Part One: Offering Praise to God: A Literary and Descriptive Analysis of Psalm 148

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Abstract

This journal article is the first in a two-part series that adopts as its rationale the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. The current essay undertakes a literary and descriptive analysis of Psalm 148, using as its incentive the first two of five well-known *solas* arising from the 95 theses Martin Luther (1483–1546) published in Wittenburg, Germany, in 1517. The first in the pentad emphasizes that glory alone belongs to God (in Latin, *soli Deo gloria*). The second in the pentad draws attention to Scripture as the fountainhead of divine revelation (in Latin, *sola Scriptura*). When the structure and content of Psalm 148 are examined (i.e. *sola Scriptura*), attentive readers discern that the major theme is giving heartfelt praise to God (i.e. *soli Deo gloria*).

[1] The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

The year 2017 commemorates the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.[2] In 1517, Martin Luther published his 95 Theses in Wittenburg, Germany.[3] In turn, these eventually gave rise to the following five well-known *solas* (in Latin) that ministers of the Gospel have used as guidelines in their interpretation and application of scripture:[4]

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[2] Church historians generally regard Protestant reformers such as Zwingli, Melanchthon, and Calvin to be figures of the early modern era. In contrast, Martin Luther is primarily considered to be a late medieval figure. For instance, whereas the former studied Renaissance humanism within various university contexts, Luther trained to be an Augustinian monk. For an incisive overview of Luther's life and times, cf. Bainton (2013); Hendrix (2015); Kolb (2009); Marty (2008); Oberman (2006). Also, for a representative, substantive treatment of other major luminaries, as well as prominent theological issues, of the Reformation, cf. Barrett (2017); George (2013); Hillerbrand (2004); Linberg (2009); MacCulloch (2005); Matheson (2010); Nichols (2007); Payton (2010); Reeves (2010); Steinmetz (2001).

[3] Luther was a prodigious writer. Aside from his German translation of the Bible, the Weimar edition includes all his writings, along with his oral statements, in Latin and German (cf. Luther 2010). The American edition includes only about a third of Luther's works. One of the most pivotal subsets of his writings, which formed the kernel of his Reformation theology, can be found in volume 31 (cf. Luther 1957). Noteworthy, seminal entries include the following: 'Disputation against scholastic theology', 'Ninety-five theses', the 'Heidelberg disputation', 'Two kinds of righteousness', 'the Leipzig debate', and 'the freedom of a Christian'. These help readers more fully appreciate Luther's emerging disagreement with the soteriology of the late medieval Roman Catholic Church, the thinking behind his theology of the cross (in contrast to Church's theology of glory), and the rationale behind his emphasis on the centrality of scripture (rather than the edicts of popes and councils) in the ministry of the Gospel.

[4] There is no scholarly consensus regarding the prioritisation in numbering of the five *solas*. For the sake of expediency, the sequencing adopted in this essay is regarded by the author as a suitable arrangement to match the research agenda set forth in section 1.0. For a comprehensive overview of the five *solas* of the Reformation, cf. Barrett (2016); Schreiner (2015); Trueman (2017); VanDrunen (2015); Wellum (2017). For a compendium of Luther's writings centred around the 5 *solas*, cf. Kilcrease and Lutzer

1. *Soli Deo gloria*: to God alone be glory
2. *Sola Scriptura*: Scripture alone
3. *Solus Christus*: Christ alone
4. *Sola fide*: faith alone
5. *Sola gratia*: grace alone

The first in the pentad reminds believers that to God alone is the glory. The second in the pentad focuses on the primacy of scripture. The premise is that while there are a variety of important ecclesiastical and scientific sources of information that merit critical engagement when studying the Judeo-Christian canon, pride of place rests with God's Word. After all, it is the fountainhead of revelation for obtaining a theological understanding of matters involving the Creator and the entire universe He brought into existence, including humankind.

The preceding observations motivate a literary and descriptive analysis of Psalm 148.[5] Specifically, an examination of this ode serves as a showcase for the above two *solas*.[6] In particular, people of faith are

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(2017). The anthology includes an explanation of the historical context and theological significance of each writing to the Reformation.

[5] There is no scholarly agreement concerning the presumed redactional history of Psalm 148. This journal article makes no effort to reconstruct the editorial activity and source materials that led to the present canonical form of the sacred song; instead, it is analysed as a self-contained, cohesive written unit. Also, a literary and descriptive analysis of the poem aligns with a text-centred, inner-canonical, and integrative hermeneutic. The latter entails engaging pertinent Judeo-Christian Scriptures in their literary, historical, and theological settings. The result is that the multiplex, revelatory import of God's Word is more fully appreciated by twenty-first-century believers.

[6] The second journal article in the two-part series undertakes a literary and descriptive analysis of Psalm 104. The corresponding focus is on the second and third of the five well-known *solas*. Due to space limitations, the remaining *solas* in the pentad are not dealt with in either journal article, their undisputed historical importance notwithstanding. Also, the decision to deal with Psalm 104 after 148 is due to the research priorities set forth in section 1.0.

summoned to offer the Creator unending praise (i.e. *soli Deo gloria*). Also, the warrant for doing so is a thoughtful and informed examination of what the songwriter communicated in his awe-inspiring hymn (i.e. *sola Scriptura*). What follows, then, is a literary and descriptive analysis of the psalm.[7]

2. Background Considerations

2.1. Psalm 148 and the Hebrew Psalter[8]

Psalm 148 is grouped with the final five songs in the Hebrew Psalter.[9] Most likely, each 'hymn of descriptive praise' (VanGemeren 1991:864)[10] was written by a Jewish musician (or team of musicians) who had recently returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon.[11] This supposition is due, in part, to the Septuagint (LXX) version of Psalms

[7] The following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the literary and descriptive analysis of Psalm 148: Allen (1983); Anderson (1983); Bratcher and Reyburn (1991); Brüning (1996); Bullock (2001); Calvin (1949b); Cohen, Oratz, and Shahar (1992); deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner (2014); Delitzsch (1982); Estes (2014); Goldingay (2008); Grogan (2001); Harman (2011); Hilber (2009); Hillers (1978); Hossfeld and Zenger (2011); Kidner (1975); Kraus (1992; 1993); Leupold (1969); Luther (1837); Mays (1994); McCann (1996); Perowne (1989); Prinsloo (1992); Terrien (2003); VanGemeren (1991); Warden (1993); Wesselschmidt (2007); Westermann (1981).

[8] For an animated outline and explanation of the Psalter, cf. Mackie (2015).

[9] Psalm 148 profoundly shaped the text for 'All Creatures of Our God and King'. Saint Francis of Assisi first penned the words of the hymn in 1225. Then, between 1899 to 1919, William Draper rendered and reworked the canticle into English, along with setting the words to music (cf. Plantiga 2007a).

[10] Alternatively, Luther (1837:384) classifies Psalm 148 as a hymn of 'thanksgiving'.

[11] Sometime after 538 BCE; cf. Ps 147:2.

145 through 148,[12] which associates these with the sixth-century BCE postexilic prophets, Haggai and Zechariah.[13]

Given this historical backdrop, even though the future was hopeful, the sorrows of exile were fresh in the hymnist's mind. Also, the ruins of Jerusalem surrounded him.[14] Despite such a sombre backdrop, the lyricist began and ended his psalm with a universal summons to give God praise (vv. 1, 14). The totality of creation is personified as expressing adoration to the Lord because of his providential oversight of the entire spiritual and material realms. This includes both the heavens (vv. 1–6) and the earth (vv. 7–14).

2.2. The meaning of 'hallelujah'

Of particular interest is the Hebrew verb *hâlal*, which is used in Psalm 148:1 and 14. The term literally means 'to boast' or 'to praise' (Allen 1997). The primary sense is to commend the virtues of the object being extolled (Westermann 1997). The Israelites joined the noun, *Yah*, which is a shortened form of *Yahweh*,[15] to the verb *hâlal*. The combined phrase basically meant 'Praise the Lord!'

