for the wild goats;233

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215 LXX adds υἱὰ τὰ, i.e. υἱὸν Seybold, Psalmen, 408 suggests the reading “lassen sie Wasser fließen.”
216 See also Gen 1:24 and Ps 104:20. Seybold, Psalmen, 408 points out that 4QPsd reads the plural τῳ βη "with them that give a voice" among the branches. 204 reads a reading “satisfies their thirst.”
218 Some manuscripts read μελος. It is unclear what the exact rendering of the hapax χάρα “thick foliage” should be. Some manuscripts suggests μελος or the Aramaic μαρακτος, while the LXX reads τῷ φῶς τῆς ἔρημου i.e. “from stones, rocks.”
219 Seybold, Psalmen, 408 favours the reading άκρα y μαρακτος der Fülle deiner Speicher.”
220 Here ḫḏḥ “service” is used in an agricultural sense.
221 The critical apparatus suggests the transposition of ḫḏḥ to the end of the verse. Depending on whether ḫḏḥ is interpreted as a subject or objective genitive, one could read “for the service of man” or “for man to cultivate.”
222 The critical apparatus suggests j 1. Seybold, Psalmen, 408 points to the alternative reading j 1, i.e. “Lebenssaft.”
223 Briggs, Psalms, 338 argued that וַאֲמַלְךָ j את y ḫ查看更多 represents a gloss from a different construction than its present context.
224 The LXX reads ἐπὶ ἔδαφῳ ὑπὸ τῶν ἔρημων, i.e. ἐπὶ Reading the preposition ἐπὶ is tenable, indicating the use of oil for making one’s face shine.
225 It has been suggested that the hapax ἐκατοσκευάσω of the LXX is a variant (Hi) of ἐκατοσκευάζω “shines.” Cf. Briggs, Psalms, 338; Allen, Psalms 101-150, 27.
226 In the LXX it is not clear whether ἐκατοσκευάζω should be read as τούτου ἐκατοσκευάζω or κυρίου. The first option suggests a reading ἐκατοσκευάζω, which does fit the context and also occurs in Ps 8:8. Briggs, Psalms, 338 suggested an original reading ἐκατοσκευάζω. But μαρακτος is also is also fitting and is read here.
227 The MT reads μαρακτος but the LXX and Peshitta omit τοῦ. Seybold, Psalmen, 408 regards μαρακτος as superfluous, while Briggs, Psalms, 338 regards sees it as a gloss.
228 For μαρακτος the LXX reads ἡδοὺ τῶν ἔρημων, i.e. as a reference to cypress or fir trees, as in Isa 14:8; 37:24 and Ezek 31:8 as an accusative of place. The Peshitta reads the preposition ב further locating the habitation of the stork.
229 The critical apparatus suggest reading μαρακτος without the ב which is suggestive of haplography.
18b the rocks a refuge for the rock badger

19a You have made the moon for seasons;
19b the sun knows its going down
20a You make darkness, and it is night,
20b wherein all the animals of the forest creep
21a The young lions roar after their prey;
21b and seek their meat from God
22a The sun rises, they gather themselves together,
22b and lie down in their dens
23a Man goes to his work
23b and to his labour, until evening

24a How manifold are your works, YHWH;
24b you have made them all in wisdom,
24c the earth is full of your riches
25a So is this great and wide sea,
25b wherein are things creeping innumerable,
25c both small and great beasts
26a There go the ships –
26b the Leviathan whom you have formed, to play in it
27a They all wait upon you –
27b that you may give their meat in due time
28a When you give them, they gather it up;
28b you open your hand and they are filled with good
29a You hide your face, they are troubled

232 Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 114 argues that the expressions הָנַב “high, exalted” and הָשֶׁב “refuge” are reminiscent of the expression sometimes used “…für die von Jahweh gewährte ‘Zuflucht’ – etwa im Tempel (vgl Ps 61:4f) – oder Jahwe selbst als ‘Zuflucht’ steht.”
233 See also Job 39:1 and 2 Sam 24:2 for יָהוּ. The LXX reads εἰς τὸ ἰοργόν, i.e. “stag, deer”
234 The LXX reads τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, i.e. “coney,” belonging to the “unclean” animals.
235 The critical apparatus suggest the participle הָבְח, thus providing a clearer indication of the perpetual nature of the creative activity of YHWH.
236 The versions of Aquila and Symmachus read εἰς τὸ ἱερό, which points to the פִּי suggesting that YHWH makes the sun know its proper time to set.
237 The Peshitta reads a third person singular, “he makes.”
238 The LXX reads קַי; εἰς τὸ ἱερό, i.e. יָהוּ
239 The rising of the sun is indicated by יָהוּ “to rise, come forth,” as well as אָפֵי in v 23a.
240 Following the LXX and פו one could read a conjunction פּוּר before הָבְח, i.e., “and they gather.”
241 א reads יָהוּ וָאָמ
242 Briggs, Psalms, 338 saw עַר אָמ as a gloss. But the noun הָבְח “works,” qualified by אָמ “manifold,” contributes to the portrayal of YHWH as majestic creator.
243 The reading of the LXX suggests א. For Fokkelman, Major Poems II, 266-7 א in v 24b returns as a marker in v 27a, arguing that “the echo of ‘them all’ is not coincidentally א כא “their food” of v 27b.”
244 The הָבְח is omitted in א. The Ê reads הָבְח וָאָמ
245 The Ê adds הָבְח וָאָמ
246 Here א can be read as chiastic counterpart to א at the end of v 26.
247 A translation “to play with” is possible if Leviathan is understood as YHWHs “plaything.”
248 א reads הָבְח וָאָמ “for them.”
249 א reads וָאָמ פּוּר, i.e. “and gather.” For פּוּר, see also Gen 31:46 and Exod 16:4, 5, 26.
250 The Peshitta omits בְּּוָא, but the LXX supports the MT.
251 This line is omitted in א. The usual rendering of וָאָמ is “they are dismayed,” but in this context can also be rendered “they expire.”
29a they take away their breath, they die
29b and return to their dust
30a You send forth your Spirit, they are created –
30b and you renew the face of the earth

31a The glory of YHWH will be forever,
31b YHWH shall rejoice in His works
32a He looks on the earth and it trembles;
32b he touches the hills and they smoke
33a I will sing unto YHWH as long as I live,
33b I will sing praise to my God while I have my being
34a My meditation of Him will be sweet;
34b I will rejoice in YHWH

35a Let the sinners be consumed from the earth,
35b and let the wicked be no more;
35a Bless YHWH my soul;
35b praise YHWH

2.4 An Analysis of Psalm 104

In this analysis of the text of Ps 104 the focus will rest on those elements that contribute to the doxological tone of the psalm’s creation theology, as well as those elements that contribute in giving shape to the particular relation of creation and death in this psalm.

Verses 1-4: Focus on the Heavens

The opening and closing phrase in verse 1 and 35 forms an inclusio to the psalm as a whole, but also stands apart from the body of the Psalm and as such has been interpreted as a liturgical addition to the original form of the psalm. Such a “liturgical addition” implies a corresponding liturgical use and cultic context for Ps 104, but the uncertainty of its setting renders such an argument tentative.

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252 ḫ reads ḫ instead of ḫ.
253 Ps 90:3 reads the hapax ḥd instead of ḣ. For Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 89 it has a local meaning, i.e. “You make man return to dust and say, Return, o mortals.”
254 The LXX, Ṣ and Peshitta read a conjunction Ṣbefore ḥb.
255 Ps 51:12 reads a Pi of ṣd “renew.”
256 Ṣ reads Ṣ before Ṣh.
257 Ṣ reads Ṣa instead of Ṣa.
258 Briggs, Psalms, 339 translated ṣd as “during my life” which also fits the context well.
259 The LXX reads ṣh as part of Ps 105, but the Peshitta omits it. Some manuscripts read ṣw.
261 Dahood, Psalms III, 33.
262 Briggs, Psalms, 337.
263 Gerstenberger, Psalms 2 and Lamentations, 222-227.
264 Goulder, The Fourth Book, 269 builds on the insights of Gunkel and Mowinckel and argues that the material of Book IV was collected for liturgical purposes and that the liturgical setting is the Autumn Festival, with the uneven psalms within Book IV recited in the morning and the even-numbered psalms in the evening. In this regard G.H. Wilson, “Understanding the Purposeful Arrangement of Psalms in...
The combination of themes in v 1 establishes the doxological nature of Ps 104. This includes the “greatness” (כְָּדַּמְתִי ֲדָגָּה), “glory” (וֹדוֹ), and “honour” (רָדָּה) of YHWH (יהוה). In this way “glory and honour” (רָדָּה וֹדוֹ) could have a royal connotation, as in Ps 96:6 and Job 40:10. This would befit the description of YHWH’s exalted status, while it does not imply that Ps 104 is a royal psalm proper. The metaphors used to describe YHWH “clothing” (וֹדַּב) and “covering” (וּנָּחַּפ) Himself in vv 1-2 reflects an affinity with Ps 93:1 (ודב x2). In tandem with Ps 103, Ps 104 affirms God’s cosmic sovereignty, and presents a response to the theological crisis articulated in Psalms 101-102.

In verse 2 the first participle phrase (וֹנָּחַּפ, “covering”) of the psalm continues the metaphorical doxology of YHWH as initiated in v 1. These images contribute to the argument that the opening verses of Ps 104 describe a divine theophany, conveying a sense of the divine power. The image of YHWH stretching out (וּנָּחַּפ) the
heavens like a curtain (יהב) is in line with the ancient Israelite cosmology, depicting the heavens as consisting of windowed vaults held up by columns that reach to the earth (cf. Job 26:11), or that it is like a veil or tent which God has stretched out over the earth (cf. Isa 40:22).\(^{276}\) YHWH’s “covering” Himself with “light” (רוא)\(^{277}\) is a disputed phrase,\(^{278}\) and some scholars here identify “light” (רוא) with “sun” (רומא).\(^{279}\) But such a connection is difficult to substantiate on the basis of the text, which does not provide a clear reason for an identification of YHWH with the sun.\(^{280}\) Rather, the reference to light emphasise the glory of YHWH and is not immediately reflective of a solarisation of the Deity.\(^{281}\) The absence of any reference to the creation of light (רוא, compare Gen 1:3, רוא יה) is significant. This might bring Ps 104:2 into closer proximity with the Egyptian Hymn to Aton than with Genesis 1. Then again, the reference to YHWH stretching out the heavens in v 3 reflects a closer affinity with Genesis 1 (see §2.5.1 & 2.5.2). In Ps 104 the “heavens” (確か) is YHWH’s creation and His abode.\(^{282}\) Despite His elevated and celestial status, YHWH’s providential care for and control over the whole of His creation is made unambiguously clear in Ps 104, since here divine transcendence does not imply divine apathy.

The exact translation of the opening line of verse 3, which describes YHWH’s “laying the beams of His roof-chamber in the waters” (כוו [ ורור הרגת),\(^{283}\) is problematic due to the unclear nature of the imagery employed (see also Amos 9:6).\(^{284}\) Whatever the exact nature, this imagery continues the doxological tone of vv

\(^{275}\) The verb חנן “to stretch out” occurs numerously in the Psalter. In the Qal Ps 17:11; 18:10; 21:12; 40:2; 44:19; 62:4; 73:2; 102:12; 109:23; 119:51, 112, 157; 136:12; Hi 17:6; 27:9; 31:3; 45:11; 49:5; 71:2; 78:1; 86:1; 88:3; 102:3; 116:2; 119:36; 125:5; 141:4; 144:5. The verb could of course also be used in the sense of pitching a tent (Gen 12:8; 26:25; 2 Sam 16:22; Isa 54:2). Houtman, Der Himmel, 211 regards “heaven” in 104:2b as comparable with a tent flap.


\(^{277}\) Other occurrences of רוא in the Psalter include 27:1; 36:10; 37:6; 56:14; 78:14; 89:16; 119:105; 136:7; 139:11; 148:3; 38:11; 44:4; 97:11; 112:4 (subject); 4:7; 36:10; 43:3; 49:20 (object).

\(^{278}\) For L. Boström, The God of the Sages: The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs (CBOTS 29; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990), 152 the majesty of the creator in Ps 104 is manifested in the sun, and the power of life brought to all creatures.

\(^{279}\) Dahood, Psalms III, 33-34.

\(^{280}\) J.G. Taylor, Yahweh and the Sun: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel (JSOTSup 111; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 230 states that psalmist distanced himself from the concept within Atenism that God was the same as the sun as a physical object. It is also not clear to what extent the poetic imagery reflects a solar understanding of YHWH or whether this imagery reflects a notion of God as solar within the cult. Whether Ps 104 should be interpreted as a polemic against sun worship also remains unclear. What is clear for Taylor is that there was a need to react against a simplistic equation of God and physical sun and that this is arguable on the basis of Genesis 1.

\(^{281}\) Podella, Das Lichtkleid JHWHs, 233 addresses the question whether or not a so-called process of “Solarisierung” is noticeable within Ps 104 (in this regard it could be compared with the so-called “Morgenmotief” in Priestly theology, which is connected with the theme of רמקל).\(^{282}\) Miller, “The Poetry of Creation,” 89 sees the equation of “light” and “glory” as appropriate, since the רמקל, which in the priestly tradition and elsewhere is a symbol of God’s presence, is itself the image of light and radiance. Here one can also compare the work of Keel concerning the solarisation in later YHWH religion.

\(^{282}\) Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 89. As merism “heaven and earth” do not present opposites, but are rather part of the created order of YHWH who comes down from His heavenly abode to establish (כָּסָף) the foundations of the earth (v 5), imposing His benevolent order.

\(^{283}\) Here the reference to the “waters” (確か) is related to the heavenly sphere, and is a recurring theme within the psalm, as symbol of chaos but also of divine providence.

\(^{284}\) Podella, Das Lichtkleid JHWHs, 236. Here as in Jer 10, reference is made to the atmospheric qualities of YHWH. Cf. H. Weippert, Schöpfer des Himmels und der Erde: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie
1-2, emphasising the exalted state of YHWH, whose rule reaches from His “heavenly abode” (ûy, “roof-chamber”) to the “foundations” (ûynk) of the earth (v 5). Interpreting the imagery employed in v 3 requires sensitivity for the wider ancient Near Eastern\textsuperscript{285} and biblical\textsuperscript{286} context, while recognising that these literary and religious motifs have been recycled by the psalmist, putting them to his own theological use in describing the exalted status of the omnipotent creator in creation. This is particularly reflected in the depiction of YHWH as “rider of the clouds.”\textsuperscript{287} He “makes” (ûjm) the “clouds” (ûjm) His “chariot” (ûobl), and “walks” (ûh) upon the “wings” (ûpkr) of the “wind” (jûw). By means of employing familiar ancient Near Eastern mythological motifs, the psalmist depicts YHWH as driving His chariot across the clouds,\textsuperscript{290} with the wings of the chariot being those of the cherubim (v 4). The purpose of this imagery is to establish the exalted status of YHWH in the heavens (ûlnw) and as such within creation. For this purpose the use of jûw is significant, since it may present a vehicle for divine movement (in Ezek 10:17 jûw is such a vehicle for movement).\textsuperscript{291} Yet, in v 4 the pural (tûyûw) is used, pointing to messengers of YHWH

\textsuperscript{285} Here we can note the similar entitlement of Baal as “rider of the clouds” (râkibu ’arapâti) in Ugaritic material. Cf. Mullen, The Divine Counsel, 148; J. Day, Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan (JSOTSup 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 91, 93. But Day does not share the opinion that the Ugaritic râkibu ’arapâti (“rider of the clouds”) has its exact equivalent in the expression tûlrûbkr (“rider of the steppes”) as used of YHWH in Ps 68:5. He considers the possibility that it is a deliberate distortion of the epithet râkibu ’arapâti for Baal. Here the argument of M.S. Smith, The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 168 is suggestive, namely that this entitlement reflects a political use of conflict language in Ugaritic material, which passed into the literature of ancient Israel. For such instances in the HB he cites Deut 33:26, Ps 104:3 and Ps 68:5. Such “political use” is also found in Ps 89, paralleling YHWH (divine king) and David (human king).

\textsuperscript{286} Here we can compare 2 Sam 22:11, “And He rode upon a cherub and did fly: and He was seen upon the wings of the wind”: Ps 18:11, “He rode upon a cherub, and did fly: He did fly upon the wings of the wind”: Hab 3:8, “You rode upon your horses” and “chariots of salvation.” Cf. Day, Yahweh and the Gods, 93-94. Also Briggs, Psalms, 337-38, who reads bûrk (“cherub”) for bûlkr (“his chariot”) as in Ps 18:11 (HB), on account of the parallelism with jwâpkr[û] in both passages.

\textsuperscript{287} While jûw “to set” occurs numerously in the Psalter, its use in Book IV is rather limited, cf. 91:9; 104:9; 105:21; 27. In Ps 104 it contributes to create an image of the creator as having control over creation, and creation as a place to be trusted.

\textsuperscript{289} In the HB Psalter ûh occurs in the Pi in 38:7; 55:15; 81:14; 85:14; 86:11; 89:16; 104:10, 26; 115:7; 131:1; 142:4. Here YHWH is said to walk upon the wings of the wind, while in Ps 18:11 He is said to “fly” (ûbd) on the wings of the wind.

\textsuperscript{290} Dahood, Psalms III, 35. Yet O. Keel and C. Uehlihnger, Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole: Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen (QD 134; Freiburg: Herder, 1992), 352 regards the clouds as YHWH’s chariot. Also Isa 19:1, where YHWH rides on clouds toward Egypt.

\textsuperscript{291} For this reason the argument that YHWH’s “cloud chariot” is being drawn by “winged horses” is less tenable.

who are at His disposal and are set in motion for the divine purpose. This theme extends into v 4.

The translation of verse 4 is problematic. A plausible translation is “He makes the wind his messengers; Flames of fire his ministers.” In such a translation jw is as a designation for the messengers of YHWH, but the question remains whether twjw here refers to “spirits” or “angels”, and cannot be neutrally interpreted in meteorological terms. The description of YHWH’s messengers (see also Ps 103:20; 148:2; Isa 44:26; Job 4:18; 33:23) being accompanied by fire could have a “warlike” function, but also a function of praising the deity within the divine assembly. While the imagery is intended to depict the glory of YHWH within the heavens, any clear reference to a divine council is lacking. The description of YHWH’s ministers (trv) as va fhl “a flaming fire” requires clarification. In the Canaanite pantheon “fire” (va) and “flame” (fhl, ptc.) functioned as two minor deities, but became serviceable to YHWH (c.f. Ps 97:3; Joel 2:3) in Israelite religion. In this verse we encounter a mythological allusion that is cast in a new theological mould. Of central importance is the description of YHWH as creator, as the one that “makes” (hc, also vv 13, 19, 24 x 2, 31).

Verses 5-9: Focus on the Earth

In verse 5 the emphasis shifts from YHWH’s heavenly abode to the earthly realm, with Åra in vv 5 and 9 forming an inclusio. At issue in vv 5-9 are past events, as indicated by the use of the perfects dsy “laid” and of µyc “set” in v 9. In v 5 YHWH...
is depicted as divine architect who established (דָּשָּׁי, "maker") the earth (הַאֲרָא) on its foundations (דָּשָּׁי). That creation has been secured, and that it will remain secure is indicated by the use of the negative לא and the imperfect וַיַּחְסֶה ("be removed"), which is complimented by the use of דָּשָּׁי ("forever"). Verse 5 depicts creation as divinely established and secure (also Amos 9:6), and while YHWH "rebukes" the waters in v 7, no real Chaoskampf motif as in Ps 74 is present in vv 5-9. But here "the waters," indicative of the primeval waters, i.e. life-threatening chaos, are set in its place rather than eliminated (also Job 38:8-11), making possible the conditions for life. In this context the stability of creation is stressed, which will not be removed (וַיַּחְסֶה) by the forces of chaos (cf. 93:1; 96:10).

Verse 6 shifts from the masculine singular participles in vv 2-5 ("who covers," "lays," "makes"), to the second person also used in v 1. Verse 7 continues with the use of second person suffixes. The foundations (וַיַּחְסֶה) of the earth, implied by the third person suffix, is said to be covered (וַיַּחְסֶה) with the "deep" (וַיַּחְסֶה), which serves as a "garment" (וַיַּחְסֶה).

