



Psalm 104 - God the creator and Provider

Introduction

The phrase ‘Bless the Lord, O my soul,’ which opens and closes the psalm, shows that the psalm is about reasons for speaking well about God. This hymn of praise celebrates the way the created order reveals God’s glory by providing so abundantly for all living things. Although it does not use many specific words from Genesis 1:1-2:3, it is generally agreed that the creation account’s ideas lie behind the psalm. Some have even suggested that the psalm is structured around the six workdays of God.

Creation day	Psalm 104 verses
Day 1	2a: Light
Day 2	2b-4: The expanse divides the waters
Day 3	5-13: land and water distinct 14-18: vegetation and trees
Day 4	19-24: light-bearers as time-keepers
Day 5	25-26: sea creatures
Day 6	21-24: land animals and man 27-30: food for all creatures

Days of Creation and Psalm 104 Verses

This structure, however, should not be pressed, since the land animals and man (vv.21-24) here precede the sea creatures (vv.25-26), while the Genesis account has them in the opposite order. Even more, this is not a straight retelling of the

Genesis account as an event: rather, it celebrates the way in which the creation order still continues in human experience. The psalm acknowledges the existence of human sin, but in only one verse (v.35).

This psalm shapes the worshippers' hearts in two ways. First, it leads them to delight in the world that God made, recognising it as a gift. Second, it enables them to see that 'sinners' and 'the wicked', i.e. those who dwell in their sin and refuse God's grace, defile God's world; the faithful will not want to be identified with such people.

Genesis 1:1-2:3 uses the term God for the deity, stressing his role as the transcendent creator. Psalm 104 primarily uses 'the Lord, the personal name of the deity, following the biblical claim that the covenant God of Israel is the same being as the majestic creator. This psalm joins Psalm 8 as a reflection on God's continuing commitment to, and care for, his creation.

This psalm is often said to be connected to the Great Hymn to Aten, which is generally attributed to the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten, who ruled between 1352-1336 BC. This Pharaoh attempted a drastic revision of Egyptian religion, aiming to focus worship on only one god, Aten, represented by the disk of the sun. Egyptologists continue to debate whether he was a true monotheist, believing that there is only one God, or a henotheist, worshipping one god while allowing for others. The hymn celebrates the works of this deity, including his provision of water and food for man and beast; it distinguishes between creatures active during daylight and those active at night even mentioning the lions. There are certainly similarities between this Egyptian hymn and Psalm 104, but there is no evidence that the psalm derives from the Egyptian hymn. As the commentary will show, the psalm reflects the covenantal and creational perspective of the Pentateuch. If there is any connection to the Egyptian hymn, and it is questionable whether most Israelites would have known of it, it is that this psalm renders the right kind of praise to the universal creator.

Adam Clarke wrote, "This Psalm has no title either in the Hebrew or Chaldee; but it is attributed to David by the Vulgate, Septuagint, Ethiopic, Arabic, and Syriac." Those who attribute it to David probably do so because the opening line is a duplication of David's statements in Psalm 103.

Charles Spurgeon commented, "The Psalm gives an interpretation to the many voices of nature, and sings sweetly both of creation and providence. The poem contains a complete cosmos: sea and land, cloud and sunlight, plant and animal, light and darkness, life and death, are all proved to be expressive of the presence of the Lord."

Psalm 104:1-4 - The Lord Is Clothed with Honour and Majesty.

The first section of the psalm sets the tone by expounding the cry, **<<O Lord my God, you are very great!>>**. The various images all express the magnificence of the God who made the world and continues to rule over it.

- ¹ Bless the Lord, O my soul.
O Lord my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honour and majesty,
^{2a} wrapped in light as with a garment.

Psalm 104:1-2a

Bless the Lord, O my soul. As repeated three times in the previous psalm, this phrase is a call to worship God in spirit and in truth: **<<But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth>>** (John 4:23-24), and to do so from one's inmost being.

O Lord my God, you are very great. The psalmist worshipped Yahweh as his God, and as the great God who is **clothed with honour and majesty**. The idol gods of the nations were often crude and shameful in their conduct, but Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, is known for his **honour and majesty**.

You are clothed with honour and majesty. **Honour and majesty**, along with splendour, describe royal magnificence: **<<His glory is great through your help; splendour and majesty you bestow on him>>** (Psalm 21:5), and: **<<Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, in your glory and majesty>>** (Psalm 45:3), which is suited to the theme of divine kingship: **<<Deck yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendour>>** (Job 40:10), **<<Full of honour and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures for ever>>** (Psalm 111:3), and: **<<Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable>>** (Psalm 145:3).