Some form of the Hebrew phrase *hâlal Yah* appears 23 times in the Psalter alone.[16] Likewise, some form of the verb *hâlal* appears 12 times in Psalm 148. Moreover, every time the phrase *hâlal Yah* appears in the

[12] Psalms 146 through 148 in the MT correspond to Psalms 145 through 148 in the LXX, in which 146 and 147 together are the equivalent of 147 in the MT.
[13] In the LXX version, each of the first lines of Psalms 145 through 148, respectively, reads as follows: Αλληλουια, Αγγαιου καὶ Ζαχαριου ('Hallelujah, Haggai and Zechariah'; Rahlfs 1979).
[14] Hereafter, the human author of Psalm 148 is presumed to be a male.
[15] Freedman (1986) refers to *Yahweh* as the 'tetragrammaton' for the Lord's covenant 'name'; cf. the corresponding lexical discussion of God's names in section 4.2.
[16] For an examination of the function of the 'hallelujahs' in the Psalter, cf. Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:39–41).

Old Testament of our English Bibles, it is usually translated. This stands in contrast with the New Testament, where the equivalent Greek interjection is transliterated as 'hallelujah'. It occurs only 4 times, all in the first 6 verses of Revelation 19. This explains why this chapter of the New Testament has been called the 'Hallelujah Chorus'.[17]

2.3. Parallelism in Hebrew poetry

An examination of the Hebrew poetry in Psalm 148 indicates a distinguishing characteristic called parallelism.[18] This term simply means that two (or sometimes three) lines of the poetry are, in one way or another, similar in meaning. Parallelism takes many different forms. The type found in this song is called equivalent (or synonymous) parallelism, because the second line essentially repeats and advances the thought of the first.

3. A literary analysis of Psalm 148

Psalm 148:1 begins and verse 14 ends with the summons to 'praise the Lord'. In a manner of speaking, the invitation is comparable to a conductor who leads worshippers through the entrance into the psalm, as well as the exit from the ode. Prinsloo (1992:56) offers the analogy of two 'choirs'—one from above and the other from below—that extol the Creator.

In particular, verses 1b–4 focus the gaze of readers upward to the heavens. The angels and celestial bodies in the starry night sky are

[17] Bratcher and Reyburn (1991) note that Psalm 148 has also been called a 'hallelujah chorus'.

[18] For an overview of different types of parallelism in Hebrew poetry, cf. Berlin (1992:156–60); Bullock (1988:32–38); Harrison (2009:89–92); LeMon and Strawn (2008:510–12).

enjoined to lead the chorus of tribute to the Lord. Verses 5–6 offer the reason for doing so, namely, that God has created every one of these entities. Next, verses 7–12 shift the readers' focus downward to the earth.[19] All the creatures on the planet are directed to band together with their celestial counterparts in heartfelt praise to the Creator.[20] Verses 13–14 put forward the rationale for honouring God in this way. Worthy of mention are the Lord's splendour and his care for the people of Israel.[21]

The above literary analysis indicates that the sacred song is divided into roughly two equal halves, that is, verses 1–6 and 7–14. In a metaphorical sense, the heavens and the earth are comparable two halves of a choir that alternate (i.e. antiphonally) in extolling God. This observation is reinforced by the repetition of the directive, 'Let them praise the name of the Lord,' both in verses 5 and 13.[22] The repeated emphasis on praise in these two interior verses, along with the opening and closing verses (respectively), reminds worshippers to extol the Creator openly for who he is and what he has done.

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[19] Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:631) explicate that the references in Psalm 148 to the 'heavens' (שָׁמַיִם; v. 1) and the 'earth' (אֶרֶץ; v. 7) is a figure of speech called a merism that the lyricist used to refer to the totality of the cosmos joining together to extol to the Lord.

[20] Prinsloo (1992:50, 53, 59) indicates that the Hebrew noun rendered 'all' (כֹּל) occurs 9 times in Psalm 148 to emphasise that every entity in heaven and on earth exists to extol the Creator.

[21] According to Luther (1837:385), the resounding chorus was to be made with 'thousands of tongues'. Likewise, the participants were to 'celebrate' the Lord's 'infinite goodness', along with his 'countless and unspeakable mercies'. Estes (2014:32) observes that while Psalm 148 commences with a broad, sweeping 'focus' on all creation, the hymnist 'progressively' concentrates the readers' attention in verse 14 on 'Israel' and its inhabitants. Warden (1993:107) states that ultimately 'God is not the recipient of praise, but its dispenser'. Expressed differently, the ability of the redeemed to offer the Creator 'praise' originates with him and is based on his gracious superintendence of the redeemed.

[22] cf. the corresponding lexical discussion of God's names in section 4.2.

Based on the preceding analysis, the proposed literary structure of Psalm 148 is as follows:[23]

- The opening refrain to praise God: v. 1a
    - The summons to offer praise in the heavens: vv. 1b–4
        - The reason for doing so: vv. 5–6
            - An emphasis on praising God's name: v. 5a
    - The summons to offer praise on the earth: vv. 7–12
        - The reason for doing so: vv. 13–14a
            - An emphasis on praising God's name: v. 13a
- The closing refrain to praise God: v. 14b

In this arrangement, the opening and closing refrains (vv. 1a and 14b, respectively) establish the main theme of the psalm, namely, for God to be praised. The interior verses develop this theme further by being configured in a dual, inwardly advancing pattern. There are corresponding summons to offer praise (vv. 1b–4 and 7–12, respectively) and reasons for doing so (vv. 5–6 and 13–14a, respectively). The parallelism between the two sections, along with the conceptual link with the main theme of the ode, is further reinforced by the admonition in both verses 5a and 13a to praise God's name.[24]

[23] For a deliberation of the structure and cohesion of Psalm 148, cf. Prinsloo (1992). The author considers data related to the 'morphological, syntactical, stylistic, and semantic' (46) aspects of the hymn. For additional proposals concerning the hymn's structure, cf. Allen (1983:313–5).

[24] cf. the corresponding lexical discussion of God's names in section 4.2.

4. A Descriptive Analysis of Psalm 148

4.1. Angelic hosts versus idols

As noted earlier, Psalm 148:1b–4 exhort various aspects of the creation above (both animate and inanimate objects) to exalt the Lord. 'Angels' renders a Hebrew noun that can also be translated 'messengers' or 'envoys' (Noll 1997). These beings form a celestial entourage that surround God's heavenly throne and whom he dispatches to do his bidding.

The Hebrew noun rendered 'hosts' (v. 2) can also be translated as 'armies' and refers to a vast cohort of military personnel (Koehler 2000). In this case, the Lord is the supreme Commander of heaven's forces. Alternately, the noun could refer to celestial bodies that are visible in the night sky (Longman 1997). Here the emphasis is on the Creator's total control of entities venerated by Israel's pagan neighbors.

The lyricist's monotheistic portrayal of God is radically different from polytheistic ancient Near Eastern conceptions of deity. In particular, the foremost idols of Aram (or Syria) included Hadad (a storm-god), Mot (the god of death), Anath (a fierce goddess of war and love), and Rimmon (a god of thunder). Eshmun (a fertility god) was the chief deity of Sidon. Chemosh (a savage war-god) was the foremost idol of Moab. Molech (or Milcom, an astral deity) was the chief god of the Ammonites. Dagon (a grain deity) and Baal-Zebub (a god of health and divination) were the foremost idols of the Philistines.[25]

Centuries later, during Paul's brief visit to Athens, his spirit became deeply unsettled by the sight of all the 'idols' (Acts 17:16) present

wherever he ventured. Then, when the apostle addressed the resident and visiting philosophers of the city, he declared that God made the world and everything in it, as well as gave life and breath to all creatures (vv. 24–25). Paul made it clear that this powerful Creator determines the various eras of history and the limits of each nation's territory (v. 26). The apostle also revealed that this great God gives every person the ability to live, move about, and become responsible citizens in his or her communities (v. 28).

4.2. Extolling the Creator

Psalm 148:3 summons a diverse collection of astral bodies, including the sun, moon, and constellation of stars, to join ranks in extolling their Creator. Verse 4 adds the heights of heaven,[26] along with its stratospheric rain clouds. Hilber (2009:442) points out that the lyricist was rhetorically addressing these inanimate objects in a personified manner, a literary technique that specialists have identified as the poetic device known as apostrophe.

The preceding observations reflect a three-tiered view of reality encompassing what is above, below, and on the earth. Accordingly, an immense body of water was thought to be located beyond the overarching sky as well as underneath the surface of the planet.[27] Hebrew writings of the day also subdivided the heavens into three or more layers.[28] If it is assumed that the first heaven is the sky and the

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[25] For a cogent treatment of polytheistic ancient Near Eastern conceptions of deity, cf. Barrett (2012); Hadley (1997); Huey (2009); Hunt (2003).