In Ps 104 וַיַּחְסֶה is stripped of its mythological garb and turned into "Wolkendunkel und Himmelsfeste," 165 regards דָּשָּׁי in v 5 as the Leitwort in v 5-9, pointing to the "Eindämmung des Meeres (und damit des 'Chaos') und die Ausgestaltung des Festlands (mit den Bergen) in vom Himmel her vorgezeichneten architektonischen Grenzen. Die Welt erscheint als ein wohl geplantes 'Gebäude' und JHWH als ihr königlicher Baumeister.”

For דָּשָּׁי/lay the foundations” in the Psalter, cf. Ps 42:2; 78:69; 89:12; 102:26; 104:8; 119:152; 8:3 (Pi). Also Job 38:4 and Prov 3:19.

Unlike Job 38:4 where דָּשָּׁי is also used, Ps 104 does not dispute YHWH as establisher of the foundations of the earth. A similar phrase also occurs in Ugaritic literature (מָשֵׁל אוֹרֶד) as pointed out by Dahood, Psalms III, 35-36 who wishes to see a Canaanite-Phoenician influence in Ps 104.

For Barr, The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality, 77 Ps 104 (5-9) exhibits a closer affinity with the recovery of creation after the flood than it does with the creation account of Genesis 1.

R.S. Watson, Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of “Chaos” in the Hebrew Bible (BZAW 341; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 158.

In the HB “waters,” as representative of primeval chaos, is never said to be eliminated from the realm of creation. This is unlike Rev 21:1 where "the sea" (קָוָל סֵסָא) is not part of the new heaven and earth.

S. Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel’s Worship (vol. 1; trans. D.R. Ap. Thomas; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 144. Echoes of this struggle are heard in the enthronement hymn of Ps 93:1b-4. Also Hermisson, Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom, 51 arguing that chaos is mostly located temporally at a great distance, either before the beginning of the world or spatially, outside the boundaries of the world.

That the powers of chaos were “domesticated” instead of “demolished” does not imply a continued threat to creation, as J.D. Levenson, Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988) argues. Chaos remains present in creation, but as part of creation and under divine rule. That it can reassert itself in new and threatening ways is countered by God’s past and perpetual acts of creation. Creation is sustained through the continuing process of creation (see also Ps 65:6-8; Hab 3:8-11; Nah 1:4). Cf. P.D. Miller, “‘Enthroned on the Praises of Israel:’ the Praise of God in Old Testament Theology.” Interpretation 39 (1985), 14-15. At every moment YHWH provides “the matrix and conditions for existence.”


For Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 92 the verb וַיַּחְסֶה(Ni) is use in v 5 in a “cosmic sense,” i.e. referring to creation being threatened by chaotic forces.

In Ps 106:11, 17; Exod 15:5, 10 וַיַּחְסֶה is used in reference to the adversaries. Cf. Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 39. It is not sure that וַיַּחְסֶה belongs to the semantic field of death and the underworld.

In Ps 104:19-23 “darkness” is positively transformed. Cf. Clifford, Creation Accounts, 190. For the use of וַיַּחְסֶה "to cover" in the HB Psalter, see 32:1 (Qal); 32:5; 40:11; 44:16; 20; 55:6; 69:8; 78:53; 85:3; 104:9; 106:11; 17; 140:10; 143:9; 147:8 (Pi) and 80:11 (Pu).

In Ps 95:4 the “depths of the earth” (הָרַחְמִים) are in the hand of YHWH and of Him are the "highest mountains" (וַיַּחְסֶה). I.e. no part of creation falls outside the divine reach.

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a piece of cosmic clothing (םיהל). This immediate context points away from a primordial struggle, but as already mentioned, this motif is not altogether absent. Indeed, in vv 6-18 the waters are “chased” to its designated place, benefiting divine creation. While various suggestions have been made concerning the use of µwht in this context (as in Gen 1:2), it is best interpreted within the parameters of the central concern for order in Ps 104 (as in Gen 1), i.e. that everything in creation has its designated place. Boundaries are set and kept in tact by the providential creator. The use of the participles is suggestive of the notion of a continuous creation and the continued involvement of the creator in creation, rather than creation as a once-of divine act. The description of the waters standing (דרי) on the mountains (מער) could imply that the earthly mountains are here at issue, and the heavenly mountains in v 8. But the context of v 8 does not suggest such an interpretation of heavenly mountains. See below.

The waters (םים) remain the focus of attention in verse 7, and are here described as fleeing (יםָּפָה impf.) at YHWH’s rebuke (רהג). In parallel the waters hurry away (יָפִיה impf.) at the voice (לֹעַ) of YHWH’s thunder (םַר). Here the Chaoskampf motif is present, but lacks any real notion of an interactive struggle. For this reason the exact sense of רָהָג is uncertain. If we identify here a scene of cosmic strife, it can serve as a divine “war cry”, but it can also point to divine authority being imposed as in Gen 1:9, where God “says” (אמר) and the waters responds accordingly. Considering the absence of various elements of the Chaoskampf motif, v 7 points to the authority of YHWH’s voice in creation which is supported by the use of סָמ (fled”), rather

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313 Miller, The Poetry of Creation, 90. For Dahood µחַכ equals the Ugaritic thm. If µחַכ here is a reference to primordial waters, it can be read in parallel with the reference to the “waters.”

314 R.E. Murphy, The Tree of Life: an Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature (3d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 118 pointed out that the motif of the divine battle with chaos is a celebrated feature in many psalms and he cites Ps 104:6-9, 24-26 as such an instance. The battle terminology used “at the pleasure of the writer.”

315 In both cases, Yahweh and the Gods, 101 argues for a Canaanite rather than Mesopotamian (Tiamat) prototype for µחַכ.

316 Here Miller, “The Poetry of Creation,” 96, rightly argues that “Perhaps more that any other formulation, Psalm 104 conveys the centrality of order and purpose in creation.”

317 In the HB Psalter, סָמ presents the primary word for “escape,” and has the connotation of “faintheartedness” and “anxiety.” Cf. J.F.D. Creach, Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter (JSOTSup 217; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 30.

318 Also Ps 76:7. S.L. Norin, Er spaltete das Meer: Die Auszugsüberlieferung in Psalmen und Kult des Alten Israel (Lund: Gleerup, 1977), 165 regards Ps 18, 29, 77, 81, 97, 104, 135, 144 as instances of a “Gewitter-Theophanie.” In discussing the strict monism of Yahwism, Gerstenberger, Theologies, 299 argues that the HB faith rests on the acceptance of a strict monism, i.e. the one world is only conceivable as the world of one deity, as the one and only source of life. No form of chaos can remain in opposition to YHWH, and in this sense it has to be destroyed first before creation can commence. But the divine dealing with chaos is part of the process of creation in Ps 104.

319 C. Kloos, YHWH’s Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 50 compares רָהָג with the Ugaritic gˈr “to roar.” So also Dahood, Psalms III, 36 for whom רָהָג denotes the roar of YHWH’s thunder. In Ps 104 the depiction of YHWH is reminiscent to a storm- or weather-god. Cf. Podella, Das Lichtkleid JHWHs, 240.

320 J. Day, Psalms (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 99 regards Ps 104:6-9 as indicative of the Chaoskampf theme and regards it as a pre-exilic.

321 That the imperfect form of the verb is used could point out that this rebuke of YHWH is not a singular event, but ongoing within creation. For Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel’s Worship I, 84 Ps 104:6ff; 135:4; 89:11ff; 33:9 presents instances of YHWH’s victory over primeval monsters. This is part of creation, but for Israel also belonged to the realm of history.
than a struggle with chaos. Likewise the use of “thunder” (µ(fr)) in Ps 104 is significant, further stressing the divine authority in creation. Thus, the waters which once presented a threat to the good order of creation now tremble at the sound of YHWH’s thunder and flee when rebuked. The waters flee to their designated place as seen in v 8, instead of being removed from creation.

Attempts at making sense of verse 8 are wide-ranging. The “waters” are still at issue as indicated by the third person plural suffix. The once threatening waters are part and parcel of divine creation and are ascribed a beneficial quality and function in v 10. In view of vv 7 and 9 the “waters” present the subject of the verbs h1[ and dry with the mountains and valleys (t[wq]) as accusatives of place after the verbs of motion. The “mountains” in v 8 are best related to the mountains in v 6, since this context gives no clear indication of “celestial mountains.” Of immediate concern is the reference to the “place” (µ[r YHWH founded (dsv) for the waters. As a result of the divine works it is incorporated into the fabric of creation. This theme is continued in v 9.

In vv 7-8 the “hasting away” of the waters is described. In verse 9 the focus is still on the waters and as such is connected to vv 7-8. YHWH has set (µyv) a boundary (lwbg) that the waters may not transgress (compare Job 38:10-11 where a boundary is set for the sea). The implication is that it may not return divine creation to a state of chaos by means of covering (hsk) the earth. It is not eliminated, but limited, and in

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322 In terms of Mowinckel’s theory Pss 47, 93 and 95-100 depict the enthronement of YHWH as king of the gods (95:3; 96:4; 97:7), while YHWH is also presented as “lord of the sea” (93:3-4; 98:7-8). The floods, great waters and sea thus present the powers of chaos that YHWH subdues, similar to Baal’s battle with ym in the Ugaritic Baal-cycle. Cf. Smith, The Ugaritic Baal Cycle, 11-12; A.R. Petersen, The Royal God: Enthronement Festivals in ancient Israel and Ugarit? (JSOTSup 259; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 16. Also Day, Yahweh and the Gods, 100. Day, Psalms, 67-87 favours Mowinckel’s thesis that the kingship of YHWH has a cultic setting in Israel, the feast of Tabernacles.

323 This echoes Ps 93:4 “YHWH on high is mightier than the noise of many waters (µym) than the mighty waves of the sea (µy).” Day, Yahweh and the Gods, 100; Day, Psalms, 67-87 is in favour of continuing the thesis of Mowinckel that the theme of YHWH’s kingship, with which the divine victory over the dragon and the sea was closely associated, had its cultic setting in ancient Israel in the feast of Tabernacles.

324 E.F. Sutcliffe, “Note on Psalm 104:8.” VT 2 (1952): 177-179 pointed out that explanations usually fall in one of two categories, either those taking regarding the mountains as subject of the verb, or those that take the mountains as object and the waters as subject. The Vulgate, LXX and Peshitta render the text with the mountains as subject. The author of Ps 104 probably had in mind the Palestinian landscape with its natural phenomena, implying that the description in v 8 should be read in its natural sense.

325 In vv 8b, 9 the waters can refer to the ocean, as in Gen 1:9.

326 The phrase t[wq dry is comparable to t[wq dry (“they go down to the depths”) in Ps 107:26. For Dahood, Psalms III, 37 for whom the use of t[wq and t[wq describes the action set forth in e.g. Gen 7:11, 8:2; Prov 3:20, 8:28.

327 Contra Dahood, Psalms III, 36.

328 Briggs, Psalms, 333, 338 argued for the dependence of v 9 on v 7 as final clause.

329 Cf. Kraus, Psalmen, 882, who argues that “Den chaotischen Wassern ist eine Grenze gesetzt, die nicht mehr überschritten werden kann.” This view is not entirely shared by F. Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” in: A. Laato and J.C. de Moor (eds.), Theodicy in the World of the Bible (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 287 for whom the imagery employed within these verses point out that the chaotic waters are not passive before YHWH, but offer resistance and as such are rebuked, eventually taking flight. This view is not shared.
this sense excluded from creation as beneficial place (cf. the use of יָמִין v 5). The divine established boundaries are secure. This imagery is comparable to that of Job 38:8-11 and Prov 8:29. Ps 104:9 reiterates that YHWH does not eradicate the chaotic waters. The boundaries set by YHWH constitute the conditions for ordered life as is described in v 10f. The perfect forms in vv 5 and 9 of יַסְדֵּד and יָכָר are used as reference to past events of divine creation, and imply that chaos remains outside the boundaries of the good ordered world. In Ps 104 however it is within the framework of creation that chaos is designated to its proper place, with limits set for it. As a result creation continues despite the presence of chaos in its bounds. This is significant for the discussion of vv 29 and 35.

**Verses 10-13: The Focus on the Earth Continues**

It has been proposed that in verse 10 the original text of Ps 104 resumes, which was interrupted after v 4 by so-called redactional insertions. Verse 10 does have a new focus, but the reference to springs (יְמִין) in the valleys (לִין) that go (וּלְּה) among the mountains indicates that one cannot speak of a complete break in theme, since it recalls the theme of v 8. With v 10a the psalm moves from a description of theophany, to the praise of the order of nature. The latter is comparable to Ps 19, where creation declares the glory of YHWH. The threatening waters of the preceding verses is transformed in v 10 into beneficial springs, which go (וּלְּה) among the valleys and between the mountains. YHWH is responsible for sending (יָלֵד, ptc.) these springs, just as he rebuked the waters in v 7. In v 10 waters in the form of springs serve as a source of sustenance, as seen in v 11.

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330 For Hermisson, “Observations,” 49-50 this is a creation concept typical of wisdom. He observes that in this instance Ps 104 must not be compared with Gen 1, but rather with texts like Ps 89:10-14/9-13, Ps 93, starting from the confrontation of creation and chaos. In his view Ps 93 serve as an example where creation is not primarily perceived as something belonging to the distant past, but as an event which is presently repeating itself - being experienced at the festival.

331 This imagery recalls the words used by God to establish a covenant with Noah and every living creature, namely that the waters will no longer become a flood, destroying all flesh (Gen 9:11, 15). Gen 9 refers only to the waters in heaven, with YHWH setting His bow in the clouds to prevent it (9:13).

332 Dahood, Psalms III, 37 postulates a common literary source for all three texts. Ps 104:9 is also similar in theme to Gen 1:6-7, where the ordering of the world from chaos commences with God’s placing a firmament (לֶגְנ) between the earth and the waters above it, and by assigning a fixed place to the waters below the firmament, thus fixing a boundary for the deep that it may not pass.

333 Comparable is the Priestly creation account of Gen 1:1-2:4a, where creation by means of divine speaking (רָא) and separation (לֶגְנ) makes possible the conditions for life. Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology, 173 observed that P puts the theological question in much more fundamental terms than J, raising the question concerning the potential impact of corrupted humanity in bringing about a revision or annihilation of the created world described in Gen 1.


335 C. Westermann, The Praise of God in the Psalms (trans. KR Crim; Richmond; John Knox, 1965), 129-130 regards Ps 104:10-30 as a descriptive psalm of praise of the creator that upholds and preserves, alongside the creator who saves.

336 Spieckermann, Heilsgegenwart, 32.

337 In the HB Psalter יָלֵד “to send” occurs in the Ni in 44:3; 74:7; 78:45, 49; 89:12; 81:13; 104:30; 106:15.

338 Kraus, Psalmen, 882, “Das tödliche Wasserchaos wird zum Lebensquell, der die Tiere des Feldes und die Vögel des Himmels erquickt.” Here it is difficult to determine the exact sense of the use of יָלֵד, but it can have the meaning “to pour out” as in Ps 105:10. Cf. Dhorme, Job, 452.
By means of providing drink (j qv, Hi)\(^{339}\) to every beast of the field (ydc wj A k), the beneficial nature of the springs (ydc wj) is made clear in verse 11. The psalmist elaborates on this theme by referring to the wild asses (arp) that quench (rbv) their thirst (arx). The reference to different animals is here not so much representative of the ancient Near Eastern Listenwissenschaft, as it is in making clear YHWH’s providence for the most diverse assemblage of creatures.\(^{340}\)

In terms of translation and interpretation, verse 12 is not easy. In its immediate context “by them” (µhyl[ ]) points to the springs of v 11, making the verse rather clumsy. It could also serve to indicate that the springs serve as source of nourishment even for the fowls (¹w[ ]) of heaven, since they habituate (÷kv) near the waters, giving (÷tn)\(^{341}\) voice from among the foliage (yp[ ]). If however yp[ ] is interpreted as “branches,” v 12 should be read in tandem with v 16 which mentions the trees of YHWH, in which the birds are said to nest in v 17. In v 12 the emphasis is not on the habitat of the birds of heaven, but rather on the joyful nature of the springs, i.e. as a place for quenching their thirst and for looking for food. Such the waters have a double nurturing function.

The imagery employed in verse 13 is reminiscent of v 3 and v 10. In v 13 YHWH irrigates (j qv, Hi ptc.) the mountains from His chambers (hfy[ ]),\(^{342}\) being portrayed as divine horticulturalist, acting from above.\(^{343}\) But also as divine caretaker within creation, since the earth is satisfied ([bc, impf.])\(^{344}\) by the fruit (yrp) of “His” works ([hc[m second person suffix, pointing to YHWH]).\(^{345}\) The focus has shifted from the birds of the heaven to the earth. In this regard vv 13-15 constitute a chain of consecutive purposes in creation.\(^{346}\) They contribute to the depiction of YHWH in Ps 104 as acting “from above,” but also “within” creation.

**Verse 14-18: Focus on Divine Providence (Food and Safe Dwelling)**

The basic theme of v 13 continues in verse 14, but the specific focus of vv 14-18 is YHWH’s provision of food and safe dwelling. YHWH is responsible for the growing (j rr, Hi ptc) of the grass (ryxj) and the herb (bc[ ])\(^{347}\) which are beneficial for cattle

\(^{339}\) In the HB Psalter j qv “cause to drink” occurs in the Hi in 36:9; 60:5; 69:22; 78:15, 45; 80:6; 104:13.

\(^{340}\) Such descriptions of nature are often found in liturgical or sapiential praise, as argued by L. Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (StBibl 11; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1988), 14-15. Ps 104 and Sir 43 provide two examples of such descriptions of nature. In Ps 104:12, 20, 23 the realistic description of nature contrasts with the “total imaginative transformation of vv 2-3. As such, nature serves as source of inspiration for poetical praise of God. See also Ps 18, 29, 77; Job 38-39 and Hab 3. Within such nature based descriptive poetry, “The immense God, the synthesis of polarities, is experienced by man positively and negatively, by opposing contrasting qualities.”

\(^{341}\) For ÷tn “to give”, in the Psalter cf. 99:7; 104: 27, 28; 105:11, 32, 44; 106:15; 41, 46.

\(^{342}\) The psalmist shares the ancient Near Eastern tripartite worldview, locating the dwelling place of the deity in the heavens.

\(^{343}\) Here YHWH “irrigating” contrasts with instances where He withholds the gift of rain, e.g. Jer 14:1-15; Joel 1:4-20; 2:15-20.

\(^{344}\) For [bc “to satisfy” in the Qal, see also 17:14, 15; 22:27; 37:19; 59:16; 63:6; 65:5; 78:29; 88:4; 104: 16, 28; 123:3, 4.

\(^{345}\) See also T. Booij, “Psalm 104:13b: ‘the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.’” *Biblica* 70 (1989): 409-412.


\(^{347}\) In Gen 3:17 the “herb” (bc[ ]) is mentioned with thorns and thistles in the context of a divine curse.
(hmhb) and humanity (µda) respectively. YHWH is responsible for the growing of the herb, but also gives it to humanity to cultivate, so that it can bring out (axy Hi) food (µj 1) from the earth. This indicates YHWH’s immediate involvement in creation. YHWH acts within creation, in the same way that He acts in history. In vv 14-23 the psalmist muses at the order discernable in the natural world. Verse 14 portrays a rather close affinity with Gen 1:29-30. If the suggestion of the critical apparatus is to be followed, regarding humanity as having the task of cultivating the earth, then it also stands in close proximity with Gen 1:28. But Ps 104 is far removed from the anthropocentricity of Gen 1:28 (or Ps 8), and lacks any notion of human domination over the earth or animals. This difference presents an example of the theological diversity of the HB creation theology. In v 14 the emphasis is on divine providence rather than human responsibility. This theme of divine care continues in v 15.

In verse 15 human cultures come into sight. Wine makes glad (j m, Pi) the heart of man; oil makes his face shine (l bx, Hi); and bread sustains (ø s) man’s heart. In this way the advantageous character of human culture and labour (wine, oil, bread) is brought into focus (cf. Deut 7:13 for staple products of Palestine). Nevertheless YHWH remains the subject in vv 14b-15. Given the interest of these verses, it might be fair to argue that within the context of Ps 104, the Psalmist’s vision of humanity is clearly reflected, namely that they are mortal, that they have to labour, but at the same time that God has provided that they are satiated through labour (‘wine gladdens the heart’; ‘oil makes the face shine’; ‘bread strengthens the heart’).