Wrapped in light as with a garment. God's honour and majesty are as apparent as a person's clothing, and so is the light-like purity of his being: **<<This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all>>** (1 John 1:5). As the creation in Genesis began with describing the creation of light, so the psalmist first mentions light. In a small way, this idea of light can be understood as a garment by considering the appearance of Jesus as his transfiguration: **<<And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white>>** (Matthew 17:2), **<<Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James**

and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them>> (Mark 9:2-3), and: <<Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white>> (Luke 9:28-29).

Paul says of God: *<<It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen>> (1 Timothy 6:16). Perhaps this is another description or allusion to light as a garment. Spurgeon noted, “If light itself is but his garment and veil, what must be the blazing splendour of his own essential being! We are lost in astonishment, and dare not pry into the mystery lest we be blinded by its insufferable glory.”*

^{2b} You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
³ you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind,
⁴ you make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers.

Psalm 104:2b-4

You stretch out the heavens like a tent. God’s power is also apparent, being the one who created the vast heavens. Since the creator is always greater than his creation, the God who created the heavens is impressive indeed. A number of passages, i.e. Job 9:8, Isaiah 40:22, 42:5, 44:24, 45:12 and 51:13, Jeremiah 10:12 and 51:15, and Zechariah 12:1, use this image with a verb that means to ‘pitch’ or ‘stretch out’ a tent, as in Genesis 12:8, 26:25, 33:19 and 35:21, and Judges 4:11, to stress that God alone fashioned the heavens and the earth, and prepared them as a place for habitation.

You set the beams of your chambers on the waters. The God of all creation can build and do what no one else can. He does not share the limitations of the creation, making the clouds his chariot and riding on the wings of the wind.

You make the winds your messengers. Hebrews 1:7 quotes this verse from the Greek Septuagint, with the term ‘messengers’ (Hebrew *mal’akim*) translated as ‘angels’ (Greek *angeloi*); it reinforces the argument that Jesus is superior to the angels by showing that Jesus receives higher honour than the angels.

Later, the writer of the Book of Hebrews quoted v.4 and revealed that the 'his' in that verse refers to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This is evidence of the deity of Jesus the Messiah, because the angels belong to him - they are his angels and his ministers.

Psalm 104:5-9 - The Lord Set Bounds for the Land and the Sea.

This section stresses the reliability of the world God made, based on the third day of creation, where the land and the water become separate; the dry land is a safe and suitable place for its inhabitants. The telling in Genesis 1:9-10 is very sparse and broad-stroke, while here the narration is more imaginative. Some have supposed that these verses are referring to the flood story, but the setting of the whole psalm is God's continuing care for his creation, rather than his judgement. Both are referenced in this commentary.

- ⁵ You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.
- ⁶ You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
- ⁷ At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.
- ⁸ They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys
to the place that you appointed for them.
- ⁹ You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.

Psalm 104:5-9

You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken. This describes the stability of the earth (refer also to the comment made on Psalm 93:1), in this case the secure allocation of water and dry land to their proper places. What God built, he built well. The earth's foundations are solid and will not be moved until God himself moves them. The psalmist understood that God was the creator of all things and that it was he who laid the foundations of the earth. It did not happen by chance or random events. There is a creator behind all things. God himself clearly stated that it was he who laid the foundations: <<*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding*>> (Job 38:4). In some ways, the modern age is significantly defined by man's rejection of God as creator. Having abandoned this fundamental

truth, humanity drifts without a proper sense of responsibility or accountability toward its creator.

You cover it with the deep as with a garment. The psalmist probably had in mind two events. First, the separation of the waters at creation: *<<And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good>>* (Genesis 1:9-10), and the global flood mentioned in Genesis Chapter 7. From reading the account of Noah's time the psalmist understood that the waters stood above the mountains: *<<The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; the waters swelled above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep>>* (Genesis 7:19-20).

At your rebuke they flee. When the waters had covered the earth long enough, God made them recede: *<<and the waters gradually receded from the earth. At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters had abated>>* (Genesis 8:3), and the psalmist poetically described it as God's rebuke of the waters. God's voice is poetically described as thunder, and for good reason for when Jesus said: *<<Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine'>>* (John 12:28-30). Mark may have had this text in mind when he wrote that Jesus 'rebuked the wind' and commanded the sea: *<<He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm>>* (Mark 4:39), implying that Jesus wielded the same authority as the Lord God, which others doubted at the time: *<<Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?>>* (Mark 2:7).