[26] The Hebrew of Psalm 148:4 is literally translated, 'heavens of the heavens' (הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמֵי).

[27] cf. Gen 1:6–7; Ps 104:3.

[28] cf. Ps 148:4; 2 Cor. 12:2, 4.

second heaven the more distant stars and planets, then the third heaven would be the place where God dwells.[29]

All these entities were to laud God's sacred name (v. 5). According to Kraus (1992:21), it signifies the 'self-manifestation and the self-expression of God among his people'.[30] Also, as an extension of what was said in sections 2.2 and 3, the divine names unveil key truths about the Lord's character, such as his honour and reputation (Ross 1997).[31] For instance, *Yahweh*, and its shortened form, *Yah*, emphasize God's eternality (Freedman 1986).[32] He shows himself to be actively involved in human history (Fretheim 1997b). *Elohim* portrays the Lord as the one, true, and unique God (Ringgren 1977). He alone is the source of all things and the fountain of all life (Fretheim 1997a).[33]

4.3. Giving God praise

The last point in section 4.2 is spotlighted in Psalm 148:5, which states that everything was created at the Lord's decree. This verse uses the

[29] cf. Neh 9:6; T. Levi 2:7–10. For an analysis of Israelites' distinctive worldview, especially against the wider backdrop of the ancient Near East in the first millennium BCE, cf. Stadelmann (1970).

[30] cf. Deut 12:11; 28:58; 2 Sam 6:2; 1 Chron 22:19; Ps 20:1, 7; Isa 30:27–28; Joel 2:32.

[31] For a concise discussion about the import of the divine name in the Hebrew sacred writings, including the Psalms, cf. deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner (2014:848–9).

[32] cf. Exod 3:14–15. Noteworthy is the fact that Waltke and Yu (2007:11), throughout their treatment of Old Testament theology, consistently render the tetragrammaton in uppercase italics as '*I AM*'. Comparably, Goldingay (2016:20) draws a sharp 'contrast' between Yahweh as the 'living God' and the 'lifeless gods and images' venerated by Israel's pagan neighbors.

[33] cf. Gen 1:1. According to Waltke and Yu (2007:371), *elohim* 'signifies the quintessence of all divine, transcendent, or heavenly powers'. Correspondingly, Schmidt (1997) maintains that *elohim* 'aided the Israelites to understand and proclaim the God of their own history as the God of the world'.

same Hebrew verb appearing in Genesis 1:1, 21, and 27, which reveal that at the dawn of time, God brought the entire universe into existence.[34] Also, as the remainder of the chapter reveals, he used his efficacious command to accomplish his will.[35]

Psalm 148:6 adds another reason for the heavens and whatever it contains to give God praise. Specifically, he alone established the sun, moon, stars, and planets. Bratcher and Reyburn (1991) clarify that during the first millennium BCE, 'all planets and stars were thought to occupy a fixed place in the sky'. Likewise, the Lord ensured that his mandate for their continued existence would never be overturned by any entity. For instance, none of the idols venerated by Israel's pagan neighbours could destabilise the universe God controlled.

4.4. Sources of idolatry

As noted earlier, Psalm 148:7–14 shifts the call to praise from the heavens to the earth, beginning with the aquatic life in the oceans. These included the largest sea creatures found in the deepest chasms of the planet, including whales, squid, sharks, and so on. According to pagan myths rampant throughout the ancient Near East, serpent-like monsters roamed the watery abyss of earth's seas and threatened to undo the created order. In contrast, the poet declared that Israel's God

[34] The Hebrew verb is בָּרָא. For an overview of the stylistic, lexical, and thematic correspondences between Psalm 148 and Genesis 1:1–2:4, along with Psalms 103 and 104, cf. Prinsloo (1992). The author maintains that the hymnist of Psalm 148 'dealt with his material creatively and independently' (56), resulting in a 'coherent, meaningful text'.

[35] cf. Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29; Pss 33:6–9; 104:5–9; Prov 8:29. Brown (1997) clarifies that the 'emphasis' is 'on the life-infusing power of the divine word'. What the Creator declared was neither an 'empty pronouncement' nor merely an 'expression of wish or goodwill'; instead, the Lord decreed 'actualizes and enables' what he brings into existence.

reigned supreme over all these oceanic forms of life. Also, he alone enabled the entire created order to remain stable and enjoy functional integrity.

Furthermore, Israel's pagan neighbours made idols out the world's naturally-occurring phenomena, including lightning, hail, snow, frost, hurricane-force winds, and so on (v. 8). The Gentiles also venerated the hills and mountains, along with the groves of fruit trees and forests of cedar that grew on them. According to Bratcher and Reyburn (1991), the entities highlighted in verse 9 stood for all 'cultivated' and 'uncultivated plants', respectively. Even pagan rituals and lewd acts were performed at these various locales.

Moreover, the creatures that lived on the earth became the idolatrous focus of people inhabiting the Fertile Crescent. The lyricist mentioned wild and tame animals, along with reptiles and birds (v. 10); yet, in doing so, he enjoined the planet's various land-based entities to offer praise to the one, true, and living God.[36] This exhortation complements Romans 1:21–25, where centuries later Paul reprimanded unsaved humanity for worshipping and serving created entities, rather than the Creator.

4.5. A summons to praise

It is against the preceding theological backdrop that Psalm 148:11–12 summons all human beings—the pinnacle of God's creation—

[36] Concerning Psalm 148:10, Estes (2014:35) asserts that even though people might regard the sounds uttered by creatures in the wild as a 'cacophony of roars, grunts, squeals, and chirps', to the Sovereign of the universe these noises are a resonant 'symphony exalting Him'.

throughout the globe to participate in the refrain of praise.[37] The poet drew attention to monarchs and high-ranking officials, as well as any other leaders over the nations of the earth. The lyricist also included men and women, regardless of their age and socio-economic status. No person in every locale across the planet was excluded from the injunction.

4.6. Reasons to praise

Psalm 148:13–14 explain why all individuals should laud the Creator's name. Specifically, no other entity was as transcendent as the Lord. Similarly, no creature in heaven or on earth was comparable in either majesty or splendour to Israel's God. He alone, not the powerless and lifeless idols touted by the unsaved, enabled his chosen people to conquer and settle the Promised Land.

Moreover, in fulfilment of God's covenant with Abraham,[38] he literally 'raised up a horn for his people' (v. 14). The hymnist possibly had in mind the horn of a ram or a bull, which in Israelite culture were symbols of power and strength.[39] In a military sense, the Creator gave

[37] cf. Gen 1:26–27. These verses reveal that men and women, as God's image bearers, reflect his spiritual and moral likeness. The Lord put them on earth to serve as his ruling representatives. Psalm 8 makes the preceding point even clearer. The One who made the heavens, moon, and stars (v. 3) also crowned humankind with glory and honour (v. 5). The Lord gave men and women dominion over his wonderful works. He graciously put them in charge of his expansive and marvellous creation (v. 6), which includes tame and wild animals (v. 7), birds, and sea creatures (v. 8). Such a great God was worthy of devotion and praise from his people (v. 9).

[38] cf. Gen 12:1–3; Deut 7:7–12. Kraus (1992:53) elucidates that whenever the Psalter refers to the 'people of God', the 'emphasis is always on the thoroughly distinctive nature of their role'. Grogan (2001:81) advances the discourse with his dual emphasis on Israel's 'election and covenant'. Put differently, God not only 'chose' the Israelites, but also 'entered into a special relationship with them'.

[39] cf. Pss 5:19; 89:17; 92:10; 112:9.

his faithful children victory over their adversaries, especially as seen in their exodus from Egypt. The upright, in turn, enjoyed a close, personal relationship with the Lord. So, only he was worthy of their praise.[40]

Hilber (2009:429) thinks the reference to a 'horn' might also point to a monarch (such as David), who enabled the redeemed to triumph over their foes despite overwhelming circumstances.[41] Luke 1:69, which is part of Zechariah's prophetic ode, sharpens the theological focus. The backdrop is the birth of John the Baptist and his ministry as the forerunner of the Messiah. Zechariah declared that the Lord had 'raised up a horn of salvation' for his people, specifically a ruler belonging to the 'house' (or dynasty) of God's 'servant David'. Through the Messiah's atoning sacrifice at Calvary and subsequent resurrection, he triumphed over Satan, sin, and death, thereby providing a second (or new) exodus for those who trust in him for eternal life.