The theme of divine providence lingers on in verse 16, but the specific focus now rests on the trees of YHWH (hmy yx), namely the cedars of Lebanon (µbl zra). YHWH planted (fn) them, and their nourishment is indicated by the fact that they are satisfied (bc), i.e. full of sap. This provides a link with the previous theme of water as nourishment, but also with the following theme in v 17 where the trees provide suitable habitation. This is indicative of YHWH’s works of creation being both functional and beneficial.

Verse 17 continues the basic idea of v 16, indicating that within the greater scope of creation everything has its particular place and function. The trees of YHWH are still in focus, but here the earlier theme of the birds (v 12) reappears. In v 17 the birds (rwpx) nest (rn, Pi) in the trees of YHWH. A specification occurs since the stork (hys) has the Cyprus tree (vwrb) as habitat (ty). This contributes to the idea that all created beings are assigned to their proper and particular temporal and local spaces.

The theme of beneficial habitation continues in verse 18, but here the earlier theme of the “mountains” (µy h) reappears. The high mountains (µy bg) are described as a place of “refuge” (hbg) for the “mountain goats” (y), while the “cliffs” (µ fl) offer a place of “refuge” (hs m) for the “rock badger” (pv). It is here made clear that

348 Kraus, Psalmen, 883 comments, “Bis in das Innerstse des Menschen reicht die erfreuende und erfrischende Gabe des Schöpfers…”.
349 Allen, Psalms 101-150, 27.
350 Contra Gen 3:19, “in the sweat of your face will you eat your bread.”
351 In 1 Kgs 4:33 Solomon exhibits his wisdom and speaks of the cedar tree in Lebanon, of beast and fowl, creeping things, and fishes.
even those animals in creation which are mostly out of site due to their dwelling in remote places are properly cared for by YHWH (cf. Job 39).

**Verses 19-23: Focus on Experiential Time**

As indicated, divine providence concerning food and habitation is the main theme vv 14-18. In vv 19-23 the focus shits to the notion of time. In verse 19 two great lights, namely the moon (יָרֵי) and the sun (יָמָה) are at issue (cf. Gen 1:16). The moon is said to have been made () by YHWH for seasons (דְּמַת), while the sun also knows (דְּבַמ), i.e. its proper time. As in Priestly creation account the sun and moon and darkness and light are not merely part of a sequence of creative acts, but are created for a purpose.

It now serves as a “Zeitbestimmung.” In this way the luminaries in Ps 104, as in Gen 1, have been stripped of their mythological garb, losing their divine status. They no longer represent divinities, but divine acts of creation. In §2.5.1.1 and 2.5.1.2 the affinities between Ps 104 and the Akhenaton hymn and Genesis 1:1-2:4a respectively are considered. The perception of the luminaries in v 19 agrees with that of Gen 1, while the theme of the greater context of v 19 is nearer to that of the Egyptian hymn to Aton. That the luminaries in Ps 104 have no divine qualities does not have to imply that Ps 104 is polemical in nature. Particularly as a polemic against solar worship. The question is not whether YHWH is assimilated with the sun (Aton / Shamash), but whether qualities of the luminaries, in particular the sun, are ascribed to YHWH. In Ps 104 the latter seems to be the case and is considered later in this chapter. Still, the general tone of Ps 104 is doxological and not polemical. The sun and moon are connected with designated times, and as such related to the theme of the good order of creation.

The theme of time continues in verse 20, where the “darkness” (עָנִי) is stripped of its usual negative connotations, gaining a beneficial quality. In Gen 1:4 God divides light from darkness (עָנִי), and in Ps 104:20 YHWH appoints (דַעַם) “darkness” to its proper place. As such darkness is part of the divine works of creation and falls within the range of divine omnipotence. Further, YHWH seems to appoint darkness for a purpose. Darkness and night (יִהְיֶה) are here closely related. At night the beasts (יִהְיֶה) of the forest (הָרֹאשׁ) move about (כֹּמַר), with the intention to

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354 Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 92. The moon is created for seasons (דְּמַת), and the sun knows its time (so v 22), or put differently, its coming (דְּבַמ).
355 Kraus, *Psalmen*, 884-5. In Ps 104 the sun is not, as in the Hymn to Aton, a life-carrying and radiating divinity.
357 Here Kraus, *Psalmen*, 883 argues for the distinction of vv 19-24 from Gen 1, since Ps 104 deviates in its basic thinking from Gen 1 in these verses. Here YHWH’s power and wisdom is reflected by the good-ordered nature of creation in its entirety. Cf. Job 12:7ff. Also Isa 6:3, “the whole earth is full of His glory.” Further Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 204.
359 Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 190.
360 Neither here nor in Gen 1 is said to be created. In Gen 1:3 “light” (יָם) is created by means of divine fiat (יָמָה), yet such a depiction is lacking in Ps 104.
feed. It is a time of abundant activity. The emphasis is not on the nature of darkness, but rather its beneficial qualities. Here again the purposefulness of divine creation becomes clear, since “night time” here implies “feeding time” (cf. v 21). Animals associated with the night profit from divine order in creation. This transformation of an otherwise negative concept (ûmj) is similar to the transformation of the threatening waters earlier in vv 10-13. But different form the watersûmj retains a dark edge as seen in v 21.

In verse 21 the psalmist describes the eerie, but impressive sound of a pack of lions roaring in the dark of night, roaming for food. But here it is particularly the young lions (rypk) that roar (gav, ptc.) for prey (¹rf), seeking (vdp) from God their food (l ka). Thus, at night death enters the description of the divinely ordered creation. The imagery used expands the theme of creation’s dependence on the creator and this applies even to the noble lion. God (lã) is here also depicted as the one that nourishes. The creator God becomes the God that feeds. In this way the darkness of the night remains somewhat ambiguous. The young lions look to God for food, but God is not directly said to “kill” or to hunt their prey for them, even if this idea is not absent from v 20 (cf. vv 27-28). Nevertheless the intent in v 20 is to describe God’s nurture of creation, attributed here an almost parental role, seeing that the young lions look to God rather than their parents for food. While God is also established as the lord and ruler over nature and animals, it does not carry the connotation of subjugation. In this way it departs from the more common ancient Near Eastern motif of the deity’s suppression of the animal world. Rather, the mountain goat and lion alike depend on the outstretched, caring hand of YHWH.

The sun (vmv) reappears in verse 22. Here it rises (jrz contra v 19 where it sets) and the lions gather (³sa) and retreat to lie down (Åbr) in their lairs (hn[m), satisfied by divine providence. Within the framework ofthe creation theology of Ps 104, the rising of the sun marks a fixed time. The time of the lions’ activity has passed, while the time for humankind’s (µda) labour is just commencing (v 23). In this context the “rising of the sun” has been deprived of mythological allusions, serving to introduce a time period that stretches until the evening (v 23). In terms of the psalmist’s theology, YHWH is not to be associated with the sun.

The fixed time introduced by the rising of the sun in v 22 continues in verse 23. Here however the focus shifts to “humankind” (µda), with the reference to humanity finding its place within the framework of the description of nature, and not as a distinct category of creation. With the rising of the sun mankind goes out (axy) to his work (l [p], and to his labour (hdwb[) until evening (br[). The lions’ rest is contrasted with human activity. While the time of day is described as the time for human labour, a limit has also been set for this period of labour, namely the evening, as indicated by the preposition d ("until"). Exactly what this human labour entails is not recounted in the psalm, but man is said to go “to” (l) his labour. As such the description of human labour here does not carry the negative connotation of Gen 3:19. It is not the result

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361 Cf. Gen 1:21, 24-26 for a reference to “creeping” (cmn) animals.
362 This is indicated by the specific use of rypk (“young lion”) instead of yra (“lion”).
363 See also Job 37:8 “Then the beasts go into dens (br[a], and remain in their places.”
364 The reality of “thorns and thistles” that becomes part of creation in Gen 3:18 seem distant within the context of Ps 104, but the psalmist does not turn a blind eye for creation’s dark edges.
of sin, but part of the natural flow of divinely established time. It fits within the framework of creation.  

Verses 24-30: Focus on the Works of YHWH

With verse 24 a shift in focus occurs. YHWH is still the object of praise, but a new subject is introduced into the psalm. This comprises the wisdom (ḥmkj) by means of which the “manifold” (bbr) “works” (hc[m] of YHWH are said to have been “made” (hc). This new theme is not entirely detached from the preceding verses, seeing the reference to the earth being full (al m) of the riches (vynq) of YHWH. What is entirely new is the qualification of YHWH’s works by means of the reference to wisdom. While the reference to the works of YHWH is in line with the general doxological character of the psalm, it also presents a contrast with human labour mentioned in v 23, which is set within the parameters of divine labour, if for no other reason than stressing the theme of the magnificence of the creator. YHWH’s works are described as manifold and not limited to a fixed time. The new idea here introduced into the psalm, concerning the divine ḥmkj, is comparable to the declarations of Prov 3:19 and Job 28:13-23, where the question of revelation through wisdom comes to the fore. This declaration of YHWH’s creation through (B) wisdom latches on to a central theme in the psalm, namely the “purposefulness” of the divine acts of creation. The affinity of Ps 104 with the HB wisdom tradition will be considered in §2.5.3. The divine works of creation bear witness to the wisdom of

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365 As in the J creation account which describes humankind (µda) being placed in the garden of Eden to “work” (db[.] and to “keep” (rmv) it (Gen 2:15), i.e. to their benefit, and not in the sense of “enslavement.”

366 The theme of divine creation and providence is here interrupted by a “burst of praise and a summary affirmation.” Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 92. In a sense the main argument of Ps 104 is expressed within the first colon of v 24, stressing the marvellous nature of YHWH’s work of creation (cf. Job 38:4-6). See B.S. Childs, Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 45.

367 In a sense the phrase tyc[ ḥmkjb µlk is premature within the context of the psalm, since the description of divine creation has not yet been completed.


369 The connection between YHWH and wisdom is particularly clear in Prov 8:22 “YHWH created me (literally “possessed me”) in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.” Also Job 28:23 “God understands the way to it, and he knows its place.”

370 Clifford, Creation Accounts, 197. In Ps 104 nature exhibits a “providential harmony” of which mankind is an integral part, though not central to it (so also in the divine speeches of Job 38-41).

371 This theme also occurs in wisdom texts such as Prov 16:4 stating that “YHWH has made everything for its purpose…” So also Qoh 3:1-8, stating in poetic fashion that everything has its appropriate time.

372 Whether Ps 104 presents a comprehensive presentation of a wisdom conception of creation is not certain. Hermisson, “Observations,” 48. Ps 104 could also be seen as an example of a creation hymn, composed in the style of the wisdom tradition, though not a wisdom psalm as such. Cf. Hermisson, “Observations,” 47. It does provide an instance where the theme of wisdom was incorporated into Israel’s worship.
The creator’s wisdom is an occasion for rejoicing. The reference in v 24 to divine hmkj is not incidental, but reflective of the main theme of the psalm.

The riches of divine creation praised in v 24 are further elaborated in verse 25, with the psalmist pondering on the greatness (l wdg and measureless (µybj rw) nature of the sea (µy) and the variety of life (hj) it hosts (cf. Sir 43:24-25). The innumerable (rpsm ÷ya) “moving things” (cmr), both small (÷fq) and great (l wdg) find a suitable habitat in the sea. While often associated with chaos, or a threat to the order of creation, the sea in v 25 gains a positive quality. It fits within the framework of divine creation, and draws praise from the psalmist. While the description of the sea points to the limited nature of human comprehension, the magnificence of divine wisdom is stressed. As a result of this mysterious element of divine creation, a moment of “fear” is retained in the rhetoric of the psalmist. The predominant stress however is on YHWH’s providential care, which does not discriminate. Taking into consideration the context of this reference to the sea, as well as the lack of any clear Chaoskampf motif in Ps 104, does not have to be mythologised (contra Gunkel). YHWH’s “rebuke” (hr[g of the waters in v 7, which is reminiscent of a battle motif, is now merely part of the actual process of creation. The theme of the sea as part of the works of YHWH is continued in v 26.

The subject matter of verse 26 has led to much scholarly debate, yet its tone and theme are rather clear. The mysterious grandeur of the sea is further indicated by the maritime traffic that it hosts. It presents a way for the “ships” (hyna) to go (ûlh). It

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373 The middle section of the Psalm could be interpreted as presenting a good example of nature wisdom. Within the middle section of the Psalm, the compilation of creatures and environments are well arranged ecologically. As such, the order of creation envisioned in Ps 104 cannot be equated to an impersonal world-order comparable to the Egyptian concept of ma’at, but rather of “an active voice of wisdom seeking to guide humanity into paths of true life.” Cf. Childs, Old Testament Theology, 35.

374 However, Murphy, Tree of Life, 120 questions this assumption, stating that the attitude of the sage toward creation was perhaps more wonder than praise, although the dividing line may be rather thin.


376 In v 1b YHWH is described as “very great” (dam tldg), and is here reflected by the greatness of creation. Cf. Fokkelman, Major Poems II, 268. The greatness, even more so than the wisdom of the creator, seems to be at issue.

377 For Smith, The Origins of Biblical Monotheism, 37 the cosmic waters are here akin to other raw materials of creation. The motif of the cosmic waters might still form the background against which µy should be interpreted, but the theological intent of the psalm here is very different.

378 The “sea” (µy) has metaphorical importance in the psalms, representing not only the chaotic waters (µyn) around the world, but also the powers of chaos within the world. Cf. Hermisson, “Observations,” 50.

379 Spieckermann, Heilsgegenwart, 41 suggests reading Gen 1 “als Bezugspunkt für die Fortschreibung in Ps 104:25”


381 Amid the description of divine works of creation the reference to “ships” seems out of place, since it refers to human works. But v 26 is concerned with the sea as a place of mystery. In Prov 31:18-19 “the way of a ship in the midst of the sea” is mentioned as one of the wonderful and unknowable phenomena in the world. In v 26 the reference to “ships” further develops of the theme of amazement, as the foundation of praise.

382 In the Egyptian Hymn to Aton, reference is made to ships faring downstream and upstream. Cf. Kraus, Psalmen, 878, 885. Also G.E. Wright, “‘There go the ships’ (Ps 104:26).” BA 1/3 (1938): 19-20.
further offers a habitat for Leviathan (צְבַּיְתָל), whom YHWH formed (רְשֵׁי) to “play” (כְּרָכָל, Pi inf.) in it. This description is significant, since here Leviathan, like the sea, is not presented in a negative way. Rather, the already emphasised divine care for creation also applies to Leviathan, the icon of chaos, whom YHWH formed, indeed, to play with. YHWH rejoices in His works of creation (cf. v 31). This description of an intimate relation between YHWH and Leviathan points away from any tension. Yet, the mysterious nature of Leviathan allows for a moment of awe, if not fear. Leviathan becomes bearable because it is designated its proper place among the waters, whose limits have been set by YHWH (v 9). The theme of divine providence is resumed in verse 27, where all the creatures (יָדֵּק) of the sea wait (רְבָּכָל, Pi impf.) on the creator, who gives (רְבּוּ) them food (לֹּקֵץ) in His time (תָּא), i.e. at the right moment (so Qoh 3:11 “He has made everything beautiful in its time”; Prov 16:4 “YHWH made all things for himself, even the wicked for the day of evil”). The description of creatures waiting on YHWH for food stresses the theme of creation’s dependence on the creator, but also points out that YHWH responds to their waiting, at a time determined by Him. In this regard v 27 is reminiscent of v 21b, where the young lions seek their meat from God (לַא). Verse 27 is closely related to v 28 (in part by the double use of רְבּוּ), and together they continue the theme of divine providence, in close proximity to the works of YHWH. The desire for food expressed in v 27 is satisfied in v 28 as a result of

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383 This reference to Leviathan prompts Dahood, *Psalms III*, 45 to identify here a Canaanite-Phoenician background for the Psalm.

384 For רְשֵׁי “to form” in the Psalter, cf. Ps 33:15; 74:17; 94:9; 20; 95:5 and 139:16 (Pu).

385 For Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 58 Ps 104 states “…das Gott wirklich mit Leviathan spiele…”, reflecting a tendency of Israelite literature to mythologise. Here Norin, *Er spaltete das Meer*, 67 also characterises Leviathan as “ein rein mythologisches Wesen.” He sites Ps 74:14; Job 3:8 and 42:25 as further examples of this usage.

386 With בְּרָכָל and יָדֵּק. H. Niehr, “The Rise of YHWH in Judahite and Israelite Religion: Methodological and Religio-Historical Aspects,” in: D.V. Edelman (ed.), *The Triumph of Elohim: from Yahwism to Judaism* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 66-67 argues that there are three groups of texts that illustrate the relation of YHWH to personalised shapes of chaos, namely 1) those texts reporting that YHWH annihilates the powers of chaos, personalised as sea monsters (Is 27:1; 51:9; Job 26:12-13; Ps 74:13-14; Ps 89:11); 2) those texts indicating that YHWH keeps the sea monsters and the sea in check (Ps 104:6-9; 33:7; Prov 8:29; Job 7:11; 38:8-11; Jer 5:22; Gen 1:9-10), and 3) those texts establishing a positive relationship between YHWH and the sea monsters, also giving praise to YHWH (Ps 104:26, 148:7, Amos 9:3).

387 With בְּרָכָל and יָדֵּק. H. Niehr, “The Rise of YHWH in Judahite and Israelite Religion: Methodological and Religio-Historical Aspects,” in: D.V. Edelman (ed.), *The Triumph of Elohim: from Yahwism to Judaism* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 66-67 argues that there are three groups of texts that illustrate the relation of YHWH to personalised shapes of chaos, namely 1) those texts reporting that YHWH annihilates the powers of chaos, personalised as sea monsters (Is 27:1; 51:9; Job 26:12-13; Ps 74:13-14; Ps 89:11); 2) those texts indicating that YHWH keeps the sea monsters and the sea in check (Ps 104:6-9; 33:7; Prov 8:29; Job 7:11; 38:8-11; Jer 5:22; Gen 1:9-10), and 3) those texts establishing a positive relationship between YHWH and the sea monsters, also giving praise to YHWH (Ps 104:26, 148:7, Amos 9:3).


389 Kraus, *Psalmen*, 878, viewing the transformation of צְבַּיְתָל as part of creation, which with all the content of the sea, is witness to the wisdom of the creator.


391 In Gen 1:29-30 God gives vegetation as “food” to the whole of His creation, but in Gen 9:3 “every moving thing that lives” is given as “food” (לֹּקֵץ), in addition to the “green herb” (כְּרָכָל) of Gen 1:29-30.


393 Ps 145:15 has a comparable image, “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.”
YHWH opening His hand.\footnote{394} All that is dependant on the sustenance of the creator is at the mercy of His outstretched hand, or averted face. Somewhat indirectly YHWH’s power over life and death is here brought into focus.\footnote{395}

In verse 28 YHWH’s role as cosmic benefactor is still at issue. In response to the waiting of the creatures in v 27, YHWH gives (÷tn) them and in response they gather up (fql). This divine giving is further described by means of drawing from an ancient Near Eastern motif,\footnote{396} with YHWH opening (jtp) His hand (dy). As a result the waiting creatures are satisfied ([bc]) with good. This brings v 28 in close proximity with v 13b, where the earth is filled ([bc]) with the fruit of YHWH’s work. The divine sustenance is indeed sufficient, with YHWH being solely responsible for it.\footnote{397} The affinity with the Egyptian hymn to Aton should not be regarded as evidence for the solarisation of YHWH. It is rather an instance of familiar imagery being employed by the psalmist to affirm the exalted position of YHWH in creation, ruling over His creation as caring and sustaining lord.