To the place that you appointed for them. As the waters receded, God had appointed a place for them, and set a boundary for the waters so they could never again cover the earth as God had promised; refer to Genesis 8:11-17.

Psalm 104:10-13 - The Lord Provides Water for the Creatures on Land.

This section moves from the boundary between water and land, to the way God abundantly supplies the water that the land animals depend on. The term 'animals of the field' refers to wild animals (refer to the comments made on Genesis 1:24-25 and 2:20); the wild asses are onagers, a species of donkey that does not seem ever to have been domesticated. This suggests that these valleys, hills and mountains are uninhabited by man. Although God made the world an ideal place for human beings to live, his creation is filled with more creatures than simply the ones useful to man; and this helps the pious to admire God's bountiful care.

- 10 You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
11 giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.
12 By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;
they sing among the branches.
13 From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

Psalm 104:10-13

You make springs gush forth in the valleys. In the previous section, the psalmist considered what God did with the waters of the earth after the flood in Noah's day. Now he considers how God distributed waters across the land, sending springs into the valleys giving drink to every wild animal: <<*I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water*>> (Isaiah 41:18)

The earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. The psalmist considered how the water, plants, and animals of the earth each find their place in God's plan and order. The wild asses quench their thirst, the birds have a home so they may sing among the branches: <<*it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches*>> (Matthew 13:32). He saw a good, harmonious world in nature and knew Yahweh was responsible for it.

By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation is actually more than the Son of God had when he lived on earth: <<*And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head'*>> (Luke 9:58).

Psalm 104:14-18 - The Lord Provides Food and Homes for the Land Creatures.

The thought of water naturally leads to the growth of vegetation, the second part of the third day of creation (Genesis 1:11-12): grass, plants, grapes yielding wine, olives yielding oil, grains yielding bread, and trees of various kinds. While vv.14-15 stress life on a farm with livestock and food from the earth, vv.16-18 join vv.10-13 in focusing on the wild environment, e.g. where the wild goats or ibexes live. God's care extends to the unclean animals, such as the stork recorded in Leviticus 11:19 and Deuteronomy 14:18, and the rock-badgers or hyraxes mentioned in

Leviticus 11:5 and Deuteronomy 14:7. God cares for all kinds of animals, even for those that he has specifically forbidden the Israelites to eat.

- 14 You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
- 15 and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.
- 16 The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
- 17 In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has its home in the fir trees.
- 18 The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the coney.

Psalm 104:14-18

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle. The psalmist continued his thoughts on nature, seeing how God provides grass for animals and plants for people to use. Spurgeon commented, “Divine power is as truly and as worthily put forth in the feeding of beasts as in the nurturing of man; watch but a blade of grass with a devout eye and you may see God at work within it.” Job also knew it was God who provided these things for the Lord told him: <<*Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no one lives, on the desert, which is empty of human life, to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass?*>> (Job 38:25-27).

To bring forth food from the earth. God designed the ecology of the world so that with work, man may bring forth food. Under God’s blessing and man’s work, that food brought forth is wonderful. God’s earth provides wine, oil, and bread - each with its own blessing and goodness. The bread here serves human need; and the uses of wine and oil described here go beyond what is purely necessary to include what adds enjoyment: <<*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows*>> (Psalm 23:5), and: <<*You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment*>> (Luke 7:46). Adam Clarke gave advice and warning, “Wine, in moderate quantity, has a wondrous tendency to revive and invigorate the human being. Ardent spirits exhilarate, but they exhaust the strength; and every dose

leaves man the worse. Unadulterated wine, on the contrary, exhilarates and invigorates: it makes him cheerful, and provides for the continuance of that cheerfulness by strengthening the muscles, and bracing the nerves. This is its use. Those who continue drinking till wine inflames them, abuse this mercy of God.”

The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly. The psalmist had a vision of how healthy and vigorous nature was. He thought of the mighty cedars of Lebanon and how, in their sap-filled health, they gave a place where the birds build their nests. They are the trees of the Lord for it is he who originally created them with a design for them to naturally propagate.