5. Conclusion

This essay began with a historical reference to the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Of particular note were the first two of five well-known *solas* arising from the 95 theses Martin Luther published in Wittenburg, Germany, in 1517. The first in the series emphasizes that glory alone belongs to God (in Latin, *soli Deo gloria*). The second in

[40] Luther (1837:384) fittingly asserted that the Creator summoned the 'children of Israel', to whom belonged the 'word and worship of God', to extol him.

[41] cf. Ps 132:17. For an in-depth consideration of the imagery and identity of the 'horn' in Psalm 148:4, cf. Schmutzer and Gauthier (2009). The authors separate 'commentators' (183) into two main groups: (1) 'literary-metaphorical' and (2) 'historical-literal'. Based on their analysis of the relevant data, they affirm the presence of 'elements common' to both categories, in which a 'militaristic theme' forms the broader conceptual backdrop. The authors conclude that the 'horn' pointed to the 'judgment of Israel's enemies', along with the heralding of 'Israel's restored reputation on an international scale'.

the pentad draws attention to Scripture as the fountainhead of divine revelation (in Latin, *sola Scriptura*).

The above statements incentivized undertaking a literary and descriptive analysis of Psalm 148. Additional motivation can be found in the first of three foundational principles affirmed by SATS, namely, that the 'Bible is the only written revelation of and from God' and 'therefore all we need for faith and life'.[42] When the structure and content of the sacred song are examined (i.e. *sola Scriptura*), attentive readers discern that the major theme is giving heartfelt praise to God (i.e. *soli Deo gloria*).

For instance, verses 1a and 14b serve as metaphorical bookends, or an inclusio, summoning worshippers to praise the Creator. Similarly, the repeated appearance of some form of the Hebrew verb rendered 'praise' throughout the psalm,[43] along with the covenantal form of the Lord's name in verses 5 and 13, reinforce the imperative for the redeemed to honour God through individual and corporate worship.

To develop the preceding thought further, it is worth noting that, according to Psalm 150:3–5, God is to be praised with music and dancing. The eight items mentioned in these verses include wind, stringed, and percussion instruments. Some were used only in corporate worship services, while others were used in everyday celebrations. The implication seems to be that God's people should use whatever means that are appropriate to exalt the Lord.

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[42] The full text of the three foundational principles affirmed by SATS can be found at the following: https://www.sats.edu.za/about-us/statement-faith/.
[43] cf. Ps 148:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 13, 14.

Colossians 3:16 also encourages the redeemed to make music a regular part of their corporate worship experience.[44] The 'psalms' were probably the canticles found in the Old Testament Psalter. 'Hymns' most likely were lyrics composed by Christians to honour God. 'Songs' may have been called 'spiritual' either to distinguish them from similar compositions by non-Christians or because they referred to spontaneous singing in the Spirit.

The idea is that the words in our worship songs are meant to express the compassion and truth of the Saviour. These hymns can either be taken from the Old Testament psalms or be newly-written lyrics of praise. Whatever the type of music, the Spirit should guide the words, the music, and the singer. Furthermore, we are to praise the Father and the Son in song with not just with our lips, but more importantly with all our heart—that is, our whole being.

Colossians 3:17 reminds believers to do everything in Jesus' name.[45] Put differently, the Messiah's supreme authority and character govern the way Christians think, behave, and minister. Since the Lord has claimed them with his atoning blood, they belong to and are dependent on him. Accordingly, his name should be stamped on all that believers do and say as his representatives to the unsaved. This includes expressing our gratitude through the Son to the Father.

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[44] cf. Eph 5:19.
[45] cf. Eph 5:20.

Part Two: Affirming God's Majesty in Creation: A Literary and Descriptive Analysis of Psalm 104

Dan Lioy

Abstract

This journal article is the second in a two-part series that adopts as its rationale the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. The current essay undertakes a literary and descriptive analysis of Psalm 104, using as its incentive the second two of five well-known *solas* arising from the 95 theses Martin Luther (1483–1546) published in Wittenburg, Germany, in 1517. The second in the pentad emphasizes that Scripture is the fountainhead of divine revelation (in Latin, *sola Scriptura*). To that end, when the structure and content of Psalm 104 are examined, attentive readers discern several possible intertextual connections of a Christological nature between the ode and the New Testament. In turn, this realization draws attention to the third *sola* in the pentad, namely, the centrality of the Son in the Father's redemptive plan (in Latin, *solus Christus*).

1. Introduction

As noted in the preceding journal article dealing with Psalm 148,[1] the year 2017 commemorates the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. In 1517, Martin Luther published his 95 Theses in Wittenburg, Germany.[2] In turn, these eventually gave rise to the following five well-known *solas* (in Latin) that ministers of the Gospel have used as guidelines in their interpretation of Scripture:

1. *Soli Deo gloria*: to God alone be glory
2. *Sola Scriptura*: Scripture alone
3. *Solus Christus*: Christ alone
4. *Sola fide*: faith alone
5. *Sola gratia*: grace alone

The second in the pentad draws attention to the primacy of scripture. On the one hand, the Reformers affirmed that when studying scripture,

[1] The first journal article in the two-part series undertakes a literary and descriptive analysis of Psalm 148. The decision to deal with this hymn before Psalm 104 is due to the research priorities set forth in section 1 of each respective essay.

[2] Wiersma (2017:4) observes that, in contrast to a generation ago, 'today' there is an increased interest in 'Luther's anti-Jewish writings and attitudes'. Admittedly, in a 1523 essay titled, *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew*, the Reformer 'showed great favour toward Medieval Europe's Jewish population'. Twenty years later, though, in 1543, Luther penned a verbose rant titled, *Concerning the Jews and their lies*. Wiersma states that 'even Luther's own colleagues and supporters were dismayed' by the violent tone and content of the 'screed'. There is no consensus explanation among scholars for Luther's 'awful words about his Jewish neighbours'. Even so, Wiersma identifies 'two main factors', as follows: (1) Luther's 'simmering disappointment with the rabbis' failure to recognize Jesus as Messiah'; and, (2) Luther's 'desire to avoid divine punishment for failing to speak out against rumoured Jewish blasphemies concerning Jesus and Mary'. Wiersma's is correct in maintaining that 'Luther's anti-Jewish sentiments represent the deepest flaws of a deeply gifted man'. Even the Reformer's legendary efforts to herald the 'crucified and risen' Messiah do not excuse Luther's 'errant words' against God's chosen people.

there is value in engaging various secondary sources of knowledge from the metaphysical and physical realms of existence; on the other hand, God's Word is given the foremost position of importance in the theological enterprise.

The third *sola* in the pentad spotlights the centrality of the Son in the Father's redemptive plan. This emphasis is borne out in a literary and descriptive analysis of Psalm 104.[3] Specifically, attentive readers discern several possible intertextual connections of a Christological nature between the ode and the New Testament. By way of comparison, the number exceeds the single connection noted in the journal article dealing with Psalm 148.[4]

The above statements serve as an incentive to undertake a literary and descriptive analysis of Psalm 104.[5] In particular, an examination of this sacred song affirms the wisdom of giving the Judeo-Christian canon pride of place in all aspects of exegetical theology (i.e. *sola Scriptura*). Moreover, a Spirit-filled and discerning consideration of what the poet conveyed in his ode points the readers' gaze to the coming Messiah,

[3] There is no scholarly agreement concerning the presumed redactional history of Psalm 104. This journal article makes no effort to reconstruct the editorial activity and source materials that led to the present canonical form of the sacred song; instead, it is analyzed as a self-contained, cohesive literary unit.

[4] The journal article dealing with Psalm 148 mentions the reference to a 'horn' in verse 14 and Zechariah's corresponding declaration in Luke 1:69 that that the Lord had 'raised up a horn of salvation' for his people', which refers to Israel's Messiah.

[5] The following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the literary and descriptive analysis of Psalm 104: Allen (1983); Anderson (1983); Barker (1986); Berlin (2005); Bratcher and Reyburn (1991); Bullock (2001); Calvin (1949a); Cohen, Oratz, and Shahar (1992); deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner (2014); Delitzsch (1982); Dion (1991); Fullerton (1921); Gandiya (2012); Goldingay (2008); Gottlieb (2016); Grogan (2001); Harman (2011); Hilber (2009); Hossfeld and Zenger (2011); Kidner (1975); Kraus (1992; 1993); Leupold (1969); Levenson (1988); Luther (1837); Mays (1994); McCann (1996); Perowne (1989); Terrien (2003); VanGemeren (1991); Wesselschmidt (2007); Westermann (1981).

whose advent looms large on the writer's prophetic horizon (i.e. *solus Christus*). Accordingly, the sections that follow put forward a literary and descriptive analysis of the hymn.