Up to this point the leading themes in Ps 104 are divine providence, creaturely dependence, and the celebration of YHWH’s works. As such it has a positive tone. In verse 29 the theme of creaturely dependence continues, but now it gains a negative tone. In terms of its placement in the psalm, v 29 applies in the first instance to the creatures described in the previous verses due to the use of the third person suffix. It is they that are “troubled” ([lb], Ni)\footnote{399} when YHWH hides (rts, Hi)\footnote{400} His face (trp).\footnote{401} In vv 14, 15, 23 humankind is also mentioned, but in the singular and without a suffix. Yet humankind is included in the works of YHWH and as such the events described

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{394} The rather patriarchal description of divine sustenance in vv 27-30, namely YHWH’s creation at the mercy of his outstretched hand or averted face, is balanced by divine care for all of creation. Cf. Allen, Psalms 101-150, 34.
\footnote{395} Janowski, Konfliktgespräche mit Gott, 62 identifies a “Todesschreckens” motif in Ps 104:27-30 (as in Ps 30:7-8) in which the life-death dichotomy becomes clear. The result of God turning away his face is “terror” ([lb], and can lead to an experience of death in this life (e.g. Ps 88:14).
\footnote{396} Taylor, Yahweh and the Sun, 228.
\footnote{397} For jtp “to open” in the Psalter, see 5:10; 37:14; 39:10; 49:5; 51:17; 78:2, 23; 105:41; 106:17; 109:2; 118:19; 145:16.
\footnote{399} In the psalms divine absence is often described as an encounter with death. Anderson, The Praise of God, 33. Also Lindström, Suffering and Sin, 440. Death claims the individual when YHWH removes his presence.
\footnote{400} J. Reindl, Das Angesicht Gottes im Sprachgebrauch des Alten Testaments (ETS 25; Leipzig: St Benno Verlag, 1970). For rts “to hide” in the Psalter, cf. 55:13; 89:47 (Ni); 19:7, 13; 38:10 (Qal); 10:11; 13:2; 17:8; 22:25; 27:5, 9; 30:8; 31:21; 44:25; 51:11; 64:3; 69:18; 88:15; 102:3; 119:19; 143:7 (Hi). For occurrences of God hiding His face in the Psalter, see Ps 10:11; 13:1; 22:24; 27:9; 30:7; 34:16 (the face of YHWH against the wicked); 44:24; 51:9; 69:17; 88:14; 102:2; 132:10; 143:7. These references are mostly set within the context of affliction. In Ps 11:7 and 17:15 ḫj (“to see”) is used with ḫp as object. That the just will see God’s face points to a lasting relationship, not broken by the event of death. Since the “seeing of God” within these two contexts takes place after the awakening of the psalmist, the phrase may, according to H.F. van Rooy, “ḫp,” NIDOTE Vol. 3 (1997) 637-640, at 839, refer to awakening after death.
\footnote{401} Cf. Ps 103:14 “For He knows how we were made (rxy cf. Gen 2:7); He remembers that we are dust.” Also Job 12:10, “That from His hand is the soul of every living being, and the spirit in all flesh is his gift.”
\end{footnotes}
in v 29 also applies to humankind. The whole of creation is dependent on the life giving presence of YHWH.\footnote{Job 34:14f-15 echoes the idea that without \textit{j w} everything returns to dust.} At the same time all created beings are dependent on YHWH for their breath (\textit{j w}),\footnote{For the use of \textit{j w} in the Psalms cf. See Ps 11:6; 18:11, 16, 43; 32:2; 33:6; 34:19; 35:5; 48:8; 51:4, 19; 55:9; 78:39; 83:14; 104:3; 139:7; 142:4; 148:8. As subject 1:4; 77:4; 7: 78:8; 103:16; 135:17; 143:4; 7, 10; 146:4 and as object 31:6; 51:12, 13; 76:13; 104:4; 29, 30: 106:33; 107:25; 135:7; 147:18.} which is also in the divine hand. In this sense \textit{j w} here functions synonymously with \textit{hm} in the sense of God’s “breath” (cf. Gen 2:7).\footnote{If YHWH takes it away (\textit{tsa}), they are certain to “die” ([\textit{wg}]. With the event of death comes the return (\textit{bw}) to their dust (\textit{rp}),\footnote{\textit{rp} is associated with the realm of the dead, but this notion is not immediately present within the context of Ps 104.} i.e. to that which characterises their constitution. Here death, as a return to dust, is closely related to YHWH and equal to “un-creation.”\footnote{This return to dust\footnote{In v 29 this is the primary function for the term, stressing the ephemerality, fragility and dependence of all created beings.} points to a leading motif in Book IV of the HB Psalter, namely human ephemerality.} In v 29 this is the primary function for the term, stressing the ephemerality, fragility and dependence of all created beings.\footnote{It also affirms the relative insignificance of individual created beings within the larger frame of creation. In some instances \textit{rp} is associated with the realm of the dead, but this notion is not immediately present within the context of Ps 104. Here dust concerns the constitution of created beings, rather than their fate, i.e. the place that they will go to, after the event of death.} The return to dust further creates a contrast and link with the divine renewal of creation in v 30.\footnote{This theme of dependence, and the connection between YHWH and life, is further explicated in v 30.} YHWH for their breath (\textit{j w}) from youth”. It also occurs in Job 3:11, and can have the sense of “breathing one’s last breath,” e.g. Ps 22:15, 29 has two references to dust, “…you have brought me into the dust of death” and “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake…” Much later, in Dan 12:2, the connection between dust and death also occurs, “And the breath of life is part of the providence of God, the provision of continuity, so that each new birth is an act of creation, renewing the earth. Death is on the way to renewal.” Here the question remains why YHWH withdraws His \textit{j w} from creation. Cf. Lindström, \textit{Suffering and Sin}, 343.}

The use of \textit{wg “to expire, to die” instead of \textit{tm} corresponds with the image of the return to dust. Ps 88:16 has the only other occurrence of \textit{wg in the psalms, and here the lament is “ready to die (\textit{wg} from youth”. It also occurs in Job 3:11, and can have the sense of “breathing one’s last breath,” e.g. Gen 25:8, 17 or “to die,” e.g. Gen 6:17; 7:21. The “return to dust” here includes humans. Their being created from dust, or that “dust” is their basic substance is a well-known motif in the HB, e.g. Ps 139:15; Job 30:23; Qoh 3:20; 12:7.\footnote{D. Rudman, “The Use of Water Imagery in the Descriptions of Sheol.” ZAW 113 (2001): 240-4. Vv 29-30 implies that being alive is to be part of the created world, while to be dead is to be “uncreated,” i.e. returning to the substance from which one was created.} The use of \textit{rp} (in the Psalter, cf. 7:6; 18:43; 22:16, 30; 44:26; 78:27; 103:14; 104:29; 113:7; 119:25; 30:10 (subject); 72:9; 102:15 (object).} D. Rudman, “The Use of Water Imagery in the Descriptions of Sheol.” ZAW 113 (2001): 240-4. Vv 29-30 implies that being alive is to be part of the created world, while to be dead is to be “uncreated,” i.e. returning to the substance from which one was created.\footnote{For \textit{rp} in the Psalter, cf. 7:6; 18:43; 22:16, 30; 44:26; 78:27; 103:14; 104:29; 113:7; 119:25; 30:10 (subject); 72:9; 102:15 (object).} Ballhorn, Zum Telos des Psalter, 126.\footnote{According to Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 88-89 \textit{rp} should not be restricted to its local meaning “dust, grave” but here “denotes origin and end of living beings…” He regards v 29 as a “confession of universal transiency.” Ps 144:3-4 offers a description of human fragility and dependence on YHWH. Also Ps 139:13-16 for the notion of individual creation by YHWH, but in a very different context of divine omnipresence and involvement. In Ps 104 creation’s fragility is closely tied up with divine care. Ps 119:25 connects dust and death “My soul cleaves to the dust; O give me life according to your word.” Ps 22:15, 29 has two references to dust, “…you have brought me into the dust of death” and “…before Him shall bow down all who went down to the dust.” Ps 30:10 contains the familiar Sheol motive, “…will the dust praise you?” Much later, in Dan 12:2, the connection between dust and death also occurs, “And of many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake….” Miller, Poetry of Creation, 93-94 finds the key to vv 29-30 in the particular order, namely death and then life and renewal. In this way “…the breath of life is part of the providence of God, the provision of continuity, so that each new birth is an act of creation, renewing the earth. Death is on the way to renewal.” Here the question remains why YHWH withdraws His \textit{j w} from creation. Cf. Lindström, \textit{Suffering and Sin}, 343.}
Verse 30 provides a positive reaffirmation of creaturely dependence so vividly described in v 29. Verse 30 could have been expected to precede v 29, i.e. death following on life. Yet the arrangement in Ps 104 stresses YHWH as sole creator, and connects the j w of created beings (v 29) with the j w of YHWH. Further, the taking of their j w in v 29 is contrasted with YHWH sending (j l v, Pi) His j w.\footnote{Gunkel, Die Psalmen, 452 rightly remarked that the psalmist does not end his meditation with a reflection on death, but within the consideration that from death follows new life.} As such the notion of the return to dust in v 29 is contrasted here with the theme of the divine renewal (vdj, Pi) of the face (hp) of the “earth” (hnd, other than Åra in v 24). Significant here is the use of the verb arb (Ni) in connection with the divine j w.\footnote{For the theme of the “face of God” in the HB J. Reindl, Das Angesicht Gottes im Sprachgebrauch des Alten Testaments (ETS 25; Leipzig: St Benno Verlag, 1970) provides a thorough discussion. For occurrences of God hiding His face in the Psalter cf. Ps 10:11; 13:1; 22:24; 27:930:7; 34:16 (face of YHWH against the wicked); 44:24; 51:9; 69:17; 88:14; 102:2; 132:10; 143:7. These references are mostly set within the context of affliction.} In a real sense arb is contrasted with [ wg and the use of the imperfect of arb indicates that this creation is not merely a singular or past event, but indeed continuing.\footnote{This is the only instance in the HB psalms where arb is used to refer to YHWH’s works of creation. Other verbs used for this purpose include w (8:3; 24:1; 93:1), hc (33:6; 95:5), dšy(24:1; 89:11) and rxy (95:5). For arb in the psalms, see 51:12; 89:13; 89:48 (Qal), and 102:19; 148:5 (Ni). Its scant distribution might attest to a later theological use. For S. Lee, “Power and novelty: The Connotations of arb in the Hebrew Bible,” in: A.G. Auld (ed.), Understanding Poets and Prophets (JSOTSup 152; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 210-211 the 48 occurrences of arb in the HB indicate that YHWH, as supreme creator, not only manifests His mastery over the physical universe, but over friend and foe equally. Thus, arb is not merely a synonym for hc, but emphasises God as sovereign creator, and His sovereignty over creation.} It is the divine j w in motion that gives shape to chaos and brings forth new life.\footnote{The use of arb in v 30 suggests a continuous creation, since YHWH’s continuous acts of creation and providence holds creation together. Cf. B.W. Anderson, From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 89. Also Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 118, arguing that creation in v 30 continues uninterupted with the renewing of the earth.} Here Gen 1:2 is called to mind, where the j w of God hovers (j r) upon the face of the deep, i.e. having creative potential.\footnote{Compare Gen 1:2 where the spirit (j w) of God moves “upon the face of the waters” (µyw µy µl), giving shape to primordial chaos. Fokkelman, Major Poems II, 267 sees the chiasm with “face” and “spirit / life” further sharpens the opposition of life and death.”} Verse 30 constitutes a climax to the works of YHWH introduced in v 24, where it is connected with the divine wisdom. The process of creation and renewal fits within the scheme of the creation theology of Ps 104.\footnote{Cf. Wiggins, “Tempestuous Wind,” 14. The spirit of God hovering upon the face of the deep (µyw µl) have been interpreted as indicative of the Chaoskampf motif, particularly if µyw is seen as reminiscent of Tiamat in ANE cosmology.} Within the framework of this creation theology death is described as a natural part of this process,\footnote{In this sense each new generation is evidence of a renewal of Yahweh’s creative activity, replenishing human and animal stock. Cf. Allen, Psalms 101-150, 34. The connection between creation and renewal occur in a few other texts, e.g. Is 48:7; 65:17; Jer 31:22; Ps 51:12. Cf. Allen, Psalms 101-150, 28. Also J.T.A.G.M. van Ruiten, Een Begin Zonder Einde: De doorwerking van Jesaja 65:17 in de intertestamentaire literatuur en het Nieuwe Testament (Sliedrecht: Merweboek, 1990), 84.} and does not stand in “opposition” to divine creation.\footnote{Since YHWH’s j w or presence makes possible the conditions for ordered existence, a withdrawal of His presence could imply a resurgence of chaos. Cf. Janowski, Konfliktgespräche mit Gott, 63.} In this sense it foundational gifts of existence “without merit” and that YHWH is free to do with His possessions as He pleases.
cannot be said that death reaches into the realm of life, since it is an inherent part of creation, indeed directly related to the creator.\footnote{Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” 256 relates these experiences to Israel’s praise.} In Ps 104 the psalmist views creation from a position of trust, i.e. trusting in YHWH’s secure works of creation, His providential care thereof, and His perpetual presence therein.\footnote{S.L. Terrien, Elusive Presence: toward a new Biblical theology (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 326, 333 postulates the idea of a “new theology of presence” developing in the Psalter which gains an “eternal dimension.” As such, moments of experiencing YHWH’s absence do not overshadow the light of YHWH’s presence. Ps 73 reflects the psalmist’s realisation that nothing, not even death – if the Babylonian Exile was in some sense experienced as death – can separate the people of God from the divine presence. See also Ps 33:7; 95:4; 55:15; Job 11:7-8; 12:22; 26:6; Pr 15:11; Deut 32:22 for the notion of divine omnipotence and presence in creation.} This theme of the presence of YHWH in creation continues in the final stanza.

**Verses 31-35: YHWH is Praised for His Works**

While verses 31-35 have been considered to be later additions to the main corpus of Ps 104,\footnote{Seybold, Psalmen, 411.} it forms an inherent part of the psalm in its present shape. Within these verses various themes introduced at an earlier stage in Ps 104 reoccur. In this way it does not stand apart from the body of the psalm. The glory of YHWH (i.e. being clothed with majesty and honour; wrapped in light) so vividly described in vv 1-2 reappears in verse 31, by means of employing the fixed expression הָיָה יְדַלְק.\footnote{In the HB Psalter the phrase הָיָה יְדַלְק occurs only here and in 138:5.} This divine glory will be (רְחֵב, impf.) forever (לְעַל), i.e. it will continue within creation and is complemented by the continuing joy (יִרְאֶה) of YHWH in His works (הָיָה יְדַלְק מְקֹל) of v 24).\footnote{Compare Ps 92:5 where the psalmist finds joy in the works of YHWH, and Ps 149:2 where Israel rejoices in Its Maker. YHWH’s joy in His creation in Ps 104 is reminiscent of Gen 1:31, where God perceives His created works as “very good” (דָּמָּרָה). Cf. also Ps 111, with the focus on the goodness of the creator toward His chosen people.} Here YHWH is said to rejoice in His works, while the psalmist rejoices in the works of YHWH in v 24. In both cases the greatness of YHWH is at issue.\footnote{Van der Ploeg, Psalmen, 195. In Ps 19:2 (לָא יְדַלְק), 29:2 (וּרְאַה יְדַלְק), 66:2 (וּרְאַה יְדַלְק), 79:9 (וּרְאַה יְדַלְק); 96:8 (וּרְאַה יְדַלְק) similar expressions are encountered, but no use of the phrase הָיָה יְדַלְק.} Not even the presence of “sinners” and “the wicked” recounted in v 35 can bring YHWH to regret His works of creation.\footnote{Contra Gen 6:6, where YHWH rejects His acts of creation, where it brought Him to grieve in His heart, causing Him to declare that He will destroy all life (man, beast, creeping and flying creatures) from the face of the earth (Gen 6:7).} The possible discrepancy between so-called cosmic and mundane order does not lead to divine withdrawal from creation.\footnote{Anderson, From Creation to New Creation, 86.}

In verse 32 the psalmist offers another description of the relation between YHWH and His creation, but in effect also an elaboration on the הָיָה יְדַלְק in creation (v 31).\footnote{Spiekermann, Heilsgegenwart, 42 ascribes the theophany motif in v 32 to a redactor.} YHWH is described in clear anthropomorphic terms. He looks (פָּרָה, Pi)\footnote{For פָּרָה “to look” in the Psalter, cf. 10:14; 13:14; 22:18; 33:13; 34:6; 74:20; 80:15; 84:10; 91:8; 92:12; 94:9; 102:20; 119:6, 15, 18; 142:5.} and touches (גֶּרֶנ,)\footnote{For גֶּרֶנ “to touch” cf. 73:14; 105:15; 144:5 (Qal); 73:5 (Pi); 32:6; 88:4; 107:18 (Hi).} to which creation responds in various ways.\footnote{For גֶּרֶנ “to touch” cf. 73:14; 105:15; 144:5 (Qal); 73:5 (Pi); 32:6; 88:4; 107:18 (Hi).} The earth trembles (דָּרַך) and...
the mountains smoke (\textit{wān}).

In this way the initial motif of the power and glory of YHWH in vv 1-4 reappears. YHWH’s power and glory receive a positive evaluation in Ps 104. In a metaphorical way the earth is brought into motion (\textit{\text{trembling}} and \textit{smoking}) in response to YHWH’s approach. These anthropomorphic images reflect both YHWH’s transcendence (i.e. “looking on”, \textit{bn}) and immanence (i.e. “touching,” \textit{gn}). This display of divine power is not experienced by the psalmist as overwhelming. It rather moves the psalmist to exaltation, as described in v 33.

The theophany described in v 32 serves as motivation for the psalmist’s declaration of praise in verse 33. In v 31 YHWH rejoices in His works, while in v 33 it is the psalmist, as part of the works of YHWH, who finds joy in creation, prompting Him to praise. In this way the joy of the psalmist in creation parallels the joy of YHWH in His works of creation (v 31). The psalmist will sing (\textit{yw}) to YHWH in (b) his life (\textit{yj}). For this purpose he will make music (\textit{rra Pi}) for God (\textit{\ym a + first person singular suffix}), during (b) his continued existence (\textit{\ym}). But this positive note also has an inherent dark tone. It reflects awareness that the potential for praise is limited to this life. When his being expires, the possibility of praise also ceases. While death is related to YHWH in Ps 104, death is also presented as bringing about separation from the creator, as it does in the somber Ps 88 (v 5, 10b, 12-13). But this is of secondary importance in the context of Ps 104, and the positive tone continues in v 34.

To his singing and songwriting of v 33 the psalmist adds his meditation (\textit{yn}) of YHWH in verse 34. This meditation shall be pleasing (\textit{br}), and in his meditation and as a result thereof, the psalmist will rejoice (\textit{ym}) in YHWH. Here indeed it is

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434 These references to earthquake and fire might very well be allusions to the Sinai theophany of Exod 20:18, particularly if it is considered that the idea of the annihilation of the wicked originates in the cult. Cf. Weiser, \textit{The Psalms}, 670.

435 Ps 144:5b employs similar image, “...touch the mountains and they shall smoke.”

436 Allen, \textit{Psalms 101-150}, 34. This is different in Job and Qohelet.

437 The mythological language employed in v 32 fits the context, since the psalmist is utilising the language proper to the religious views concerning nature and deity. Cf. Mowinckel, \textit{The Psalms in Israel’s Worship}, 102.

438 Ps 77:18 has a similar description, “The voice of your thunder was in the heaven: the lightning lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook.”

439 This is contrary to the picture of YHWH’s dealings with his people in Ps 44:19-26, slaying them instead of dragons, covering them with the shadow of death, sleeping in their hour of need, hiding his face and forgetting their suffering.

440 In vv 33-34 the use of the first person suffix points to an individual concern, while the interest of the remainder of the psalm is of a more “communal” nature. This raises the question whether the psalmist’s “vow to praise” and “meditation” is indicative of its origins among the temple singers. Cf. Gerstenberger, \textit{Psalms 2 and Lamentations}, 224.

441 Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 94.

442 Whether one choose to translate \textit{ybh} “among the living” or “throughout my life” as Dahood, \textit{Psalms III}, 47 does, makes little difference for understanding the general thrust of v 33. It is in the realm of life that the possibility of praise lies.

443 The presence of death implies the absence of praise, while the presence of life implies the possibility of praise. C. Westermann, \textit{Lob und Klage in den Psalmen} (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1977), 121.

444 This is not unlike the call in Qoh 12:1 to “remember your creator in the days of your youth.” Ps 139:13-14 refers to the inability to escape God’s presence, but is situated in a different context of the psalms.