Spurgeon had much to say on this, “What would our psalmist have said to some of the trees in the Yosemite valley? Truly these are worthy to be called the trees of the Lord, for towering stature and enormous girth. Thus is the care of God seen to be effectual and all-sufficient. If trees uncured for by man are yet so full of sap, we may rest assured that the people of God who by faith live upon the Lord alone shall be equally well sustained,” “You will observe that the word ‘sap,’ is inserted in italics; it is not there in the Hebrew. ‘The trees of the Lord are full,’ or rather, which gives the meaning clearly, ‘The trees of the Lord are satiated — are satisfied — the cedars of Lebanon, which he has planted,’” and “A traveller tells us that in the wood bark, and even the cones of the cedar there is an abundance of resin. They are saturated with it so that he says he can scarcely touch one of the cedars of Lebanon without having the turpentine or resin of them upon his hands. That is always the way with a truly healthy Christian, his grace is externally manifested.”

The stork has its home in the fir trees. The birds have their nests, but the other animals have their homes also, including the stork, the wild goats, and the coneys or rock-badgers. A wise and loving God provides for them all.

Psalm 104:19-23 - The Lord Governs the Rhythm of Day and Night.

These verses take up the fourth creation day, when God appointed the celestial lights to mark off time for mankind; the lights still do what God appointed them to do. The moon will mark the seasons, i.e. the ‘appointed times’ of the liturgical calendar with its phases, (refer to the comment made on Genesis 1:14-19), but it also joins the sun in marking off day and night.

During the night, many wild animals are active: all the beasts of the forest creep about and the young lions roar for their prey. At daybreak, they steal away for shelter, while man goes out to his work. These verses help the Israelites to see the rhythm of their life by which they work during the day and rest at night, as inherent in the creation order, refer to the comment made on Genesis 1:3-5, and also in the larger context of the other animals’ activities. Hard work is not an evil distortion of the original creation; man was given work to do from the beginning:

<<*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it*>> (Genesis 2:15). The curse did not introduce work; it infected work with pain: <<*And to the man he said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, “You shall not eat of it”, cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field*>> (Genesis 3:17-18). Verse 24 brings to a close this section and is about the creatures that live on the earth, i.e. on land, with its exclamation of wonder and delight: <<*how manifold are your works!*>>.

- 19 You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
- 20 You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
- 21 The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
- 22 When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.
- 23 People go out to their work
and to their labour until the evening.

Psalm 104:19-23

You have made the moon to mark the seasons. The moon is listed first, because the Hebrew day began with the evening. The psalmist turned his attention to the moon and the sun. They operate according to God’s plan, providing darkness so that all the animals of the forest can forage and hunt.

Predators, such as young lions, go after their prey, seeking their food from God. This activity is admired, and even seen as part of the proper working of the world, so long as these beasts do not threaten stock animals: <<*But David said to Saul, ‘Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it*>> (1 Samuel 17:34-35), <<*For thus the Lord said to me, As a lion or a young lion growls over its prey, and – when a band of shepherds is called out against it – is not terrified by their shouting or daunted at their noise, so the Lord of hosts will come down to fight upon Mount Zion and upon its hill*>> (Isaiah 31:4), and: <<*Thus says the Lord: As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so*

shall the people of Israel who live in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed>> (Amos 3:12), or man: <<Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah. When he came to the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion roared at him. The spirit of the Lord rushed on him, and he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as one might tear apart a kid. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done>> (Judges 14:5-6), although the Lord does occasionally use animals to kill people: <<When the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard of it, he said, 'It is the man of God who disobeyed the word of the Lord; therefore the Lord has given him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him according to the word that the Lord spoke to him'>> (1 Kings 13:26), and: <<When they first settled there, they did not worship the Lord; therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which killed some of them>> (2 Kings 17:25).

When the sun rises. Just as God provided for the night he also provided for the day, when lions and other nocturnal animals lie down in their dens. When the lions sleep, people go out to their work until the evening. Everything operates according to God's wise plan for creation except when his creatures go against his will for them.

Psalm 104:24-26 - The Lord Delights in the Sea Creatures Too.

After celebrating God's care for the land animals, the song moves on to the open sea which teems with innumerable creatures corresponding to the fifth creation day recorded in Genesis 1:20-23. The ships that men sail for merchant activities do not defile the creation order.

Leviathan here is probably a poetic name for a whale and is therefore one of the great sea monsters of Genesis 1:21. Although the word can be used for an enemy of God, this psalm joins the creation account in portraying the various creatures as subject to the Lord, not opposing him. The admiration continues, as the song says that God formed Leviathan to play in the sea or he formed it to be his partner in play; throughout this psalm, delight takes the singing congregation far beyond mere utility!

²⁴ O Lord, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

²⁵ Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.