2. A Literary Analysis of Psalm 104

Psalm 104—along with Job 38 and Psalms 8 and 29—produces a magnificent poetic and musical commentary on the creation.[6] Brueggemann (1997:155) considers Psalm 104 as the 'fullest rendition of creation faith' in the Tanakh. Even the structure of the song draws praise in that it is modelled quite closely on the day-by-day creation events recorded in Genesis 1:1–2:3.[7] Indeed, as the psalmist described in grandiose detail the daily acts of creation, he seemed to proclaim in glowing terms that what the divine Architect and Artisan created on each day is reason enough to praise him.[8]

On the one hand, the psalmist used the various stages of creation as his starting points for praise; yet, on the other hand, as he developed each creation-day theme, there is a constant anticipation of more, especially

[6] Psalm 104 profoundly shaped the text for 'O worship the king'. William Kethe penned an early version of the hymn in 1561. Then, between 1833 to 1835, Robert Grant reworked the canticle into its present form (cf. Plantiga 2007b).

[7] Mays (1994:331) differentiates between 'contemporary people', who discourse about reality through 'scientific, economic, aesthetic, [and] recreational' lenses, versus Psalm 104, which presents a 'view and language appropriate to faith'. Admittedly, Old Testament texts (such as Psalm 104) dealing with creation themes make use of the ancient Near Eastern cognitive environment of the second to first millenniums BCE. The intent (at least in part) was to reveal deep theological truths about God and his relationship to humankind, not to provide a precise scientific treatise concerning the process God used to bring the cosmos into existence. For a biblical and theological analysis of the old Adamic creation in Genesis 1–3, cf. Lioy (2016:13–53).

[8] Luther (1837:273) noted that 'by recounting the works of creation', the hymnist confirmed that 'all the creatures', whether celestial, terrestrial, or oceanic, were 'monuments' to the 'goodness of God'.

for the later days of the creation. In general, the songwriter was cognizant of the day-by-day creation events recorded in Genesis 1; nonetheless, he also allowed himself some poetic licence.[9] For the most part, though, he kept to the structure set out in Genesis, as the following chart shows:

Day God Created . . .	Genesis 1	Psalm 104
1–Light	3–5	1–2
2–The heavens and the waters	6–8	2–4
3–Land and vegetation	9–13	5–18
4–The sun, moon, and stars	14–19	19–23
5–Fish and birds	20–23	24–26
6–Animals, people, and food to sustain them	24–31	21–24, 27–30

Along with the preceding observations, an examination of the content of Psalm 104 results in the following proposed literary structure:[10]

[9] For a consideration of the interrelationship between Psalm 104 and Genesis 1, cf. Berlin (2005:76); Goldingay (2008:197–8); Levenson (1988:55–8).

[10] For a comparable literary arrangement of Psalm 148, cf. the 10-strophe chiastic structure proposed by Alden (1978:201). Alternatively, Terrien (2003:710) proposes a 7-strophe structure that harmonises with the 7 creation days in Genesis 1. For additional proposals concerning the hymn's structure, cf. Allen (1983:28–9).

- An opening refrain to praise God: v. 1a
    - God's entitlement to praise: v. 1b
        - God's glorious presence throughout the heavens: vv. 2–4
            - God's formation of the land and seas: vv. 5–9
            - God's provision of water, food, and shelter: vv. 10–18
            - God's establishment of the night-and-day cycle: vv. 19–23
            - God's creative genius: vv. 24–26
            - God's control over life and death: vv. 27–30
        - God's glorious presence throughout the earth: vv. 31–32
    - God's reception of praise: vv. 33–35a
- A closing refrain to praise God: v. 35b

In this arrangement, a concentric pattern is discernible. Specifically, the opening and closing refrains (vv. 1a and 35b, respectively) parallel one another. Similarly, God's entitlement to praise and reception of praise (vv. 1b and 33–35a, respectively) complement each other and advance the poetic movement of the hymn. God's glorious presence both throughout the heavens and the earth (vv. 2–4 and 31–32, respectively) parallel one another, move forward the writer's thought, and frame the extended central portion of the psalm. Verses 5–30 comprise this section, which not only describe God's oversight of his creation, but also emphasise his superlative insight and skill in doing so (particularly, v. 24).

3. A Descriptive Analysis of Psalm 104

3.1. Worshipping the Creator

Psalm 104 begins with the singer's call for his soul—or entire being—to extol God in praise (v. 1). Indeed, the totality of the hymn is a summons for the upright to worship the Creator. The Hebrew verb used here is *bārak* (בָּרַךְ), where the emphasis is on worshippers acclaiming the Lord for who he is and what he does, particularly his 'goodness, faithfulness, power, or grace' (Brown 1997). The same verb appears again in verse 35, along with *hāllăl* (הָלַל), where the focus is on exalting God for his supreme 'greatness or excellence' (Swanson 2001).[11] The Lord's grandeur is evident by the fact that he has clothed himself with majestic splendour as a powerful monarch would wear a royal robe (v. 1).

Admittedly, there were other ancient Near Eastern creation hymns that existed prior to the time when this psalm was written, possibly by or for David, based on the title in the Septuagint (LXX) and Dead Sea Scroll (DSS) versions.[12] Some of the pagan odes, like the Egyptian

[11] cf. section 2.2 of the journal article dealing with Psalm 148, in which the meaning of 'hallelujah' is discussed.

[12] The LXX numbers Psalm 104 as Psalm 103. Bratcher and Reyburn (1991) point out that both hymns in the MT are 'similar in style', which leads to the supposition that they were 'composed by the same person'. Also noteworthy is that both songs begin and end with the same call to praise. Other possible linkages are detailed in Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:37, 57–9). DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner (2014:774) think the 'central witness of Psalm 103' concerns the goodness of the 'Creator'. In contrast, the 'driving witness of Psalm 104' centres on the Lord's greatness. The LXX opening line of Psalm 103 reads, Τῷ Δαυιδ, or 'pertaining to David' (Rahlfs 1979). In the DSS (11Q5 Psalms[a]), the opening line of Psalm 104 reads, לדויד (Penner and Meyer 2016). As Goldingay (2008:754) indicates, the provenance of the association with David remains unclear and the exact nature of its

Akhenaten's 'Hymn to Aten', which was written around the fourteenth century BCE, described the formation of the day and night, along with the earth's creatures absolute dependence on the sun.[13] Psalm 104, however, contrasts with this idolatrous hymn in that the poet makes a clear distinction between venerating the sun and worshipping the Creator of the sun.[14]

In this magnificent sacred song, all that is in heaven and on the earth points to the Lord, the one true and living God. He alone put on 'light' (v. 2) as a dazzling vestment. Also, he unfurled the expanse of the sky as nomads in the ancient Near East would unroll and pitch their tent curtains; yet, as VanGemeren (1991:658) relates, the difference is that the Creator accomplished his task with ease.

John 1:4 equates 'light' with the Messiah.[15] The Word, who is 'life' itself, likewise is the 'light' of all people.[16] The emphasis in the Fourth

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attribution to Israel's king is open to debate. At least, the statement could point to a Jewish tradition that affirmed a preexilic date for the hymn.

[13] For an English rendering of the text of the Egyptian hymn, cf. Wilson (2011).

[14] cf. Ps 104:19. Gandiya (2012:109) clarifies that out of 7 potential 'parallels', there are just 2 that involve unambiguous correspondences between Psalm 104:24–26 and lines 52–54 and 74 in the 'Egyptian hymn', as follows: (1) the 'similarity between the expressions of awe over the wondrous creative acts', along with the 'effectiveness of the designs of both deities'; and (2) the 'mention of creatures and ships in the sea'. Barker (1986:80) maintains that whatever 'links' are conjectured between Psalm 104 and various writings found throughout the Fertile Crescent can be explained by a 'common pool of imagery for describing a sovereign deity and the natural order' in creation, along with the hymnist's intent that his song be a 'polemic against foreign deities' competing for the Israelites' 'allegiance'. It is beyond the scope of this journal article to undertake a comparative analysis between the Egyptian hymn and Psalm 104. For a variety of approaches, cf. Allen (1983:28–30); Craigie (1974); Dion (1991); Hilber (2009:409); Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:54–6); Kraus (1993:302); Levenson (1988:58–65); Nagel 1950:395–403); Terrien (2003:715–6).