445 This “meditation” (\textit{yn}) of the psalmist is not unlike the wisdom tradition, in which meditation on experiential reality has an important function.
personal praise (יְכָרָא) that is at issue, rather than communal praise. In view of the use of the verbs יָכָר and יִכָר it has been suggested that the psalmist is here referring to psalm itself, i.e. the praise of YHWH sung in the psalm. In this way the “meditation” and “praise” of the psalmist presents the proper response. Despite the psalmist’s observations concerning the ephemeral nature of created beings, including humans, despair is not a proper response, but rather continued praise.

In Ps 104 the primary focus concerns the God of creation, and as such divine creation is pictured as trustworthy.

In verse 35 the tone of the psalmist shifts from praise to petition. Sinners (םיָפַר) should be “consumed” (םַמָל) from the earth, and the wicked (םיָר) should not be allowed to continue to be (דָיַח). This is reminiscent of the wisdom psalms 1 and 37. Indirectly this petition is addressed to YHWH, who is again the subject of praise in 35ba (הוֹיֶל הֲוֹיֶל הֳרִיעָה as Pi impv.) and reaffirmed in 35bb (הֲוֹיָל הֲוֹיָל as Qal impv.). The perceived beneficence of creation and omnipotence of the creator serves as motivation for this closing exaltation. This petition does not merely have a rhetorical function, but is uttered with the assurance that it will indeed come about. The prayer recounted in v 35ba and 35bb forms an inclusio with v 1a (הוֹיֶל הֲוֹיֶל הֳרִיעָה), v 35aa and 35ab seem rather out of place at first in terms of the structure and theme of the psalm. For this reason the reference to the sinners and the wicked might be ascribed to a redactional hand, but within the present form of the psalm it does acquire an important function, namely that in the psalmist’s perception of creation does not ignore its dark edges. The psalmist is celebrating the beauty of

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446 Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 102.
447 Allen, Psalms 101-150, 34 regards praise in this context equal to the offering of a sacrifice. G.A. Anderson, A Time to Dance, A Time to Mourn: The Expression of Joy and Grief in Israelite Religion (University Park: Penn State Press, 1991), 25 argues that within Hebrew, as in other Semitic languages, the term “joy” (יָכָר) is not so much a general term of emotional happiness, but rather a term connoting particular pleasures associated with the observation of specific rituals. This is rather surprising, seeing the general idea in the Psalter that creation cannot continue without the presence of the creator. Cf. Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” 259.
449 In Job 38:13 the wicked are “shaken” out of the earth.
451 Some scholars regard הֲוֹיָל as falling outside the structure of the psalm proper, functioning as a liturgical phrase or liturgical direction. Cf. Allen, Psalms 101-150, 28. Also Briggs, Psalms, 339. So also Seybold, Psalmen, 411 who regards הֲוֹיָל as a call to praise.
452 The use of the shorter form of the divine name הָיָה occurs especially in late psalms.
453 Ps 49 describes a tension between the fate of the wicked and the righteous, and declares that the wicked shall perish, and that death shall feed on them (49:14), while God will redeem the soul of the upright from the power of the grave (49:15). Ps 104 concerns creation and humanity in general, and lacks any notion of resurrection. Further, in Ps 104 death is seen as a fixed “event” and not as an entity, as in Ps 49 (death as a shepherd).
454 Spieckermann, Heilsgegenwart, 43. He regards vv 20-22 as part of the original form of the psalm and as such contrast with v 35, for in vv 20-22 even the “wicked” in the form of the animals of prey have a place in creation, implying that the notion of “annihilation” was absent in the original form of the psalm.
455 Verse 35 is more than just a redactional insertion or liturgical gloss. Here the psalmist is appealing to what is already reported in Ps 1:4-6, namely the disappearance of sinners and the wicked. Cf. Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 94. For similar instances of such a “wish”, see Ps 31:18; 37:20, 34, 38; 68:3. Also Prov 2:22.
creation, without neglecting the apparent imperfections thereof.\textsuperscript{456} This does not detract from the beauty that the psalmist perceives in creation, but rather presents a wish that it may become “complete”, i.e. pointing to the continued involvement of YHWH in creation. For this reason the notion of a continuous creation is very much present in Ps 104. This annihilation of the wicked and the sinners is to take place, i.e. become a reality within creation, and not at some eschatological point in the future or in a new creation. The psalmist perceives creation as trustworthy, and this trust is motivated by the perception of the creator. It is YHWH that holds the fabric of creation together.\textsuperscript{457} This petition of the psalmist does indirectly present a call for divine justice in creation,\textsuperscript{458} but primarily presents a declaration of trust in YHWH.\textsuperscript{459}

### 2.5 Thematic Discussion

Various Psalms deal with the topic of creation, but often as part of a larger whole encompassing other concerns. In Ps 104 creation is the central theological theme and motif.\textsuperscript{460} What is also apparent from the preceding analysis of Ps 104 is the rather peripheral place of death as a theological theme within the framework of its creation theology. In this section we will consider the context of Ps 104, its affinity with material from its Umwelt and within the HB and its affinity with the HB wisdom tradition. This will lead us back to creation and death as theological themes in Ps 104 and the relation between these two themes.

#### 2.5.1 Considering the Context of Psalm 104

Individual psalms and the HB Psalter as a whole are difficult to date and Ps 104 offers no exception.\textsuperscript{461} Ps 104 in its present form stems from the exilic-postexilic period,\textsuperscript{462} but it probably has an earlier Vorlage.\textsuperscript{463} Some scholars argue for a pre-exilic date for

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\textsuperscript{456} For Kraus, Psalmen, 886 this petition for the annihilation of sinners and the wicked from creation is indicative of a belief in a “new creation.” So also Allen, Psalms 101-150, 34 who argues, “Those who by flouting his moral order deliberately spoil the harmony of creation forfeit their God given privilege of sharing in it.” Also S.L. Cook, “Apocalypticism in the Psalter.” ZAW 104 (1992): 82-99 who considers apocalyptic moments in Pss 68, 97, 104, 108 and 144. In Ps 104 the concern is with the present.

\textsuperscript{457} For Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” 287 the return of the chaotic waters in Ps 104 is nothing but an impossible possibility, and suggests that only human evil (v 35) is capable of posing a challenge to the creator. As such “sin” and “wickedness” are references to chaos, which is never far away.

\textsuperscript{458} Clifford, Creation Accounts, 187 regards Ps 104:35 (with Job 9:16-24) as an instance where the general ancient Near Eastern and biblical notion of justice, as a constituent part of creation, is challenged. Yet the question of theodicy is present only at the very edge of the psalm. Cf. Hermisson, “Observations,” 52.

\textsuperscript{459} In Ps 94:3, 5-7 and 10:13-14 YHWH will bring the flourishing wicked to account.

\textsuperscript{460} Mays, “Maker of Heaven and Earth,” 84. Also Miller, “The Poetry of Creation,” 87.

\textsuperscript{461} For Seybold, Psalmen, 408-409 the precise dating of Ps 104 is basically impossible, but should probably, with Genesis 1, be located in the postexilic period.

\textsuperscript{462} Seybold, Psalmen, 409. In view of its affinities with Gen 1 and “weisheitlich-theologischen Denkformen” Ps 104 fits better in the postexilic context. Van der Ploeg, Psalmen, 187 postulates a date between 600-400 BCE, based on an analysis of the vocabulary of the psalm. The use of arb in Ps 104 and Genesis 1 points to a later dating, since arb as technical term mostly occurs in texts from the exilic-postexilic period.

\textsuperscript{463} Kraus, Psalmen, 881. He also favours a later date for the psalm.
Earlier scholarship often considered Ps 104 as postexilic, given the postulated dependence of Ps 104 on Gen 1. Arguments for the dating of Ps 104 include the style, language and motifs operative in the text. In this regard a late, postexilic dating is still preferred by various scholars, and very few attempt to ascribe a specific Sitz im Leben for the text. Here we will consider the relation between Ps 104 and the material from its Umwelt, to see if it can contribute in providing a context for Ps 104.

2.5.1.1 Psalm 104 and the Material from its Umwelt

Affinities between Ps 104 and material from its Umwelt cannot be denied. In its vivid description of creation and creator, Ps 104 incorporates both sun-god and storm-god imagery. The question is how such imagery found its way into Ps 104. The sun-god imagery is usually ascribed to a familiarity of the author with the Egyptian hymn to Aton, while the storm-god imagery is ascribed to the fact that the Hymn to Aton became known to Israel via a Canaanite-Phoenician route. The storm-god imagery, often depicting the deity as a “chariot rider,” is incorporated in the description of YHWH’s cosmic rule (vv 1-9, 32. Also Ps 68:18; Hab 3:18, 15). Yet it is the ascription of solar qualities to YHWH and the affinity with the theme of the hymn to Aton that interests us here.

Since the discovery of the Egyptian Hymn to Aton on the west wall of the tomb of Ay at Tell el-Amarna at the turn of the previous century, scholarly opinion concerning

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464 Kraus, Psalmen, 881; Dahood, Psalms III, 33.
465 Crüsemann, Studien zur Formgeschichte von Hymnus und Danklied in Israel, 301-302 employs the mixed form of the psalm as criteria for suggesting a late, non-cultic, corporate setting for Ps 104, as Ps 103.
466 Gerstenberger, Psalms 2 and Lamentations, 227. It is this exilic-postexilic community that would have drawn freely from diverse traditions, producing such a mixture of texts.
468 Dion, “YHWH as Storm-god and Sun-god,” 43-71 tries to trace the tracks of how sun- and storm-god imagery came to be combined within Ps 104. Also Spronk, Beatific Afterlife, 289 who argues that in Ps 104 and 103 Canaanite material with Egyptian elements have been used.
469 Von Rad, “The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation,” 142 suggested that Ps 104 and 8 reflect an Egyptian outlook, “passed on to Israel by travelling teachers of wisdom.”
470 M. Noth, Die Welt des Alten Testaments: Einführung in die Grenzgebiete der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft (Berlin: Verlag A. Töpelmann, 1940), 198.
471 J. Day, God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 17-18 identifies Ps 104:1-19 as an instance of the Chaoskampf motif within the HB, and argues for a possible Canaanite or Babylonian influences in the text. According to his argument the HB draws on portraits of both El and Baal for its portrayal of YHWH – interpreting the victories of YHWH as cosmogonic.
472 With the Amarna revolution Pharaoh Amen-hotep IV moved the capital from Thebes to Tell el-Amarna, and changed his name to Akhenaton (Akhen-aton), i.e. “He who is serviceable to Aton.” He broke ties with established religion in Egypt, instituting the worship of Aton, the sun disc, as source of life. Cf. J.A. Wilson, “Egyptian Hymns and Prayers,” in: ANET (2d ed.; 1955), 369-70. Also D.B. Redford, “The Monotheism of the Heretic Pharaoh: Precursor of Mosaic Monotheism or Egyptian Anomaly.” BAR 13/3 (1987): 16-32 who provides a discussion of the religious content of the Amarna
the extent of its influence on, and literary and thematic affinities with Ps 104 have been wide ranging, including theories of direct dependence or mere allusions.\textsuperscript{473} The literary affinity between Ps 104 and the Hymn to Aton is illustrated by the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Hymn to Aton (ANET, 3d edition)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Ps 104</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lines 70-73: The Nile in the sky descending and making waves on the mountains to water the fields</td>
<td>10, 13, 6: The waters gain a beneficial quality due to divine activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 31-34: Beasts satisfied with their pasture, trees, plants, and birds which fly from their nests</td>
<td>11, 12, 14aa: Beast, birds, trees are satisfied by divine providence, while the birds finds habitation in the trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 11-12: when thou set the earth in darkness, 17: every lion has come forth from his den</td>
<td>20-21: YHWH sets darkness, while the beasts and lions become active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 21-24: the rising of the sun</td>
<td>22: the sun rises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line 30: the whole land performs its labour</td>
<td>23: human labour commences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line 52: how manifold is that which thou has made; 54: Thou did create the earth according to thy will, being alone</td>
<td>24: the works of YHWH are manifold; in wisdom He made it all; the earth is full of His riches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 37, 39: ships on the Nile; fish; leap on the river before thee</td>
<td>25, 26: ships on the sea; Beasts in the ocean; YHWH playing with Leviathan in the sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line 60: each man has his food</td>
<td>27: YHWH provides food to all at the right time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 99-100: when though has risen, they live; when though set, they die</td>
<td>29-30: When YHWH hides His face they are troubled; when he takes away their breath they die When he sends His spirit they are created</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Structural, thematic and grammatical affinities between these two texts do not necessarily imply a direct literary dependence or influence. A reason is the rather short-lived nature and limited impact of Atonism in ancient Egypt and the ancient Near Eastern context.\textsuperscript{474} In all probability the hymn to Aton was mediated to Israel via a different route. Various scholars have suggested a Canaanite-Phoenician route, i.e. that the hymn became known in Israel by means of a Canaanite-Phoenician translation.\textsuperscript{475} A reason for this argument is that the geographical space reflected in Ps 104 is more representative of a Palestinian than an Egyptian context.\textsuperscript{476} As such Ps 104 can be regarded as a hymn in the Egyptian tradition, mediated to Israel by means of Canaanite-Phoenician culture and religion.\textsuperscript{477} This implies a process of revolution. Further E. Nordheim, “Der grosse Hymnus des Echnaton und Psalm 104: Gott und Mensch im Ägypten der Amarnazeit und in Israel,” in: G. Dautzenberg (ed.), Theologie und Menschenbild: Ewald Link zum 65. Geburtstag gewidmet (TW 7; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1978), 51-74.


R.K. Gnuse, \textit{No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel} (JSOTSup 241; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 172-73 argues that the impact of Atonism on Yahwism was minimal, which is surprising, considering the close proximity of Egypt to Canaan.

R. Kraus, \textit{Psalmen}, 88; Dahood, \textit{Psalms III}, 33. Keel, \textit{The Symbolism of the Biblical World}, 209 states that it is “inconceivable” that the Aton hymn was directly taken up by the Israelites.

Gerstenberger, \textit{Psalms 2 and Lamentations}, 223. Such a geographical space is reflected in Ps 104:16-18, where the necessity of rainfall is stressed, while Egypt depended on the Nile River rather than rainfall.

transmission and reception, which could explain the intertwining of sun-god and storm-god imagery in Ps 104.\textsuperscript{478} This transmission to and reception of the Aton hymn in Israel led to a transformation and reapplication of motifs and formulations encountered in the Aton Hymn. Such motifs were reapplied for a different purpose,\textsuperscript{479} and brought into conformity with Israel’s distinctive theological outlook.\textsuperscript{480} Ps 104 reflects the merging of divergent theological perspectives, cast in a new theological mode.\textsuperscript{481} The combination of storm-god and sun-god imagery also suggests that the divine nature of YHWH is beyond identification with a single natural phenomenon (see also Ps 50:1-3).\textsuperscript{482}

Ps 104 does not present a polemical text. Rather, the sun-god and storm-god imagery employed in the text have a doxological purpose. In this way the status of YHWH as omnipotent and beneficent creator, creating without opposition, not equitable with any aspect of creation, is rhetorically affirmed.\textsuperscript{483} The doxological nature and intent of Ps 104 is suggestive of a cultic setting,\textsuperscript{484} but the exact occasion for its use cannot be determined with certainty.\textsuperscript{485} In such a cultic setting, Ps 104 is incorporated into Israel’s worship and for this reason the solar qualities ascribed to YHWH are significant. The ascription of solar qualities to YHWH does not imply a solarisation of YHWH within official Yahwism.\textsuperscript{486} YHWH is not assimilated with or depicted as sun-disk.\textsuperscript{487} Yet, solar qualities are ascribed to YHWH. This is comparable to Mal 4:2, where YHWH is described, for those that fear His name, as “sun of righteousness” (\textit{hqdxt \textit{wnm}}) with “healing in its wings” (\textit{hprkb \textit{apr}}).\textsuperscript{488} Solar imagery in Ps 104 is

\begin{itemize}
\item Aton hymn on Ps 104. Recently S. Reichmann, \textit{Bei Übernahme Korrektur?: Aufnahme und Wandlung ägyptischer Tradition und das Alte Testament} (Ph.D. diss., Groningen, 2008) who argues that some parts of Ps 104 are a direct translation of the Akhenaton hymn.
\item Dahood, \textit{Psalms III}, 33; Kraus, \textit{Psalmen}, 880; Gnuse, \textit{No Other Gods}, 172-73 suggests that Israel may have been the recipient of some teachings concerning Aton due to its connection with Phoenician scribal tradition. Also J.C. de Moor, \textit{The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism} (Leuven: Peeters, 1990), 67. Taylor, \textit{Yahweh and the Sun}, 225-230 likewise argues for a Canaanite-Phoenician influence in bringing the Akhenaton hymn to Israel, which also contains storm-god imagery.
\item Levenson, \textit{Creation and the Persistence of Evil}, 57, 57-65; Clifford, \textit{Creation Accounts}, 115.
\item Taylor, \textit{Yahweh and the Sun}, 225-6.
\item Stadelman, \textit{The Hebrew Conception of the World}, 31 rightly observes that whatever influence the Hymn to Aton might have had on Ps 104, any borrowed material has been thoroughly assimilated to the faith in Yahweh and transformed to express the “creation mythology and Hebrew cosmology.”
\item Compare here Ps 29, which probably presents a transformation of a hymn to Baal, transformed by the psalmist into a doxology of YHWH, and ascribed to David.
\item Crüsemann, \textit{Studien zur Formgeschichte}, 301-2 assigns Ps 104 (with 103) to a non-cultic setting.
\item The collective “we” is absent in Ps 104, but the “I” speaking in the psalm could function as a liturgist. Gerstenberger, \textit{Psalms 2 and Lamentations}, 227.
\item S.A. Wiggins, “Yahweh: the God of Sun?” \textit{JSOT} 71 (1996): 89-106, at 104. He argues with Dion, YHWH as Storm-god and Sun-god, 65 that the author of Ps 104 used the Aton hymn to elaborate on the storm-god attributes of YHWH, but the author avoided any suggestion of a privileged relation between YHWH and the sun. However, texts such as Ezek 8:16 or 2 Kgs 23:5, 11 might reflect a criticism against cultic practices associated with solar worship in the Jerusalem Temple in the final stages of the Judean monarchy. Smith, “The Near Eastern Background,” 31.
\item W. Zimmerli, \textit{Old Testament Theology in Outline} (trans. D.E. Green; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 38-39, rightly argued that despite the close similarities, “…it is characteristic that it is not the sun with its life giving power that is extolled, but Yahweh, who wraps himself in a robe of light and spreads out the heavens like a tent (v 2) and ordains the course of the moon and the sun (v 19).”
\item Also Ps 84:12 (HB), “For YHWH Elohim is a sun and shield…” By means of such figurative language YHWH can be described in solar terms. Cf. Smith, “The Near Eastern Background,” 30. In Ps 17, 27, 63 and Ezek 8:16, the sun evokes the luminescent dimension of the divine presence.
\end{itemize}
seen particularly in vv 1-2, but reoccurs in the description of YHWH’s works of creation and providence. The Aton hymn illustrates the universality and beneficence of the creating and re-creating sun disc. In Ps 104 this is ascribed to YHWH, who is described by means of qualities of the sun, but also rules over the sun (vv 19, 22). The “dying and rising” associated with the creating and re-creating sun-disk (Aton) is also absent in Ps 104.489 On this point the difference between the hymn to Aton and Ps 104 is clear.490

2.5.1.2 Psalm 104 and the Priestly Creation Account of Genesis 1:1-2:4a

The dependence of Ps 104 on Gen 1 remains a moot point.491 In terms of structure, theme and theological viewpoint Ps 104 and the Priestly creation account of Gen 1:1-2:4a stand in close proximity.492 But the degree of (inter-)dependence and direction of influence remain disputed.493 The basic structural relation between Ps 104 and Gen 1:1-2:4a is illustrated by the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creation of heaven and earth</th>
<th>Ps 104</th>
<th>Gen 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waters pushed back</td>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>6-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waters put to beneficial use</td>
<td>10-13</td>
<td>6-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of vegetation</td>
<td>14-18</td>
<td>11-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of luminaries</td>
<td>19-23</td>
<td>14-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of sea creatures</td>
<td>24-26</td>
<td>20-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of living creatures</td>
<td>27-30</td>
<td>24-31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