²⁶ There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

Psalm 104:24-26

O Lord, how manifold are your works! The psalmist continues his sense of amazement as he looks at nature and creation. He saw it all not as the result of random and purposeless events, but as the wise works of a great God who has right of ownership over all of it.

Yonder is the sea, great and wide. The psalmist thought of the greatness of the oceans, in his case, the Mediterranean Sea. The vast waters contain innumerable creeping things, including great and mysterious things such as Leviathan.

The name Leviathan appears five times in the OT; although here it almost certainly refers to a whale, in Canaanite myths it is the name of a dangerous, dragon-like monster: <<*Let those curse it who curse the Sea, those who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan*>> (Job 3:8). The biblical authors are confident that the Lord triumphs over all powers, including the most feared: <<*On that day the Lord with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea*>> (Isaiah 27:1); here, this monster is used as a figure for Egypt. Elsewhere the name is used for fearsome creatures, over which God has control.

The name Leviathan means ‘twisting one’ and is also used in other interesting places in Scripture:

- Job 26:12-13 also refers to God’s piercing defeat of a fleeing serpent associated with the sea.
- Job 41:1 as a great sea creature that men cannot tame or catch.
- Psalm 74:12-14 refers to Leviathan as a sea serpent, and that God broke the head of the Leviathan long ago, perhaps at creation.
- Isaiah 27:1 speaks of the future defeat of Leviathan, also associating it with a twisted serpent that lives in the sea.
- Isaiah 51:9 and Psalm 89:8-10 also speak of a serpent associated with the sea that God defeated as a demonstration of his great strength, and identifies this serpent with the name Rahab, meaning ‘proud one.’

Satan is often represented as a dragon or a serpent, e.g. in Genesis Chapter 3, and Revelation Chapters 12 and 13, and the sea is thought of as a dangerous or threatening place in the Jewish mind; refer to Isaiah 57:20, Mark 4:39 and Revelation 21:1. It is possible that Leviathan is another serpent-like manifestation of Satan whose resistance to creation was overcome. Yet here the psalmist is talking about the glories of creation and therefore Satan is definitely not in view.

In the ancient times Middle East there were many popular legends about the gods who combated different hostile deities in order to create the earth. Biblical authors took some of these stories and made Yahweh the hero of them.

Therefore, it is Yahweh who divided the sea, when ancient legends said that Tiamat (the Deep) was the chaotic goddess defeated by the hero god Marduk (Bel), or Yam (the Sea) who was defeated by Baal. It is Yahweh who broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces, not Marduk or Baal.

Psalm 104:27-30 - All Creatures Everywhere Depend on the Lord's Provision.

Each living thing on the land and sea depends on God to supply their food in due season, as well as their very breath in order to continue their lives; they also depend on God to renew the face of the ground, i.e. to give success to their reproduction. In keeping with this entire psalm, the God on whom all depend is generous, someone safe on whom to rely.

- 27 These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
- 28 when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
- 29 When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
- 30 When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

Psalm 104:27-30

These all look to you to give them their food in due season. The psalmist considered all kinds of created things from the land, sea and air. He recognised that they all depended upon God, who provides for them in due season, as Paul acknowledged: <<*In past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good – giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy*>> (Acts 14:16-17).

Spurgeon observed, “God has a timing for all things, and does not feed his creatures by fits and starts; he gives them daily bread, and a quantity proportioned to their needs. This is all that any of us should expect; if even the brute creatures are content with a sufficiency we ought not to be more greedy than they.”

When you give to them, they gather it up. God feeds the animals, but does not pour food into their mouths from heaven. He provides, but they must gather in. Spurgeon commented, “When we see the chickens picking up the corn which the

housewife scatters from her lap we have an apt illustration of the manner in which the Lord supplies the needs of all living things – he gives and they gather.”

This principle also has application to evangelism as Spurgeon also noted, “God will give us souls if we pray for them, but we must seek after them. When the Lord calls a man to speak in his name, he intends to give him some success, but he must be on the watch to gather it.”

When you hide your face, they are dismayed. Creation is so dependent upon God that if he were to hide his presence or take away their breath, they would soon perish. There is a real sense in which creation is much more responsive and surrendered to God than humanity.

They die and return to their dust is an allusion to: <<*By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return*>> (Genesis 3:19).

When you send forth your spirit, they are created. The withdrawal of God’s presence or favour means ruin for all creation, but the outpouring of his Spirit means life and renewal: <<*Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink”, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water’*>> (John 4:10), and: <<*On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.”’ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified*>> (John 7:37-39).