[15] In the Judeo-Christian canon, light represents what is good, true, and just, while darkness symbolises what is evil, counterfeit, and immoral. Iniquity and injustice are

Gospel is on the Son being 'the light of the world' (8:12), that is, the glorious presence of God, who extends the promise of eternal life to all who are willing to receive it (1:12). The Messiah is the One who 'shines in the darkness' (v. 5). Indeed, the Son's radiant presence never ceases to pierce through the darkness. The idea is that the Messiah's mission included overcoming what is characterized by error and falsehood.

The association of 'light' (Ps 104:2) with the Creator is also found in 1 Timothy 6. Beginning in verse 14, Paul drew attention to the second advent of the Saviour, whom the Father would unveil at the appointed 'time' (v. 15). Evidently, the idea of the Father bringing about the consummation of the ages moved Paul to write a doxology of praise comparable to Psalm 104:1. The apostle referred to God as the 'blessed and only Sovereign' (1 Tim 6:15).

In Revelation 17:14 and 19:16 some variant of the Greek phrase rendered 'King of kings and Lord of lords' is applied to the Son, especially in connection with his second advent; yet, in 1 Timothy 6:15 the reference is to the Father, whom Paul declared to be 'immortal' (v. 16). The apostle also stated that the eternal Creator dwelt in 'unapproachable light'. Because his glorious luminescence is so 'intense and dazzling' (Arichea and Hatton 1995), not even the redeemed can directly approach or look upon him; instead, believers must turn to the risen and exalted Son to reveal the Father.[17]

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linked to darkness, whereas holiness and purity are associated with light; cf. Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman (1998:509–12); Sæbø (1997); Selman (1997). An ongoing emphasis in the fourth gospel is that Jesus' disciples live in the light, while Satan's followers abide in the darkness; cf. Ritt (1990); Silva (2014); Spicq (1994).

[16] cf. 2 Cor 4:6.

[17] cf. John 1:18; 12:45; 14:9; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3.

3.2. God's control of the elements

Psalm 104:3 depicts God's abode as a celestial dome.[18] Also, it is on the rain clouds that the exalted Monarch of the cosmos laid the rafters that supported the rooms of his palace. In an analogous way, Amos 9:6 pictures the Lord placing the spacious chambers of his sanctuary in the most distant realm of heaven. As well, he makes earth the foundational structure to support his throne room.

In keeping with the observations made by Kraus (1993:51, 299), the divine Warrior uses the storm 'clouds' (Ps. 104:3) in the sky as his 'chariot'.[19] Furthermore, he travels along the current generated by the 'wind', with no would-be foe to halt his advance (such as the pagan deities venerated throughout the ancient Near East).[20] He even makes these same 'winds' (v. 4) his envoys. He also appoints lightning flashes as his stewards. Elsewhere, in the Old Testament such entities are understood to be angels.[21]

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[18] For a summary of the ancient Israelite three-tiered view of reality, cf. section 4.2 of the journal article dealing with Psalm 148.

[19] According to Hiebert (1992:877), the broad conceptual context within the Old Testament is that of a 'conflict between Israel's God and the forces of chaos in the universe as a whole'. There is an underlying assurance that despite the age-old battle between good and evil, the remnant is 'preserved from all threats against it'. Indeed, as Brueggemann (1997:241) posits, at the eschatological consummation of history, the Lord would 'defeat all the illicit claimants against public power'. For a sampling of differing exegetical and descriptive treatments of the divine warrior motif in Scripture, cf. Ames (2012); Emery (2003); Hiebert (1992); Kelle (2008); Klassen (1992); Lind 1980; Longman (2009); Longman and Reid (1995); Miller (2006); Neufeld (1997).

[20] cf. Deut 33:26; Pss 18:10; 68:4; Isa 19:1. It is beyond the scope of this journal article to undertake a comparative analysis of Psalm 104 and the mythological imagery widespread among Israel's pagan neighbours. For a concise, informative correlation, cf. Hilber (2009:409–12).

[21] cf. Pss 29:1; 82:1; 103:20.

Noteworthy regarding the above observation is Hebrews 1:7, which cites the Septuagint version of Psalm 104:4 to describe the character of angels.[22] The surrounding context for the quote in Hebrews 1:7 is the writer's argument for the superiority of the Son to angels. On the one hand, the original Hebrew version describes the wind and lightning of a storm as God's servants; on the other hand, the Septuagint version identifies angels as God's servants. This variation in the text aligned with the theological point the writer of Hebrews wanted to make, namely, that angels are much lower in existence than the royal Son of David, who is enthroned in the heavens as the eternal Creator and King.[23]

3.3. God's rule over creation

In Psalm 104:5, the lyricist portrayed the divine Architect and Artisan of all creation, at the dawn of time, placing the world firmly on its base. This ensured the planet would never be overturned. In addition, God draped the oceans over the planet like a robe. Initially, it was a scene of chaos, in which the oceans exceeded the mountain ranges in height (v. 6). This tumultuous situation, however, did not last indefinitely, for the waters are depicted as scurrying away in fear when the Lord shouted (v. 7).

An awareness of verse 7 clarifies the theological meaning of the episode recounted in the Synoptic Gospels in which Jesus used a stern

[22] In the LXX, the text appears in Psalm 103:4 as ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πῦρ φλέγον ('who makes his angels spirits [or winds] and his servants [or ministers] a flame of fire'; Rahlfs 1979). Also, cf. fn 12 above. For a detailed correlation between Hebrews 1:7 and the LXX of Psalm 103:4 (104:4), cf. Swinson (2007). The author holds that the LXX version 'probably exhibits a truer sense of the Hebrew original than an initial impression might suggest'.

[23] cf. Heb 1:10–12.

command to calm an intense storm occurring on the Sea of Galilee.[24] His absolute authority over the elements of nature so inundated his disciples with fear that they wondered about the exact nature of his identity. This miracle should have convinced Jesus' followers that he is God, for in the Old Testament the Creator is described as the one who controls the natural world and the sea.[25]

The preceding mindset is manifest in Psalm 104:8, in which even the grandest 'mountains' and stateliest 'valleys' are portrayed as doing God's bidding, whether it be rising up or sinking down. Furthermore, as his voice thundered across the heavens, stampeding torrents rushed away. At first, they coursed from one mountain to the next. Then, the waters drained through the plains and ended up at their divinely-appointed spot. The Creator established a 'boundary' (v. 9) that the world's oceans could never breach, and this prevented them from inundating the earth.[26]

3.4. God's nurture of creation

God not only rules over creation, but also nurtures it. By way of example, the poet observed that from the lofty rooms of God's celestial palace, he poured rain on the 'mountains' (Ps. 104:13). As a result, tributaries formed to journey through the ravines and hillsides (v. 10). In this way, the Lord made plenty of water available for thirsty creatures inhabiting the lowlands, such as untamed animals and birds (vv. 11–12). Likewise, the Creator enabled all sorts of plant and animal life to thrive on the peaks and slopes of the highlands (v. 13).

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[24] cf. Matt 8:18, 23–27; Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25.
[25] cf. Pss 65:7; 89:9; 93:3–4; 107:28–30; Isa 51:10; Hab 3:8–10.
[26] Barker (1986:57) correlates Psalm 104:6–9 with the 'catastrophic tectonic activities associated with the Genesis flood' recounted in chapters 6–9.

Moreover, due to the Lord's gracious provision, every region of the planet flourished and experienced unimaginable abundance. For instance, livestock had plenty of green pasture for grazing, and farmers harvested bountiful yields of crops from fertile soil (v. 14). Consequently, there was no lack of grapes to produce 'wine' (v. 15), olive 'oil' as a lotion to clean and moisturise sun- and wind-damaged skin, and 'bread' to satisfy people's hunger. God even ensured that verdant forests provided safe nesting for birds (vv. 16–17) and the lofty peaks offered shelter for large and small animals, whether clean or unclean (v. 18).