489 In Deut 33:2, Isa 60:1 and Hos 6:3 the root j rz “to rise” is used to describe YHWH. Yet the focus is on the divine presence and glory, and not on the divine “rising.”
490 Other differences include that cult of Aton lacked rituals and offers, while Yahwism has both - even an elaborate system. Aton was pictured solely as a solar deity, while YHWH is predominantly characterised as a storm God with occasional solar attributes. Aton is a timeless, distant and impersonal deity, while YHWH is a warrior God closely involved with his creation. YHWH, as God of creation and history, stands in a relationship with many people, while Aton stood only in relation to Akhenaton. Cf. Gnuse, No Other Gods, 173. Also W.H. Schmid, The Faith of the Old Testament: A History (trans. J. Sturdy, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 69; D.B. Redford, Akhenaten: The Heretic King (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 32.
492 What should not be overlooked is the particular affinities that have been identified between Gen 1:1-2:4a and the process of creation encountered in the Egyptian Memphite Theology – in which creation takes place through the word of a single deity (Ptah), while God “speaks” creation into being in Gen 1. Cf. Clifford, Creation Accounts, 114; also K. Koch, “Wort und Einheit des Schöpfergottes in Memphis und Jerusalem.” ZTK 62 (1965): 251-93 who offers an investigation into such Phoenician models and their possible influence.
493 E.g. P. Humbert, “La realtion de Genése 1 et du Psaume 104 avec la liturgie du Nouvel-An israélite,” in; Opuscules d’un hébraïsant (Neuchatel: Université de Neuchatel, 1958), 60-83 who follows Gunkel, Die Psalmen, 453 and argues for the direct influence of Gen 1 by the author of Ps 104, pointing to linguistic parallels and a similar sequence of creation. To the contrary A. van der Voort, “Genèse 1:1 a 2:4a et le Psaume 104.” RB 58 (1951): 341-42, 346 argues that Gen 1 reflects a later stage of theological development and rather reflects a use of Ps 104. This argument is supported by Day, Yahweh and the Gods, 100-102.
Such a schematic comparison indicates the similarity concerning the basic order of events of creation, but also that the basic structure of creation within these two texts is essentially the same. An overlap in vocabulary is also noticeable, e.g. μυδ[wml (v 19 // Gen 1:14); νανγ (vv 11, 20 // Gen 1:24); μυρν ¹ν (v 12 // Gen 1:26, 28, 30); bc[ (v 14 // Gen 1:11-12); μαρ [v 8 // Gen 1:9). But stylistic differences also persist. So e.g. Gen 1 is logical and schematic in its approach, while Ps 104 is exuberant and free, employing rich and varied vocabulary. In this sense the use of anthropomorphisms and mythic elements in Ps 104 should be noted (the description of the divine self-revelation in vv 1-2, 3-4, 32), which lacks in Gen 1. The question of literary dependence is complicated by the fact that both Ps 104 and Gen 1 drew from diverse material of its Umwelt and incorporated it into their own theologies. The earlier origin (not final form) of Ps 104 would suggest use of Ps 104 by the author of Gen 1, without implying a direct dependence. Differences between Ps 104 and Gen 1 are suggestive of a diversified background, literary and theological. But in their final form both texts represent an independent expression of basically the same part of Israelite theology.

The argumentative tone of both texts has led to the suggestion that Gen 1 is partly polemical (vv 14-18), while Ps 104 is doxological. Yet both stress the completeness of the divine works of creation. The absence of a clear struggle motif in Ps 104 and

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495 For Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 119 Ps 104 “...konfrontiert traditionell vorgegebene, mythologische Konzepte und, alltägliche Erfahrungen so miteinander, daß sie sich wechselseitig erschließen, interpretieren und korrigieren.”
496 For this view Day, Yahweh and the Gods, 101 aptly argues that 1) Ps 104 is more mythological, with vv 6-9 referring to the battle with the waters and v 26 to Leviathan. The references in Genesis 1:6-10, 26 is regarded as instances where Ps 104 was demythologised, since for Day this is a more natural assumption than to suppose that Ps 104 re-mythologised Genesis 1. He is also in favour of viewing the Hymn to Aton as the source of Ps 104 instead of Genesis 1. 2) The form of the word for ‘beasts’ in Genesis 1:24 (νανγ) occurs elsewhere only in poetic texts, among them Ps 104:11, 20, which suggests for Day that a poetic text, Ps 104, underlies Gen 1.
497 In this regard it has been suggested that Ps 104 should not be compared to the creation model of Gen 1, but rather with texts that start from the confrontation of creation and chaos, such as Ps 89:10-14. Cf. Hermisson, “Observations,” 125.
498 Boström, The God of the Sages, 73. For arguments postulating a common cultic origin for both texts, cf. A.A. Anderson, The Book of Psalms (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1972), 717. Humbert also argued that both Gen 1 and Ps 104 originally served as “librettos” for a festival in the Jerusalem Temple. Also Anderson, From Creation to New Creation, 86.
500 A.S. Kapelrud, “Die Theologie der Schöpfung im Alten Testament.” ZAW 91 (1979): 159-170, at 164 views the Priestly creation account of Gen 1 as a response to the ideological competition in the form of creation accounts like Enuma Elish. As a result “Ordnung” and “Trennung”, two main features in Enuma Elish, are also prominent in Gen 1, but absent in the earlier creation account of Genesis 2. Smith, The Origins, 168 sees Gen 1:1-2:4a as indebted to older creation model of the “cosmos as battlefield.” Chaos never really refrains from threatening the ordered creation, but in the HB creation texts the dramatic element of struggle is often lacking.
501 Contrary to this interpretation Anderson, “Mythopoetic and Theological Dimensions,” 13 reads Ps 104 as a “true cosmogonic myth” (vv 6-9) and that creation’s harmonious beneficial order results from YHWH’s battle with chaos. He further highlights the relation of Ps 104 with Gen 1, with Ps 104 having an Egyptian origin, entering Israelite religion via the wisdom tradition. L.G. Perdue, The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 117-119 discusses this perspective under the rubric of “Myth in American Old Testament Circles.”
Gen 1 highlights the emphasis placed on the omnipotence of the creator and the beneficence of creation. Both texts view creation from a position of trust, with the creator responsible for maintaining the life supporting order in creation. As symbol of chaos, “water” (µỳm) is an important theme in both texts, with God “separating” (ldb) it in Gen 1:6, and YHWH “rebuking” (hr[g) it in Ps 104:7. In both texts water is designated its proper place, and gains a beneficial quality. The “waters” respond to the divine voice without resistance or a struggle.

Both texts argue for the omnipotence of the creator and the beneficence of creation, but there are also differences between these two texts. Divine providence is a theme in both creation theologies, but it is further developed in Ps 104, leading some to regard it as the theological crux of the text. An important difference is the connection between divine creation and wisdom in Ps 104:24, which lacks completely in Gen 1. In the creation account of Gen 1 a reference to death is absent, while Ps 104 connects the phenomenon of death with YHWH. The use of the divine names presents another difference. Ps 104 predominantly employs hwhy (cf. §2.5.4.1), and Gen 1 µyhla. In Gen 1 creation is categorically described as good (bwf), particularly in the formulation bwfAyk µyhla aryw (vv 10, 12, 18, 21, 25; 31). Ps 104 also ascribes this quality to creation (v 28), but not by means of a fixed expression, and it remains aware of the dark side of creation, calling on YHWH to bring His creation to completion by removing injustices from it (v 35). Another significant difference between these two creation theologies concerns the place of humanity within creation. In Ps 104 humanity has no special designation and is mentioned within the broader description of creation, having its place and function as all created beings (see also Ps 29; 42:1; 44:11; 49:12 for humanity’s devalued place in creation and in relation with the Deity. Cf. Ps 49:21 for a different view).


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502 The description of Elohim’s j w “moving” (¹jr, Pi) upon the face of the “waters” in Gen 1:2 is suggestive of such a mythological remnant, corresponding with the earth’s description as “empty and void” (lubwlt), with darkness (ûj) on the face of the deep (µlht).
503 Weiser, The Psalms, 666 suggested the same origin in a common cultic tradition for both texts, in terms of which God created by means of his power and wisdom and in terms of which He created for His own sake, revealing His glory, which is also to be seen in nature.
504 In her consideration of “chaos” in Ps 104, Watson, Chaos Uncreated, 233-242, at 242 argues against an identification of Chaoskampf in Ps 104. She suggests that images associated with the creation of water reserves did not enter Israel’s Temple hymnology before the postexilic period.
505 Van der Ploeg, Psalmen, 187 regards Ps 104 as a doxological hymn of divine providence.
507 The anthropocentrism of Gen 1 is softened by the Priestly covenant in Gen 9:15a, describing God’s covenant with “every living creature of all flesh” (9:15a). While Gen 9:2-3 continues the line of reasoning of Gen 1:28, the privileged place of humans within creation is relativised by the new covenant of God with every living creature.
creation, but not at the centre.\textsuperscript{509} Despite this important difference, theocentrism rather than anthropocentrism governs the worldview of both creation theologies.

2.5.1.3 Psalm 104 and the Wisdom Tradition

The notion of YHWH as sole and omnipotent creator is expanded in Ps 104 by identifying all His works with wisdom (\( \text{hmkj} \)) in v 24.\textsuperscript{510} This connection of the divine works with wisdom inevitably led some scholars to characterise Ps 104 as a wisdom psalm.\textsuperscript{511} This view is supported by the reference to the “meditation” (\( \text{jyc} \)) of the psalmist in v 34. Further, the middle section of Ps 104 offers an example of nature wisdom, as described in 1 Kgs 4:33 (5:13, HB).\textsuperscript{512} As such Ps 104 is certainly reflective of a wisdom influence, and can be considered as a psalm with a wisdom orientation. Whether this is sufficient reason to label Ps 104 as a wisdom psalm in terms of genre is not as clear. This is due to the disputed nature of the genre wisdom psalm in HB scholarship.\textsuperscript{513} A primary reason for this dispute is the disagreement concerning the criteria to be employed for establishing whether a psalm qualifies as a wisdom psalm.\textsuperscript{514} The need for more nuanced criteria has long been pointed out,\textsuperscript{515} Schroer, “What About Job: Questioning the Book of the ‘Righteous Sufferer’.” in: A. Brenner and C.R. Fontaine (eds.), Wisdom and the Psalms: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (2d Series; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 191 interpreting Ps 104 as “non-anthropocentric” and comparable to the divine speeches in Job 38-41. They regard this as an inherent aspect of the worldview of wisdom literature.\textsuperscript{509} This does not imply a dualism between humanity and nature Ps 104. Anderson, From Creation to New Creation, 87.

A mix of stylistic features as encountered in Ps 104 is not surprising, considering the “reciprocal influence” among the traditions of the HB. Cf. Murphy, Tree of Life, 108. The HB contains a “living mix of literary activity.”\textsuperscript{516} On this point one should not loose sight of the hybrid character of the psalm. For the majestic Hymn or “psalm of praise” does indeed here include dimensions characteristic of wisdom. Cf. e.g. S.J.L. Croft, The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms (Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 171. Also Whybray, The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament, 96. In his investigation into the nature of the wisdom psalms, Whybray is in favour of applying form-criticism, due to the varied nature of these poems. Also Westermann, Das Loben Gottes in den Psalmen, 1961.

\textsuperscript{515}J.K. Kuntz, “Reclaiming Biblical Wisdom Psalms: A Response to Crenshaw.” CBR 1 (2003): 145-154 argues in favour of the genre “wisdom psalm.” R.E. Murphy, “A Consideration of the Classification ‘Wisdom Psalms.’” VTSup 9 (1962): 167 identifies Pss 1, 32, 34, 37, (39), 49, (73), 112, 128 as wisdom psalms, but also warns that the employment of wisdom elements does not necessarily ascribe a psalm to this genre. Also J.L. Crenshaw, “Wisdom,” in: J.H. Hayes (ed.), Old Testament Form Criticism (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1974), 247-253 calls for a distinction between psalms that were written by the wise and those that portray a wisdom influence in form and theme. He remains sceptical about the existence of wisdom psalms proper, but nevertheless regards Pss 1, 19, 33, 39, 49 and 104 as belonging to this genre, while Ps 94 portrays a strong wisdom influence.

\textsuperscript{514}H. Gunkel and J. Begrich, Einleitung in die Psalmen: die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels (GHAT 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933), 386-97 were among the first to employ such criteria, particularly “sapiential forms” and “themes” for identifying wisdom psalms. For von Rad, Weisheit in Israel, 70f Pss 1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128 and 133 meet these criteria, presenting Lehrgebete. S. Mowinckel, “Psalms and Wisdom.” VT Sup 3 (1955): 205-24 identified Psalms 1, 34, 37, 49, 78, 105, 106, 111, 112, 127 as having a non-cultic origin and purpose, and labelled it “learned psalmography.” Gunkel and Mowinckel’s emphasis on the study of the psalms by focusing on particular literary forms (characteristic vocabulary, life setting, motifs) and the liturgical background into which psalms fit, meant that little room was left a category as wisdom psalms. Cf. Murphy, The Tree of Life, 103. Also J.K. Kuntz, “The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel,” in: J.J. Jackson and M. Kessler (eds.), Rhetorical Criticism (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1974), 186-222 who regards
but the identification of wisdom psalms remains tenuous. Such uncertainty is further fueled by the fact that very little is known about the actual origin and setting of wisdom psalms. As is the case with various psalms it might have originated in a temple setting, or in the context of a wisdom school. The problem with postulating a temple setting is that the relation between wisdom and the cult, i.e. the participation of the sages in the Israelite religious life, is not certain at all. But despite this uncertainty there is no reason not to assume some form of participation of the sages in the Israelite religious life. In the case of wisdom schools, little is known about the actual existence of wisdom schools or houses of learning (cf. Sir 51:23, ὤ[κω][τοί|παideiā") at an early time in Israelite society. Therefore this setting would point in the direction of a later dating for the wisdom psalms. Wisdom psalms most probably found its way into the HB Psalter as a result of the sages’ participation in the Israelite religious and cultic life. Such an infiltration of sapiential thought into the Israelite cultic and religious life would have occurred at a relatively late stage, since the Israelite sages did not seem to show a lively interest in matters pertaining to the cult before the time of Ben Sira in the second century BCE.

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515 Murphy, “A Consideration of the Classification ‘Wisdom Psalms’”, 156-67. Also Murphy, The Tree of Life, 97 where he argues for the need of establishing adequate criteria for the identification of wisdom literature in the HB which falls outside the parameter of acknowledged wisdom texts. To this genre he ascribes Psalms 1, 32, 34, 37, 49, 112, 128. See also Perdue, Wisdom and Cult, 266-67, adding the criteria of “structure.”

516 Murphy, The Tree of Life, 103-04 challenges interpreters to form their own criteria, and challenges the number of psalms that have been classified as “wisdom psalms.”

517 Perdue, Wisdom and Cult, 267. Scholars such as Von Rad, Mowinckel and Jansen have argued that the didactic poems, including wisdom psalms, were produced in a wisdom school in which the wise sought to instruct their students in different genres of literature, including cultic forms. The view that long didactic poems in the Psalter stems from the late postexilic period is rejected by Perdue. For Westermann, Würzeln der Weisheit, 43 it was only after the event of the exile that wisdom proverbs entered into the psalms and contributed to the formation of a “general wisdom.”

518 Ps 104 could provide an instance where the concerns of Israel’s sages met those of her priests. In this regard A.R. Ceresko, “The Sage in the Psalms,” in: A.R. Ceresko, The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 219 observes that “If the wisdom movement involved itself in the handing down of the knowledge and values of the community (“the world” in which that community lived) to the next generation, the cult, with its sacred songs (psalms) functioned to maintain, reshape, and celebrate that world.” See also K.J. Dell, “‘I will solve my riddle to the music of the lyre’ (Psalm xliv4[5]): a Cultic Setting for Wisdom Psalms?” VT 54 (2004): 445-458. She suggests that the wisdom influence in the psalms is not just the result of scribal activity in the postexilic period, but part of Israel’s earliest self-identification through worship.

519 The difference between cult and wisdom has aptly been explained as a difference between times of festivity and those of everyday life. Cf. Hermisson, “Observations,” 54. After the exile of 587 BCE, wisdom gained a greater share in the religious market place of ancient Israel, resulting in greater interaction of sage and priest. Also M.E. Stone, “Ideal Figures and Social Context: Priest and Sage in the Early Second Temple Age,” in: P. Miller et al., Ancient Israelite Religion. Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 576 who discusses the priest and sage within some literature from the late Second Temple period. Their roles are socially and religiously fixed, which assists in analysing the value systems and world views expressed in the presentation of these figures as ideal or exemplary types, providing “paradigms of conduct.”

520 J.L. Crenshaw, Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction (Westminster: John Knox, 1998), 175. In Jer 18:18 priest, sage and prophet are mentioned together as devising plans against Jeremiah. But not too much should be read into this text concerning the sages’ interest in the cult.
Thematically Ps 104 clearly has a wisdom orientation. It contemplates creation and the place of all created beings therein; it connects creation with divine wisdom (hmkj, v 24; cf. Prov 3:19), and it calls for the banishment of the wicked (v 35; cf. Ps 1 and 37). Ps 104:24 presents a unique instance in the HB, and here the infrequent use of hmkj in the HB Psalter should also be noted. The infrequent use of terms relating to wisdom in the Psalter does not have to be interpreted as an indication of general disinterest in wisdom in the Psalter. The overall tone of Ps 104 does allow for identification with the wisdom tradition, even if its does not meet all the form critical criteria to be labelled as a wisdom psalm. The complex character and mixed style of Ps 104 further complicates attempts at assigning it to a specific genre. But as stated, the present form of Ps 104 does reflect an affinity with the Israelite wisdom tradition. This does not necessarily imply that it originated within a wisdom context such as a wisdom school, but was influenced by the broader Israelite wisdom tradition. The wisdom orientation of Ps 104 has implications for considering creation and death as theological themes in this text.

2.5.2 Creation as a Theological Theme in Ps 104

Psalm 104, with its wisdom orientation, is a prime example of a creation psalm. Creation is not one of several theological themes, but the central theological theme in Ps 104. The theme of divine providence fits within the framework of the

523 For the occurrence of hmkj cf. psalms 90:12; 104:24; 111:10; 37:30 and 51:8 (as object); 107:27 (subject) for the occurrence of. The noun µkj “wise” occurs in Ps 107:43 and 49:11 (subject). Here it has been rightly pointed out by Hurvitz, Wisdom Vocabulary in the Hebrew Psalter, 44 that infrequent occurrences of isolated words or expressions are not decisive in determining the linguistic nature of a given text.
524 So e.g. Ps 104 has been described as “…one of the grandest works of international Old Wisdom with its dominant focus on nature-creation.” Cf. Geller, Wisdom, Nature and Piety in Some Biblical Psalms, 105.
525 Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” 287 regards the final form of Ps 104 as deeply influenced by the wisdom tradition, and that creation becomes a sign of victory and an act of liberation (cf. Ps 18:15-20; 65:8; 89:14), with the created order testifying to the divine wisdom (104:24). He regards the psalm as an anti-mythical treatment of the chaotic waters, which is congruous with the description of Leviathan. Cf. also Terrien, Elusive Presence, 315-16 pointing out that despite the lack of clear literary criteria for the genre, affinities in some parts of Psalter with wisdom circles is readily admitted.
528 Pss 8, 24, 33, 65, 74, 74, 89, 95, 96, 100, 102, 115, 119, 121, 124, 134, 135, 136, 146, 147 and 148. According to L. Vosberg, Studien zum Reden vom Schöpfer in den Psalmen (BEVTH 69; München: Kaiser Verlag, 1975), 11, 15 none of these 22 psalms should be dated to a period before 587/6 BCE.
529 Von Rad, “The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation,” 140-142 regarded creation psalms to offer a starting-point from which to consider divine providence and the purpose of divine salvation. Despite this view, he considered Pss 104 and 19 as containing an “unadulterated” doctrine of creation. To the contrary Mays, “Maker of Heaven and Earth,” 75 sees YHWH’s
description of divine works of creation. This sets Ps 104 apart from Ps 103 in which divine providence is the central theme, as in the twin historical psalms 105 and 106. Amid the rhetorical fusion of literary and theological motifs in Ps 104, the distinct voice of the psalmist in depicting creator, creation and the relation between creator and death remains clear.