Psalm 104:31-35 - May I Ever Rejoice in the Lord’s Works As He Does.

The key to the final section is the repeated ‘rejoice’: <<*may the Lord rejoice in his works*>> (v.31), i.e. the works he does in caring for his creation, and: <<*I rejoice in the Lord*>> (v.34), i.e. who shows such abundant generosity in his works. This meditation on God’s bounty will be pleasing to him if the singing congregation can learn from it to admire and trust the creator and ruler of all, and to sing praise to him from the heart.

Verse 35 is the only mention of human sin in the entire psalm, although the curse on sin is alluded to in v.29. Sinners and the wicked are, as generally in the psalms, those who reject God’s gracious rule and dwell in their rebellion. Such a moral condition of hardness against God is a blemish on God’s good world; the prayer that they be consumed from the earth will be answered in God’s good time. The purpose of this prayer in this context is not to foster hatred of human sinners but instead hatred of all sorts of sin that so stains and defiles God’s good creation. The faithful will not want to be identified with such people, and will want their own lives to be more and more in tune with the goodness of God.

31 May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works —
32 who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.

Psalm 104:31-32

May the glory of the Lord endure for ever. As the psalmist considered the power and wisdom of God in all creation, it made him long for the glory of the God behind it all to endure forever: <<*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen*>> (Romans 11:36). As Spurgeon once stated, “His works may pass away, but not his glory. Were it only for what he has already done, the Lord deserves to be praised without ceasing.”

May the Lord rejoice in his works. The psalmist also wanted God to find pleasure in what he had created, which he did: <<*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day*>> (Genesis 1:31). This implies that his creatures that are gifted with rational choice, such as humanity, should deliberately choose to give God reasons to rejoice in his works.

Who looks on the earth and it trembles. The shaking earth and smoking hills may be a remembrance of God’s manifested presence at Mount Sinai; refer to Exodus Chapter 19. It was reminder of the overwhelming power and might of God.

33 I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
34 May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the Lord.
35 Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!

Psalm 104:33-35

This remarkable psalm has little or no focus on God as redeemer and saviour. Its focus is on the greatness and goodness of God as displayed in creation. Yet that was enough to make the psalmist determined to say, I will sing to the Lord as long as I live: <<*My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make melody. Awake, my soul!*>> (Psalm 108:1). The God of all creation is

worthy of life-long praise. This again shows the importance of knowing God as creator. The rejection of God as creator has had a deep and terrible effect upon the heart and mind of the modern world.

I will sing praise to my God while I have being. Spurgeon again commented, “The birds sang God’s praises before men were created, but redeemed men will sing his glories when the birds are no more. Jehovah, who ever lives and makes us to live shall be for ever exalted, and extolled in the songs of redeemed men.”

May my meditation be pleasing to him. The psalmist understood that God is also worshipped by thoughts. What his people choose to set their minds on is a measure of what they truly value. Knowing the greatness and goodness of God as revealed in creation, he wanted his thoughts to be pleasing to God. Creation is a wonderful subject for sweet meditation, but Christians have even greater subjects, as Spurgeon noted, “Redemption is a choicer theme for meditation than creation is, for its wonders are far greater.”

For I rejoice in the Lord. Again a sense of determination is noted. He chose to be glad in the Lord, making a rational choice in light of God’s revelation of himself through creation. This was another theme reflected by David: *<<I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High>>* (Psalm 9:2).

Let sinners be consumed from the earth. This seems a strange and solemn declaration in this psalm. Yet it is the logical consequence for those who reject God as creator: *<<But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed; the posterity of the wicked shall be cut off>>* (Psalm 37:38). Paul later developed this thought in Romans Chapter 1, speaking of the guilt and consequences due to those who reject God as creator and worship the creature rather than the creator.

Bless the Lord, O my soul. The psalmist was compelled to consider the dark consequences due to those who rejected the creator God, but he could not let such a remarkable psalm end on a dark note. He ends with another rousing call to his own soul to **bless the Lord**, and to **praise the Lord**. This is the fitting response of the creature to the creator.

Praise the Lord! This is the Hebrew word *hallelujah*. The Greek Septuagint makes this phrase a part of Psalm 105, matching the last phrase of Psalm 105:45. This would result in Psalms 103-106 each having a literary envelope, with the closing phrase echoing the opening. However, there is no evidence for this in the Hebrew manuscripts.