Jesus' statements in Matthew 6:28–30 possibly had Psalm 104:10–18 as their inspirational backdrop. Jesus asked his followers why they worried about having clothes to wear. Perhaps as he gestured to some lilies growing in the nearby fields, he asked his audience to consider how such delicate flowers grew. These plants did not exert any effort to obtain protective covering; rather, the Creator graciously supplied their vibrant colour and texture (Matt 6:28). Jesus noted that the lilies carpeting the fields of Palestine were more gloriously dressed than King Solomon ever was (v. 29).

Jesus next directed the attention of his followers to the native grass filling the countryside (v. 30). The life span of such vegetation was short, and small plants were of little value. For example, people in Jesus' day would use grass as a cheap and abundant source of fuel to heat their clay ovens; yet, God so decorated these seemingly insignificant plants with beautiful flowers. Jesus used a rhetorical question to remind his disciples that they were of greater value to their

Father in heaven.[27] After all, he would provide them with food, clothing, and shelter.

3.5. God's regulation of life's rhythms

The hymnwriter noted that life on earth was characterized by predictable regularity. This was due to God choreographing the ebb and flow of temporal existence around the globe. Indeed, it seemed so consistent that in the first millennium BCE, the Israelites could use the movement of the 'moon' (Ps 104:19) across the nighttime sky to determine the beginning and ending of each month in their lunar calendar. Similarly, the predictability of the sun's daily ascent and descent enabled wildlife to hunt for prey and people to synchronise their work and rest cycle (vv. 20–23).

3.6. God's boundless power and artistry

As the poet of Psalm 104 considered the world around him, he marvelled at the diversity of wildlife God made (v. 24). Every aspect of his creation was a testimony to his 'wisdom'. The underlying Hebrew noun draws attention to the incisive skill, foresight, and precision evident in the Lord's handiwork (Müller 1980).[28] This sentiment reflects the mindset of the Hebrew wisdom writers, who looked at the world with reverence, because it reflected the glory of its Creator.[29]

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[27] One form of Jewish argumentation in the first century CE involved establishing the factuality of a lesser truth to convince an audience (whether orally or in writing) to accept a greater truth.

[28] cf. Exod 31:3, 6; 35:31; 1 Kings 7:14; Prov 3:19; 8:22–31; Jer 10:12; 51:15.

[29] Goldingay (2008:191) likens the planet to a 'magnificent quilt' wherein 'every thread contributes' to the layers of stitched fabric, all of which are 'woven by a supremely skilled craftworker'.

In verses 25–26, the writer focused on the immense seas with their many forms of aquatic life. The rich variety found throughout the depth and breadth of the world's oceans was a vivid reminder of God's boundless power and artistry. His craftsmanship was especially seen in humankind, whom the Lord made in his image.[30]

People have abilities and aptitudes that far exceed those of other creatures. For instance, humankind has made abundant use of the world's oceans. This includes nations and people building all kinds of sailing vessels to travel over the waters. The poet especially noted the presence of 'Leviathan' (v. 26), which deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner (2014:777) explain was a dreaded beast in ancient Near Eastern pagan mythologies. This contrasts with the view of the songwriter, who was referring to one of the immense aquatic denizens God made to splash about playfully in the sea.[31]

Centuries later, Paul also wrote about God's creative genius, especially in connection with the Saviour. For example, in Ephesians 2, the apostle taught that while the believers' good 'works' (v. 9) did not bring about their salvation, their regenerate status was intended to result in 'good works' (v. 10). The Greek verb rendered 'walk' is the same word translated 'walked' in verse 2. In each case, the term meant to 'journey about'.

The theological point is that while the unsaved trudged through life wallowing in evil, the earthly sojourn of believers was characterized by

[30] cf. Gen 1:26–27; 5:1; 9:6; Jas 3:9. Down through the centuries, specialists have debated what it exactly means to be made in God's image. For a concise synopsis of the issue, cf. Lioy (2016:27–28).

[31] cf. Job 3:8; 41:1; Ps 74:13–14; Isa 27:1. Levenson (1988:54) remarks that the reputed 'terrifying monster' is portrayed as being 'emasculated into a toy', a mere

worthwhile deeds. Along the way, through the power of God's grace, they became his 'workmanship' (v. 10) or living masterpieces. Paul revealed that the Father was creating believers anew in union with the Son to the eternal praise of the triune God.

3.7. God's abundant provision

The hymnist of Psalm 104 observed that every lifeform was absolutely dependent on the Creator for its health and vigour. The Lord provided sunshine, rain, and air so that the plants, birds, and animals he so wondrously made could thrive. In keeping with what was noted earlier in verses 19, 22, and 23, God's benevolent provision of food occurred at the right times and in the proper seasons (v. 27).

Furthermore, as an expression of the Creator's 'common grace' (VanGemeren 1991:663),[32] he enabled people to plant crops and reap an ample supply of food from it. In a manner of speaking, the Lord generously opened his hand to supply the inhabitants of the earth with other beneficial resources for their wellness (such as minerals, precious metals, building materials, and so forth; v. 28). Clearly, this was not the work of impersonal, mechanical forces, but rather the provision of the Sovereign who made the highest heavens his magnificent domicile.[33]

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creature that has 'always only delighted and never opposed its designer, maker, and owner'.

[32] Luther (1837:274) appropriately asked, 'What philosopher or sage could even open or utter the extent of the use and blessings of common light, which we live?' For a lexical overview of the biblical concept of grace, cf. Lo (2014). For a theological overview, cf. Erickson (2013:265–6). For a comparison between God's common grace and special grace, cf. Hughes (2001:519–20).

[33] cf. Ps 104:2–3. Goldingay (2016:140) aptly notes that the Creator 'did not merely set the world' in motion 'like someone winding up a clock', only then to abandon it to run on its own.

In Matthew 5:44–45, Jesus also drew attention to God's common grace. The Messiah revealed that Christian love is to reflect God's own love. The motive Jesus gave for obeying these principles was that his followers would be acting like their Father in heaven, who showered his kindness and blessings on all people regardless of who they were. This was the language of evidence. Believers were to act toward their enemies as the Father in heaven had acted toward all humankind.

3.8. God's determination of life on earth

In Psalm 104:29, the writer described what life was like when the Lord hid his face, or withheld his gracious care and help.[34] For instance, when God allowed severe drought or devastating storms to occur, humankind was horrified. This means people were overwhelmed by the disastrous turn of events. Eventually, they turned to their Creator and implored him to bring them relief from their calamity.

As Kraus (1992:163) indicates, the redeemed discern that both life and death are in the hands of almighty God. Consider that in time, the breath of life, which the Lord graciously imparts to every person, is removed by him. It is then that humans perish and their lifeless bodies decompose.[35] This is a sobering reminder of how mortal humans truly are and how utterly dependent people are on the Sustainer of the entire universe.

God is not only the master of death, but also the one who bestows life. The psalmist depicted the Lord as sending his animating breath and in this way bringing all entities into existence by his supreme act (v. 30). He also sustains life. After all, if it were not for the nurturing hand of

[34] cf. Num 6:24–26; Pss 27:9; 13:1; 22:24; 30:7; 44:24; 69:17; 88:14; 102:2; 143:7.
[35] cf. Gen 2:7, 19; 3:19; 6:17; Ps 146:4; Eccles 3:18-21; 12:7.

the Lord, all living things would wither and die. With each passing season and successive generation, he renews the face of the earth, which Beale (2011:560) regards as evidence of a 'continual creative process'.[36] None of this happens haphazardly or in its own strength, but is the result of God's gracious intervention.

From a New Testament perspective, the Son is the Lord of life. For instance, in John 5:21, Jesus declared that he gives life to whomever he wishes. This included temporal and eternal existence. In fact, as Martha learned in 11:25, Jesus alone is the 'resurrection' and the 'life'. Later, in 17:3, the apostle revealed that eternal life is much more than unending existence. It is being in a close, personal relationship with the Father, the only true God, and his Son, Jesus the Messiah, whom he sent to earth to secure redemption for the lost.

Contrary to the prevailing Greek thought of the day, the divine-incarnate Word was not an impersonal, rational force that remained detached from life within the universe; instead, the Evangelist revealed in 1:4 that the Son, as the Creator of the world, is the giver and source of life. Correspondingly, in 5:26, Jesus asserted that the Father, who had life in himself, had granted that the Son likewise have life in himself. Only Jesus could rightfully claim in 14:6 that he is the way, the truth, and the life, and that it is only through faith in him that people receive access to the Father.