2.5.2.1 The Rhetoric of God in Ps 104

Central to the creation theology of Ps 104 is the description of the Deity. Primarily, the Deity in Ps 104 is characterised as magnificent and omnipotent creator. The majesty (dĕw) and honour (rĕd) ascribed to YHWH in v 1 are royal predicates (cf. Ps 96:4, 6), presenting YHWH as cosmic ruler. The creation theology operative in Ps 104 stresses that everything, even that which is representative of chaos, such as the waters (vv 6-9) and Leviathan (v 26), is subjugated to divine supremacy. This is achieved by means of describing YHWH’s exalted position in creation as well as His works of creation, and not by means of describing YHWH’s struggle with or victory over the forces of chaos. The imagery employed in Ps 104, describing divine supremacy, has an ancient Near Eastern background, but it has been remodelled according to the theological purpose of the psalmist. This is evident in vv 1-2, and particularly the description of YHWH “stretching out the heavens” (lĕyv hêvaw) in v 2. YHWH’s cosmic location is indicative of the heights of the horizon, i.e. the

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530 According to Albertz, Weltschöpfung und Menschenschöpfung, 160 it cannot be determined with certainty whether the tradition concerning the providence of the creator functioned in pre-exilic times. He proposes that this tradition is suggestive of an Egyptian rather than a Canaanite-Phoenician background.

531 McCann, “Psalms,” 1096, seeing creation as the focus of Ps 104, setting it apart from Ps 103 (4, 8, 11, 13, 17) which stresses the divine mercy and love.

532 Spieckermann, Heilsgegenwart, 20.

533 Ps 103:14-16 describes humanity’s mortal state and YHWHs remembrance thereof, but the nature of the description and the context in which it occurs differs from Ps 104.

534 Here Ezek 1 and Isa 6 are comparable in describing of the divine Gestalt.

535 Kraus, Psalmen, 887 identifies “Baumeister,” “Familienvater,” “Feldherr,” “Ökonom,” and “Hausvater” as metaphors for the creator in Ps 104, while YHWH is throughout depicted as heavenly king.

536 Deissler, Die Psalmen, 408.


538 Here contra Gerstenberger, Theologies, 243 who identifies a struggle motif in Ps 18, 77, 104 and 114.


540 N.C. Habel, “He who Stretches out the Heavens.” CBQ 34 (1973): 417-430 considers the occurrences of this theme in Deutero-Isaiah (Is 40:22; 42:5; 45:12; 48:13; 51:13, 16), and related expressions in Job 26 and Ps 104, identifying a possible prototype for these expressions in Ps 18 (with its archaic formulation) and 144, with both related to a sacred tent tradition. A connection is visible between the imagery of Ps 18:9-13 and 104:2-5, and this tent imagery is suggestive of a cultic context for both texts.
cosmic north, presenting the mythological abode of the gods and the place of celestial appearance within the religions of ancient Palestine. In Ps 104 it presents the realm from which YHWH rules, coming in power to demonstrate His cosmic dominion, covering Himself with light (rā, v 1). As such vv 1-2 contribute in amplifying the divine revelatory dimension of vv 1-4. YHWH’s self-manifestation is not preceded by a Chaoskampf as in the Baal Epic or the Enuma Elish, where victorious gods such as Baal and Marduk and kings build temples following their victories. In Ps 104 the heavens announce YHWH’s presence and revelation as He proceeds to create.

In Ps 104 the Deity is predominantly designated by the name hwhy (v 1 x 2; 16; 24; 31 x 2; 33; 34; 35), and once with µhya (v 1), lâ (v 21), and hy (v 35) which, as shorter form of hwhy frequently occurs in later psalms in the formulation hyAwllh. The deity is addressed in the 2nd and 3rd person, and also with the 1st person singular suffix, “my God” (v 1). YHWH is the psalmist’s God (ybl hwhy v1), and as such all subsequent descriptions of the Deity’s works of creation applies to YHWH, who is very great (dam tldg, v 1). In this way YHWH is depicted as heavenly king, even if Ps 104 is not a royal psalm.

In addition to being great and majestic, YHWH is also characterised as “wise”, making everything in wisdom (hnhj, v 24), securing a beneficial order in creation. This description witnesses to the nature of the creator and creation alike. Creation is governed and kept in tact by divine wisdom. This implies that the creator is not depicted as distant, but closely involved in the realm of creation. YHWH is not an impersonal life force as the solar deity in the hymn to Aton. Rather, YHWH responds (v 28) to His creation (v 27), providing in the needs of living creatures, being in charge of meteorological phenomena (v 13), and even finds pleasure in the playful Leviathan (v 26). When YHWH opens His hand (v 28), creation is filled with goodness. In this respect the providential quality of the creator is clearly depicted. Birds, trees, humans, creatures of the sea, all depend on the timely provision (v 27) of YHWH. YHWH rules with an open hand, nurturing and

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542 Habel, “He who Stretches out the Heavens,” 423. In this regard the description of the heavens serves primarily as the cosmic location of the creator, rather than a structural component of creation, in the sense of holding back the waters. Compare Ps 29:9-10 where YHWH is described as enthroned above the cosmic flood.

543 In Ps 104:1 ḥdw “splendour” (cf. Hab 3:3) and ṛdh “honour” belong to the language of divine theophany and cultic epiphany (cf. Ps 29:2; 96:6; Job 40:10). Cf. Habel, “He who Stretches out the Heavens,” 422.

544 Habel, “He who Stretches out the Heavens,” 429.

545 Here contra Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” 284, 288 who considers Ps 104 as fitting within the frame of the YHWH-kingship psalms. For Weiser, The Psalms, 667 the imagery describing YHWH is drawn from a nature myth, preserved in the language of the cult. Cf. 18:10, “And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.”

546 Ps 136:5 states that YHWH made the heavens in “understanding” (hmwt).


548 Perdue, Wisdom and Creation, 467 considers the connection between divine wisdom in the HB and ma‘at, and argues that “God is the creator of heaven and earth and the one who continues to sustain the order of reality, making life in its various manifestations not only possible, but indeed vital and blessed as well.”

549 This motif also occurs in Ps 33, 147, 148, but here in the context of salvation rather than creation.
restraining, rather than hunting down like the Egyptian and Mesopotamian gods in order to demonstrate their authority.\footnote{W.P. Brown, \textit{Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 99-100.}

While YHWH responds to creation by means of caring and providing, creation also responds to the approach of YHWH (v 32). By means of a continuance of anthropomorphic images, the psalmist describes the earth’s trembling and the mountains’ smoking in response to YHWH’s looking (fbn) and touching ([gn). In the same way the waters fled from YHWH’s rebuke (hr[g, hearing the voice of His thunder (v 7). The psalmist offers an awe inspiring description of the creator, who does not stand in a threatening relation to creation.

In the continuous cycle of creation and death, YHWH is described as present every step of the way. If YHWH takes away the j w, which by implication He also gave, living beings die and return to dust (v 30). When YHWH sends forth His j w creation is renewed and continues (v 31). For this reason YHWH in Ps 104 is above all the God of life.\footnote{The notion of hwhy as God of life is implicit in the divine name, associated with the verb hyj “to be” (Exod 3:14). See also Deut 30:19-20; Jer 21:8; Ps 36:9; Job 12:10 for other instances affirming YHWH as God of life. Cf. Johnston, “Death in Egypt and Israel,” 114.} In this way the creation theology of Ps 104, describing the creator-creation relationship is suggestive of a cosmic intimacy. In as much as the creator is magnificent (v 2), He is also provident and caring. Thus, the creator in Ps 104 is trustworthy, also in bringing an end to injustice in creation (v 35). What is said of YHWH in relation to creation and death applies to this life, since the psalmist is silent concerning that which lies beyond the grave (cf. §2.5.4.3).

\subsection*{2.5.2.2 The Theology of Creation in Ps 104}

The Israelite perception of life and death in relation to YHWH is pertinent for a consideraton of the intimate creator-creation relation attested in Ps 104.\footnote{H.J. Kraus, \textit{Theology of the Psalms} (trans. K. Crim; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 165.} Here both life and death are intimately connected with YHWH. As in the wider context of the HB Psalter YHWH is the origin of all life. Indeed, with YHWH is a “fountain of life” (µyyj rwqm Ps 36:9).\footnote{Kraus, \textit{Theology of the Psalms}, 162-163. Ps 36:9 further reads, “…in your lights shall we see light.”} While Ps 104 does not dwell on the question concerning the origin of life,\footnote{In fact, the Psalter does not dwell much on the question of origin of life (e.g. Ps 22:9; 139:13-17). Cf. K. Seybold, \textit{Introducing the Psalms} (trans. R.G. Dauphy; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 167-171.} it does formulate the dependence of all life on YHWH - as the source of life, other than the Sun - as well as the beneficent order established by YHWH in creation.\footnote{R.B. Coote and D.R. Ord, \textit{In the Beginning: Creation and the Priestly History} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 4 argue that the main concern of HB creation texts is “to describe order, structure, sequence, and relation, not the creation of matter per se.”} As such the connection of YHWH with light (rw) and water (µym) in the opening verses is significant, since both are symbols of life.\footnote{Barth, \textit{Die Errettung}, 28-29. In Gen 1:3 rw a as the first act of divine creation is associated with life, as is µym (Gen 1:6, 7, 9), with its division constituting the second act of creation.} Light is directly
associated with YHWH (v 1), while the chaotic waters are put in their place by YHWH (v 9; cf. Prov 8:29), gaining a beneficial rather than threatening quality. Ps 104 is not concerned with an act of divine creation in some distant past, but with YHWH’s creative activity in the present. For this reason the psalmist does not undertake to discern the divine ordering of creation, as in the case of Gen 1, but rather states it as a given, based on his experience of creation. Because nature is brought under divine control, it has become knowable. Indeed, the praise of the creator in Ps 104 becomes a description of nature, which repeatedly returns to its origin, namely YHWH (v 24). The works of YHWH present the leading motif for awe and wonderment, and in this way the creation theology of Ps 104 may be characterised as experiential. It is significant that the doxological tone of Ps 104 allows room for creation’s dark edges (vv 6-9, 20, 26, 29, 32, 35).

As already stated, a moment of tension or chaos remains within the framework of the creation theology of Ps 104. But this does not imply that the text contains a clear Chaoskampf motif, or a struggle between YHWH and the representatives of chaos (e.g. Ps 74:13-14; Isa 51:9). Ps 104 is rather indicative of “creation without opposition.” While no real struggle with the life threatening forces of chaos is evident, it is significant that the representatives of chaos continue to exist within the framework of the creation theology of Ps 104. Indeed, they have become woven into the fabric of life, contained by the continued activity of the creator.

The deep (µwht, v 6) has been covered by YHWH, the waters (µym, vv 3, 6, 7) have been put in their proper place (v 9) and Leviathan has been fashioned by YHWH (v 26). These images are stripped of their divine qualities and became remythologised as the sun (µmv) and moon (µry) in v 19. While a reference to the lights (trwa) and stars (µybkk)

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557 Cf. Ps 56:13 (v 14, HB), “…that I may walk before God in the light of the living.” Here µyyj rwab is related to µyl a. However, Ps 104 is the only pure creation context in which rwab is directly related to YHWH. For other occurrences of rwab in the Psalter, cf. 27:1; 36:10; 37:6; 56:14; 78:14; 89:16; 119:105; 136:7; 139:11; 148:3; 38:11; 44:4; 97:11; 112:4 (subject); 4:7; 36:10; 43:3; 49:20 (object).
558 In Ps 104:2-30 the psalmist sketches YHWH’s acts of creation that assures the stability and continuance of all life. Cf. Terrien, “Wisdom in the Psalter,” 71. Comparable are also Ps 104:27 and Qoh 3:11, where the “right time” is at issue. But Qoh 3:11 is immediately qualified by the statement that humanity cannot “find out” (axm) the work of God. In Ps 104 divine works of creation are intelligible. Cf. Hermisson, “Observations,” 48.
559 For Schnocks, Vergänglichkeit und Gottesherrschaft, 242-43 Ps 104 draws from motives occurring in older (Ps 93) and younger (Ps 97) psalms, yet the innovative aspect of Ps 104 is the focus on nature, which brings the psalm in close proximity to Gen 1:1-2:4a.
560 In a sense Ps 104 wants its audience to let their “Lebenserwartung” be informed and corrected by their “Welterfahrung.” Cf. Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 118. Thus, in terms of the Weltanschaung of Ps 104, humans can work, eat, drink and praise God, and must eventually die at a given moment.
562 Here we can compare Job 41:2, 5-11, where the splendour of Leviathan is described, tameable only by the creator. In Ps 74:13-14 and Isa 27:1 we encounter a different depiction of Leviathan, which is to be slain.
563 In Ps 104 the sun and moon are mentioned by name, while in Gen 1 it is referred to as part of the lights. Cf. Deissler, Die Psalmen, 409.
as encountered in Gen 1:14-19 is absent, these luminaries now have a chronological function, without any divine connotations (cf. Ps 136:7-9).\textsuperscript{566}

Psalm 104 presents a picture of a perfectly ordered and maintained creation, but a moment of chaos and tension remains.\textsuperscript{567} This is not entirely surprising, considering the experiential nature of the psalmist’s creation theology.\textsuperscript{568} However, the psalmist’s rhetoric of the creator partially debunks this tension, particularly by means of describing YHWH’s past acts (use of perfects), and His continued involvement in creation (use of imperfects and participles).\textsuperscript{569} Thus, despite the moment of tension inherent in creation, it is ultimately depicted as secure in view of the works of YHWH. Not even the moment of death (v 29), or the presence of the wicked and sinners (v 35) interrupts the divine continuance of creation (v 30).\textsuperscript{570} In this way the “persistence of evil” in creation (v 35) is viewed through the lens of the trustworthy nature of creation, implying that the psalmist’s petition for the removal of the wicked and the sinners presents a moment of hope in the psalm, rather than despair. In view of its very different theme, v 35a is probably a later addition, but it has a significant place in the present form of the psalm. In addition to presenting a moment of hope in the psalm, it also presents a reality check on the part of the psalmist,\textsuperscript{571} who does not turn a blind eye to creation’s incongruities. Theodicy is not a primary theme in Ps 104, and neither is the theme of eschatology, which is only reflected in the petition in v 35a.\textsuperscript{572} This eschatological moment is conditioned, since here the psalmist’s hopeful petition is directed towards this life, within the frame of creation.\textsuperscript{573} The petition for the removal of the wicked and sinners can further be read in view of the psalmist’s perception of death as the limit of life, i.e. that they share the same fate as all living beings, and will inevitably perish (cf. Ps 49).\textsuperscript{574}

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\textsuperscript{566} Here we can note the doxological context of Ps 148, where the whole creation is called to praise YHWH, including the sun, moon and stars of light (v 3).

\textsuperscript{567} Niditch, \textit{Chaos to Cosmos}, 6 argues that the Urgeschichte (Gen 1-11) contains two main movements, namely from chaos to order and from ideal order to reality. In Ps 104 ideal order is balanced by reality.

\textsuperscript{568} Cf. Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 119-120.

\textsuperscript{569} Cf. Böstrom, \textit{The God of the Sages}, 152 for whom the God of the wisdom orientated Ps 104 is not just the supreme creator of the past, but continues to uphold everything in the present. The divine works of creation (Ps 104:2-30) gives an impression of the assured stability and growth of universal life. Cf. S.L. Terrien, “Wisdom in the Psalter,” in: L.G. Perdue et al., \textit{In Search of Wisdom Essays in memory of John G. Gammie} (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 71. Also Murphy, \textit{The Tree of Life}, 119, for whom creation is a happening that occurs over and over for all its inhabitants.

\textsuperscript{570} Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 118. “Schöpfung vollzieht sich nach V 30 ungebunden weiter in der fortwährenden ‘Erneuerung’ der Welt.”

\textsuperscript{571} Brown, “The Lion, the Wicked, and the Wonder of it All,” 16 suggests that God’s engagement with creation in Ps 104 is more “aesthetically” than “morally” driven, and as such contrast with the reconstruction of Gen 8:21b, “I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, because the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.”

\textsuperscript{572} Doxology also entails eschatological vision. Cf. V. Howard, “Psalm 104.” \textit{Interpretation} 46 (1992): 179. Comparable is the creation imagery employed in Deutero-Isaiah’s vision of God’s future (Isa 40:21-23, 25-26, 30-33; 43:1).

\textsuperscript{573} Contra Deissler, \textit{Die Psalmen}, 410 who identifies in v 35 a longing for a “new earth”, as in Isa 66:22f.

In Ps 104 the basic HB tripartite division of the world (µymv / Åra / µym + µwht) is upheld. \[^{575}\] We have already referred to the influence of ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies on the creation theology of Ps 104, \[^{576}\] but its closer affinity with the priestly creation account of Genesis 1 is indicative of its basic Hebrew cosmology. \[^{577}\] While the psalmist is clear concerning place of YHWH in the heavenly and earthly spheres, little mention is made of the underworld. YHWH is said to securely establish (dsy) the foundations of the earth in v 5 (cf. Job 38:4), which He covers with the deep (µwht, v 6). YHWH however is not said to be active in the underworld. Further, the reference to the deep in v 6 should not categorically be equated with the underworld in the sense of Sheol. The realm of death does not belong to the psalmist’s description of creation. Living beings are merely said to return to dust (v 29). The limited interest of the psalmist in the underworld stresses the concern with the realm of life. \[^{578}\] At the same time the creation theology of Ps 104, representative of a tripartite worldview, is indicative of YHWH’s sovereignty over all spheres of creation. \[^{579}\]

In §2.5.1.2 the affinity between the creation theologies of Gen 1 and Ps 104 was pointed out. Similarly the affinity between the creation theology of Ps 104 and the creation account of Genesis 2:4b-3:24 must not be overlooked. Admittedly the focus and intent of these two texts are very different, but affinities are identifiable. This pertains particularly to the status of human labour (v 23), and the fate of created beings at the moment of death (v 29). In Gen 2:4b-3:24 human labour is initially perceived as a neutral divine imperative (Gen 2:15), and eventually as the result of divine punishment for the transgression of a divine command (Gen 3:17-19). This latter notion lacks in Ps 104, where the result of human cultivation of the earth (wine, oil, bread) is described as a reason for joy (v 15). In Gen 3:17 the earth (hmda) is cursed (rra) on account of humanity (µda), yet in Ps 104:14 the earth (Åra) yields its produce to the service of beast (hmhb) and humankind (µda) alike. The relation between the earth and living beings is not distorted, and the harmony in creation persists.

In the J creation account humanity (µda) and the earth (hmda) are intimately related. \[^{581}\] Indeed, YHWH forms (rxy) humankind from the dust (rp) of the earth in Gen 2:7. As

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\[^{575}\] Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 115 refers to the “kosmologischen Räume” (heaven, earth sea) reflected in the build-up of Ps 104, which is in line with the more traditional ‘models’ of describing the world within the HB.

\[^{576}\] Clifford, Creation Accounts, 114 argues for such an Egyptian influence on Ps 104.

\[^{577}\] Allen, Psalms 101-150, 30-31.

\[^{578}\] This is further indicated by the description of the divine glory (dwbk), which is connected to images of light, fire and heaven, i.e. the opposite of that associated with Sheol.

\[^{579}\] Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 119-120 regards the Wirklichkeitsverständnis of Ps 104 as an interplay of order and chaos. While Sheol is not mentioned explicitly in Ps 104, the connection between divine activity and death in v 29, and the reference to the “deep” (µwht) in v 6 could allow for such a view. For µwht as primeval waters in the Psalter, cf. 36:7; 42:8; 71:20; 78:15; 104:6; 106:9; 107:26; 135:6; 148:7; 42:8; 77:17 (subject); 33:7 (object).

\[^{580}\] Reventlow, “Leben und Tod im Alten Testament,” 10. Without the divine jw humanity is no more than dust of the ground. Also K.A.D. Smelik, De Dood en de Bijbel (Haarlem: Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap, 2003), 15. The tone of Ps 104 is very different from that of Ps 90. Cf. Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 115-16.

\[^{581}\] In Gen 2-3 and Ps 104 humanity is depicted as “Erdmann,” i.e. called to cultivate the earth. Cf. Deissler, Die Psalmen, 409.
already indicated, the earth (הָדָא) is eventually cursed on account of humankind (מִדָא). However, humankind only becomes a living being (יִם וּרְף) once it receives the breath of life (יִשֵׂי תַּמוּנ) from YHWH Elohim (יֶהוֹה אֱלֹהִים). On account of humanity’s transgression of the divine command (Gen 2:16-17), they are doomed to return to the substance from which they were formed, namely dust (רֵפָה, Gen 3:19). Oddly enough it is not mentioned in this context that YHWH takes back the life breath with which he infused מִדָא. Indeed, humanity does not die immediately on account of transgressing the casuistic command of Gen 2:16-17, but a limit is set to human life and the possibility for eternal life is lost (Gen 3:22-24). Nevertheless, the J creation account recounts the continued divine care for humanity (Gen 3:21), even after divine judgment has been cast. In Ps 104 an identification of humanity with the ground is visible in v 29, and here the return to dust (רֵפָה) refers to all living beings. While Ps 104 does not explicitly recount the creation of humankind, or any other living being for that matter, with the exception of Leviathan whom YHWH formed (רֵפָה v 26), the creator-life relation is unmistakable. This relation is stressed in vv 29-30 by means of the identifying YHWH’s breath (יִוְר), with the יוְר of all living beings. Also in this respect humanity fits within the larger scheme of things, having no distinguished place in creation. As in Gen 3:19, Ps 104:29 recounts that all living beings will return to dust. In Ps 104:29 this happens when YHWH takes away (יָסָא) their יוְר. Other than Gen 3:19, this is not limited to humanity, but pertains to all living beings. What is also different in the creation theology of Ps 104 is the description of the divine renewal of creation in v 30. While v 30 describes the creation (ארב) of living beings when YHWH sends (יָלַף) His יוְר, which is not unlike Gen 2:7, the main difference concerns YHWH’s renewal (וֵכֶף) of the face of the earth (הָדָא יָפ). In terms of the J creation theology of Gen 2:4a-3:24, YHWH continues to provide for humanity after divine judgment, yet the earth remains cursed and no mention is made of the divine renewal of creation. This notion of renewal is central to the creation theology of Ps 104, maintaining life and death in a fine balance.

Ps 104 engages with and draws from other creation theologies in the HB, but nevertheless presents a distinct picture of the created world. Creation is rhetorically presented as firmly established, well ordered, beneficial, maintained by the creator and for this reason perpetual. In terms of such a creation theology, life does not have to be faced with anxiety, and even death, apparently, looses its sting. In a world where the images of chaos, often associated with death, have become inherent to creation, death itself has come to be viewed as a natural, inherent part of divine creation. This we will consider in the next section.

582 Ps 90:3 also contains the notion of YHWH bringing (human) life to an end, “You turn man to destruction and say, ‘Return you children of men.’” In Deut 32:39 and 1 Sam 2:6 creation and death are also attributed to the God of Israel, who kills and makes alive. Also indirectly 2 Kgs 5:7.

583 This idea is present in the flood narratives of Gen 6-9, but differs from Ps 104.

584 Mays, "Maker of Heaven and Earth," 85. In terms of Ps 104 “Our living and dying are knit together in the Lord’s way with the world.”

585 Israel’s thoughts on creation have a doxological intent, and are not merely theoretical expressions. Cf. H. Ringgren, Psalmen (KUTB 120; Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1971), 105.

586 Terrien, Elusive Presence, 317.
2.5.3 Death as a Theological Theme in Ps 104

In the Psalter the theme of death is numerously addressed and variously dealt with. It occurs in a variety of contexts, including the doxological context of Ps 104. While the life-death antagonism presents a fundamental characterisation of the Psalter, we have already argued for creation as theological Leitmotiv in Ps 104. Within its framework the theme of death functions only on the periphery. Indeed, *tuw* does not occur in Ps 104 as noun or verb. As such death does not constitute an independent theme. Its significance in Ps 104 is located in the context in which it occurs, i.e. creation, as well as the way in which it is described, namely in neutral and natural terms. Further, in Ps 104 death is not a random event, but is perceived as a natural part of the process of creation, and closely related to divine activity in creation (vv 29-30). This creator-death connection in Ps 104 is significant, but not foreign to the HB, given the Israelite discernment of life and death in relation to YHWH.

In the HB Psalter death is predominantly seen as the expected and absolute end of life. It is however the context in which death is dealt with (e.g. praise or lament), and the ways in which the author responds to the fact of death (e.g. fear, despair, anger – all in relation with YHWH), that results in the Psalter’s diversified view of death. When death intrudes into the sphere of life, it becomes a problem. As such it is particularly in the context of psalms of lament that the theme of death is pertinent.

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590 Once [ Giants 29] is used, which relates to the theme of the return to dust.

591 It is far removed from notions of a “premature,” “bad,” or “unjust” death. Further, Ps 104 does not reflect on death’s impact concerning the divine-human relation, contrary to Pss 6:5; 39:13; 41:5; 88:4; 115:17; 116:15, where death is perceived as bringing an end to this divine-human communion. Cf. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 200-201.

592 Weiser, *The Psalms*, 670 identified in vv 29-30 the conquest of death by means of the continual process of recreation. But in Ps 104 death is not something to be overcome, but part of creation.

593 Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 165.

594 An expectation of future life is often identified in Pss 49 and 73, but here the nature of death remains unclear. M. Witte, “Aber Gott wirt meine Seele erlösen – Tod und Leben nach Psalm XLIX.” *VT* 50 (2000): 541 argues that Ps 49, as wisdom psalm, concerns deliverance before death, not from death. So also J.D. Pleins, “Death and Endurance: Reassessing the Literary Structure and Theology of Ps 49.” *JSOT* 69 (1996): 27 who argues that Ps 49 is not concerned with an afterlife, but with death “as the philosophic scale for measuring what endures on this side of the grave…”

595 Goldingay, “Death and Afterlife in the Psalms,” 65. The notion of the “terrors of death” (Ps 55:5, HB) is absent in Ps 104.
as exemplified in Ps 88).\textsuperscript{596} In this context death is experienced as invading into the sphere of life and cutting the lamenters of from the presence of YHWH,\textsuperscript{597} since the dead are considered as standing outside the orbit of the worship of YHWH.\textsuperscript{598} In this way affliction or illness may be experienced as a descent into Sheol, thus serving as motivation for lament (cf. Pss 30:9; 88:10-12; also Isa 38:18).

The situation in Ps 104 is very different, considering its doxological tone and the psalmist’s trusting perception of creation and creator. No lament or notion of a descent into Sheol is noticeable in Ps 104. In a very limited and indirect way, the return to dust (רָפֶּה) of v 29 might allude to this, but it is not an immediate concern of the psalmist.\textsuperscript{599} The psalmist does not elaborate on this “return to dust,” but rather presents it in a manner of fact way. As a result the psalm says very little concerning the creator-dead relation,\textsuperscript{600} as well as the fate of the dead. The psalmist’s concern is with the creator-creation relationship in this life. In Ps 104 death is a natural consequence of being created, i.e. receiving one’s breath (יָד) from the creator. At the same time it marks the absolute end of an individual life, since death sets in when YHWH takes away the יָד which He gave when creating human beings. It is this subtle ambiguity that characterises the creation-death relation of Ps 104. Nevertheless, in Ps 104 the reality of death does not cast a shadow over the light of life. Indeed, the creator-death relation in Ps 104 furthers the theme of divine omnipotence and creaturely dependence. YHWH commands life (v 30; cf. Ps 133:3), and also brings it to an end (v 29; cf. Job 34:14).\textsuperscript{601}

The theme of human ephemerality is central to the fourth book of the Psalter, particularly Ps 90. This is only partially present in Ps 104, and concerns life in general, not just human life. It is accepted as a fact of life, and not scrutinised. However, in Ps 104 as in the wider context of the fourth book of the Psalter, the themes of Vergänglichkeit and Geschöpflichkeit\textsuperscript{602} are closely related. Living beings are ephemeral because they are created. As such human mortality in Ps 104 is not presented as the result of human hubris or divine wrath. Creation and death in Ps 104 are two sides of the same cosmological coin, and are not negatively juxtaposed. For this reason the struggle between the experience of death and the longing for a restoration to life so pertinent in various psalms, is absent within the context of Ps 104.\textsuperscript{603} Still, created life does not imply life without limits (v 29).\textsuperscript{604} Life, which by
nature implies death, is set within the parameters of divine creation. The Diesseits orientation of Ps 104 is clear.

While Ps 104 maintains the basic tripartite worldview of the HB, any clear reference to Sheol or the underworld as “abode of the dead” is lacking, apart from the reference to µwht in v 6. YHWH secures the foundations of the earth amidst the chaotic waters (cf. Ps 93:1). As such the underworld does not threaten to intrude into the realm of life. In some instances in the Psalter the experience of deliverance from death is representative of a rescue from everything that interferes with life in an unwholesome and destructive way (cf. Ps 9:13; 16:10; 88:8). In Ps 104 not even the presence of the wicked and the sinners in creation (v 35a) leads to the psalmist’s longing for rescue. They do no present a threat to life. The continued presence of YHWH in creation (v 31), despite the hiding of His face, outweighs the presence of the wicked and sinners. It is also YHWH’s continued presence in creation that contributes to death loosing its threatening dimension. The necessity of the divine presence in creation is however made absolutely clear. In Ps 104 life and death are elements in a unitary reality, positively affirming the dependence of all creatures on God.

Further, the psalmist’s disinterest in the creator-death relation is motivated by the perpetual process of divine creation, or renewal of creation (v 30). For this reason the death of the individual life is overshadowed by creations’ continuance. This also applies to YHWH’s “killing” in order to provide prey for the young lions (v 21). The psalmist’s emphasis on life Diesseits directs the attention away from any Jenseits expectation (contra Ps 73:24b). It is in this life that the psalmist will sing praises to YHWH (v 33), while he has his life, as long as he “continues.” While creation is renewed by means of YHWH sending His jw (v 30), the ancient Near

closely related with divine activity, it is stripped of mythological and metaphorical dimensions in Ps 104.

Goldingay, “Death and Afterlife in the Psalms,” 64-65 has argued that the dead within the psalms “cannot commemorate and give praise for Yahweh’s deeds not because they stand outside the orbit of worship but because they stand outside the orbit in which YHWH acts; they therefore have no deeds to commemorate or give praise for.” This is even more clearly reflected in the book of Qohelet – in which death is a central theme, pervading all life and casting a shadow over all life that is to be lived (Qoh 7:1-4).


Deissler, *Die Psalmen*, 408.

This contrasts with instances where the “grave” (r’/ t’ v) presents the opening of the depths of Sheol into the realm of life, and where death is at times experienced in the midst of life, as in Ps 30:3 “YHWH, you have brought up my soul from the grave: you have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.” Cf. Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 166. Also Barth, *Die Errettung*, 170.

For Lindström, *Suffering and Sin*, 441 Israel’s temple theologians did not attempt to rationalise YHWH’s actions by means of the categories of punishment and sin, but rather focussed on the consequences of the absence of God from His people and creation. The suggestion has also been made that within the Psalter one can speak of two modes of existence, namely a Totenexistenz and a Lebensexistenz, with the lamenters longing to be moved from a state of death to a state of life. Cf. Zenger, “Mit Gott ums Leben kämpfen,” 73. Both modes of existence are possible in life Diesseits, but this is not the case in Ps 104.


Eastern concept of dying and rising gods, also associated with the continuation of creation, is absent in Ps 104. Unlike Baal, YHWH never dies (cf. Hab 1:12). He lives (cf. Ps 18:46) and is not subjected to the sleep of death (cf. Ps 121:4). In this way YHWH as creator is contrasted to the ancient Near Eastern gods of life and death. A parallel does however occur with the Canaanite god El as creator, who is the guardian of order in the heavens and on earth.

Since YHWH is the God of life, anyone in need of life, experiencing the threat of death, will strive to go into YHWH’s presence. This does not categorically imply that death falls outside the divine reach, since YHWH is also described as lord over the ways that lead to death (cf. Ps 68:21, “He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto YHWH the Lord belong escape from death.”; cf. 116:15; 118:18). Nevertheless, YHWH is primarily in the “business” of life, which results in the lack of a concern with Sheol or a *Jenseits* expectation in Ps 104. The divine renewal of creation does not present some sort of future life expectation. Rather, death as event coincides with divine acts of creation. It is, strangely enough, this certainty of death and its connectedness with divine activity that presents a reason for hope. This hope is not *Jenseits* but *Diesseits* directed. Death does not stand in opposition to divine creation, but fits within the boundaries thereof. For this reason death’s presence in life is not experienced as death’s infiltration into life. Death does not detract from the significance of life (v 33). Neither does it function as a dynamic power that intervenes in different ways in the everyday life of the individual and community.

This perception of death stands in stark contrast with the individual psalms of lament. As already pointed out, Ps 104:29 is not concerned with individual life or death. This is indicated by the use of the third person plural suffixes (i.e. “they are troubled; their breath; they die; they return; to their dust”). Neither does it refer to the death of humans in particular, but rather to created life in general. The theology of creation in Ps 104 is determinative for its perception of death. In the same way that chaos came to be an inherent part of the good order of divine creation, so death is assigned its place within the order of divine creation. As the forces of chaos remain present in

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613 Mowinckel, *Psalms*, 68.

614 Barth, *Die Errettung*, 48. Considering the cultic setting of various psalms, it is particularly through cultic-ritual actions that life may be restored or preserved. So Mowinckel, *Psalms*, 63.

615 Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 167.


617 This is often the perception of death in other psalmic contexts. Cf. Lindström, *Suffering and Sin*, 440. In this sense Ps 23 serves as a good example, where the “valley of the shadow of death” in v3 is juxtaposed with “the house of YHWH” v 6.

618 The “Vergänglichkeitsklage” of the individual as encountered in Ps 102, is not present in Ps 104.

619 Zenger, “Mit Gott ums Leben kämpfen,” 63 argues “Der Tod als Gegenmacht zum Leben kommt in vielfältigen Bildern zur Sprache. Sie sind der Versuch, die alltägliche Begegnung mit der Destruktivität des Todes und die unausweichliche Erfahrung der Begrenztheit des individuellen Lebens so mit dem Glauben an JHWH als den Gott des Lebens zusammenbringen, dass sich daraus Perspektiven für ein ‘Leben trotz Tod’ ergeben.” In Ps 104 death does not stand opposed to life, but the perception of the creator does contribute to living life “in the face of death.”
creation, within the divinely established limits (v 9), so death is a reality of creation, and finds its place within the divinely established parameters of life. In part, hope in Ps 104 is to be found in the knowledge that despite one’s own limited lifespan, creation as such, of which each individual form of life is a part, will continue by means of YHWH’s continuous involvement in and providential care for creation. YHWH is the source of hope, instead of an expectation of a future life.

2.6 Conclusion

The Psalms incorporate various realities pertaining to creation and death. Ps 104 attests to one of these realities. The theology of creation and creator in Ps 104 is determinative for its perception of death. Within the framework of its creation theology, death has a natural place, be it peripheral. While the absence of death is not a prerequisite for doxology, it should be noted that the doxology in Ps 104 takes place in this life with a view on this life. Ps 104 is Diesseits orientated. As such the possibility of hope does not depend on the belief in some form of life after death. In Ps 104 the return to dust (v 29) does not imply a shade-like existence in Sheol (cf. the μνήμη in e.g. Ps 88:11; Isa 14:9, 26:19; Prov 2:18; 9:18; 21:16; Job 26:5, or 1 Sam 28:13 where μνήμη is used). Death is not considered as an enfeebled life, which continues in the underworld. Death is final. But this does not imply that the death of the individual stands opposed to the continuation of creation (v 30), i.e. of life. The psalm’s report on creation and death concerns this life. The orientation of Ps 104 toward the present relates to its perception of the creator as active, and as such immediately “present” in creation. The creator is encountered in the context of creation (v 31).

In Ps 104 order in creation is discernable, and for this creation is experienced as beneficial and trustworthy. As we will see, this differs markedly from the perceptions of Job and Qohelet.

In the opening of this chapter Ps 104 was characterised as a complex text. It incorporates theological ideas and literary motifs pertinent in various theological traditions of the HB (J, P, and wisdom), as well as its Umwelt. Ps 104 resists being

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620 In Ps 73 it is the power of death yields to the glory of YHWH, yet in Ps 104 death is not considered as an independent power, but closely associated with YHWH, falling within the range of his creative power.

621 While this perception of creation counters egocentric human claims, its significance for individuals and communities in desperate situations is disputable. Cf. Hermisson, “Observations,” 51. Yet, as Qoh 3:1 states, there is a time for everything, including a time to weep and a time to praise (3:4). Ps 104 presents such an occasion for joy.

622 Here O.H. Steck, World and Environment (BES; Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 167-168 observes that in the experience of the non-disposable gift of life and its equally non-disposable withdrawal, the individual in Israel actively experienced Yahweh the creator as acting in the event of life.

623 In Ps 104 it is by means of the basic view of the world as evoking awe, that appreciation and fear transcend its cultural barriers and allows the text to be heard within a cultural context with a very different picture of the world.

624 The hope for fullness in life Diesseits in Ps 104 corresponds with the hope assumed in the wisdom books of Proverbs, Job and Qohelet. Cf. Goldingay, “Death and Afterlife in the Psalms,” 61. While this view might clash with faith traditions in which the notion of resurrection and life after death stands central, the contribution of Ps 104 should not be neglected.

625 Cf. Allen, Psalms 101-150, 34 who argues that within the parameters of Ps 104 “Awe and appreciation are set in a religious context: the world and its phenomenon are regarded as windows through which divine activity of love and power may be glimpsed.”
categorised as belonging to a specific theological tradition. It presents an instance where different theological traditions of the HB intersect.\textsuperscript{626} As a result the creation theology of the psalm presents an attempt at reshaping or re-imagining the world,\textsuperscript{627} particularly after the catastrophic event of the Babylonian exile of 587/6 BCE. In a shattered world, left without a palace and temple, ancient Israel’s place was no longer secure. However, by turning the attention toward creation, particularly nature, the psalmist contributes to ancient Israel’s rethinking its own place in creation and its relation with the creator. The world envisioned in Ps 104 provides significance to communal and individual life.\textsuperscript{628} Not even death or the persistence of evil in a well ordered creation can detract from its significance. The foundations of creation are firmly established and cannot be shaken.\textsuperscript{629} YHWH rules supreme over His creation. For this reason the need for a theology dealing with the fate of the dead, as encountered in later biblical traditions (Dan 12), is not necessary. The call for the annihilation of the wicked in v 35 is not so much indicative of the theodicy theme that is prominent in later wisdom, but rather affirms the applicant’s trust in creation and creator.\textsuperscript{630} Such trust in creator and creation is disputed in the book of Job, predominantly due to the pressing and persistent theme of theodicy. The world of Ps 104 seems to be turned upside down in Job 3. It is to this text that our attention now shifts.

\textsuperscript{626} And could be regarded as an instance where the concerns of Israel’s sages met those of her priests. Cf. Ceresko, “The Sage in the Psalms,” 219 who observes that “If the wisdom movement involved itself in the handing down of the knowledge and values of the community (“the world” in which that community lived) to the next generation, the cult, with its sacred songs (psalms) functioned to maintain, reshape, and celebrate that world.”

\textsuperscript{627} W. Brueggemann, “Response to James L. Mays, ‘The Question of Context,’” in: J.C. McCann (ed.), The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 31 who points to the continual importance of the process of re-symbolisation of religious ideas for the post-exilic Israelite community. This is crucial for the comprehension of new experiences, and for older religious symbols to stay pertinent. Also Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 92.

\textsuperscript{628} The understanding of life reflected in the psalms was formed and developed during the time of the Israelite monarchy and was strong enough to survive the fall of Jerusalem Temple in 587/6. But a cultic-orientated worldview was challenged after the fall of Jerusalem, which in turn led to the incorporation of theological currents that originally had no place herein and so became part of the tradition of the Psalter. Cf. Brueggemann, “The Question of Context,” 32.

\textsuperscript{629} Contra Ps 60:4 (HB), where the foundations of the earth “shake” \((\nu \tau)\) as a result of distress from an enemy, or Ps 82:5 where it shakes due to the lack of law and justice on earth.

\textsuperscript{630} Hermisson, “Observations,” 52.