3.9. God's majestic splendour

In Psalm 104:31, the poet expressed his desire that the Creator's majestic splendour would last for all eternity. His guardianship of

[36] Significant is the fact that the Hebrew verb translated 'created' in Psalm 104:30 (בָּרָא) is the same term used in Genesis 1:1, 21, and 27 for God bringing the entire cosmos into existence at the dawn of time.

everything he made would bring him unending honour. Just as the Lord took great delight in what he originally created at the dawn of time,[37] so too the psalmist prayed that God would continue to enjoy and rejoice in his handiwork.

The poet asserted that God is so powerful that one direct glance at the earth causes it to quake in fear (v. 32). He is so awesome that one slight touch of some lofty volcano causes it to smoulder and spew out smoke. These observations serve as a reminder of God's infinite majesty and his unmatched ability to blot out whatever he graciously brings into existence.

The mention of the earth shaking and mountains smouldering would recall for the members of the preexilic Israelite community a similar scene centuries earlier as their predecessors gathered at the base of Mount Sinai. Exodus 19:16 draws attention to the theophanic presence of 'thunder and lightning', along with a dense 'cloud' descending on the 'mountain'. Deuteronomy 5:22 additionally notes the divine manifestation of 'fire' and intense 'darkness' during the episode unfolding at Mount Sinai.[38]

Hebrews 12:18–24 discloses that with the advent of the Messiah, the mountain of terror is replaced by the mountain of joy. Previously, the

[37] As noted in Lioy (2016:30), there are several places during the creation week in which the divine Artisan declared his work to be 'good' (Heb. טָוֹב; Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Then, at the end, the Creator-King reflected upon what he had brought into existence and concluded that it was 'very good' (Heb. מְאֹד טָוֹב; v. 31). As Psalm 104 poetically depicts, all that was necessary for life to flourish—in the totality of its rich array and diversity—was in place.

[38] cf. Gandiya (2012) for a 'correlation of storm theophanic imagery with the motifs of creation, wisdom and judgement in the depiction of Yahweh as creator-king and judge' (107), both in connection with Psalm 104 and Job 9:4–10; 26:7–14; 38; Jer 10:1–16; 25:30–32; 51:15–19; Amos 1:2, 14; 4:12–13; 5:8-9; 9:5–6, respectively (108).

members of the covenant community in the Old Testament era went to Mount Sinai. In contrast, new covenant believers, in baptismal union with the Son, have journeyed to Mount Zion. In biblical thought, Zion was the place where the Lord resided and presided. This explains why Hebrews 12:22 refers to Mount Zion as the 'heavenly Jerusalem' and the 'city of the living God'.[39] Moses was the mediator of the old covenant by receiving the law from God and delivering it to the Israelites. Similarly, the Son mediated the 'new covenant' (v. 24) by teaching about faith and dying so that sinners can be reconciled with the Father.[40]

3.10. God, the object of praise

As the poet arrived at the apex of his praise, he reflected on his worshipful contemplation of God's work in nature. The writer declared that throughout his life he would sing in exultation to the Lord (Ps 104:33). The hymnist also wanted his thoughts, as seen in his praise hymn, to honour the Lord and be acceptable to him (v. 34).

Attentive readers today recognize that the Creator did not have to make the world and all the life within it. He was never lonely, bored, or in need of a challenge. He sustains life on earth so that all creatures might be the recipients of his benevolent care. He especially wants the redeemed to take note of his abundant provisions and timely help. As they ponder all that the Lord does for them, they should be filled with awe and be eager to extol his name.[41]

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[39] cf. Heb 11:10, 13-16; 13:14.
[40] cf. Rom 5:9–11; 2 Cor 5:18–21; Heb 8:6.
[41] cf. the lexical discussion of God's names in section 4.2 of the journal article dealing with Psalm 148.

Peter, in his first letter, echoed the preceding sentiments. For example, in 2:9, the apostle stated that the recipients of his epistle were a 'holy nation'. By this he meant that God had established and set apart the church for his distinctive use.[42] This includes believers openly praising the Father for the wonderful things he has done for the redeemed through his Son.[43] Peter specifically mentioned the Lord's calling the apostle's readers out of spiritual 'darkness' into the marvellous 'light' of salvation won by the Messiah at the cross.[44]

3.11. God, the source of mercy and justice

On one level, God delights to see his children trust in and revere him. After all, he is glorified when people rejoice in his goodness and greatness. It would be one humble way they could express their infinite debt of gratitude to him; yet, on another level, the poet of Psalm 104 realized how easy it is for people to use the intellect God has given them for corrupt and evil undertakings (v. 35).[45]

The psalmist revealed that God has been merciful to let his fallen human creation live on. Still, the songwriter longed for the day when the rebellious were cut off from the earth, and the curse of their iniquities was forever erased. In the meantime, the poet reiterated what

[42] During the Old Testament era, the Lord declared that Israel was a 'holy nation' (Exod 19:6). One view is that the church is the new Israel of God and replaces Israel in his redemptive plan. A contrasting view is that Israel and the church remain distinct entities with separate roles in God's programme.

[43] This portion of 1 Peter 2:9 seems to be an amalgam of ideas and quotes extracted from Exodus 19:5–6, Isaiah 43:20–21, Malachi 3:17, and the LXX version of Exodus 23:22.

[44] cf. Acts 26:18.

[45] The ingrained, sinful propensities of people impelled Luther (1837:277) to opine, 'Let those that would fear God, then, remember what is required of them!'

he declared in verse 1, namely, that he would continually praise God with every aspect of his being (v. 35).[46]

The New Testament affirms the hymnist's sentiment that those entrenched in sin would be banished from the planet and that the godless would not have any inheritance in God's kingdom. For example, in the new Jerusalem of the eternal state, the triune God would be worshipped face-to-face. Indeed, the domicile would be a cosmopolitan place, where redeemed humanity in all its cultural diversity would dwell together in peace. Moreover, the risen and exalted Saviour would vindicate the faith of his spiritual children by forbidding anything immoral or wicked to enter the holy city (Rev 21:22–27).[47] Also, while eternal joy would be the heritage of the righteous, the Son would ensure that unending sorrow was the lot of reprobates (22:14–15).

4. Conclusion

Like the preceding journal article dealing with Psalm 148, the historical anchor-point for the present essay is the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Arising from the latter, particularly the 95 theses penned by Martin Luther, are a pentad of *solas*.

The second in the series highlights the Judeo-Christian canon being the wellspring for God's revelation to humankind (in Latin, *sola Scriptura*).

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[46] cf. the discussion in 3.1 about the usage of two different Hebrew verbs for praise in Psalm 104:35, namely, *bārak* (בָּרַךְ) and *hāllăl* (הָלַל), and their respective meanings. The LXX places the Greek equivalent of the interjection rendered 'praise the LORD' (Αλληλουια) at the beginning of the next psalm. In contrast, the DSS version (11Q5 Psalms[a]) of the Hebrew interjection (הללויה) appears at the end of Psalm 104:35 (which corresponds to the MT).

[47] cf. Isa 35:8; 52:1; Joel 3:17; Zech 14:21.

This serves as a motivation for undertaking a literary and descriptive analysis of Psalm 104. Doing so, in turn, surfaces various intertextual connections between the hymn and the New Testament. These especially include possible Christological aspects of Psalm 104. The consequence is that the third *sola* in the pentad garners attention, namely, the centrality of the Son in the Father's redemptive plan (in Latin, *solus Christus*).

As noted in section 2, the creation events recorded in Genesis 1:1–2:3 form the backdrop for Psalm 104. God is not only presented as the sovereign Monarch of the universe, but also the divine Architect and Artisan of the metaphysical and physical realms. What he brought into existence, regardless of whether it is the heavens above or the earth below, become the basis for offering him praise.

Indeed, the opening and closing refrains (vv. 1a and 35b, respectively), along with an affirmation of God's entitlement to and reception of praise (vv. 1b and 33–35a), form an *enclusio* to stress the importance of extolling the Creator. Verses 2–4 and 31–32 accentuate his glorious presence throughout the heavens and the earth. Also, the placement of these respective sets of verses around the central section of the psalm—namely, verses 5–30—indicates that every aspect of creation owes its existence to God. For this reason, they are to participate in offering him praise.

In addition to what has been noted above concerning *solus Christus*, there is the second of three foundational principles affirmed by SATS, namely, the 'lordship and centrality of Jesus Christ'.[48] This emphasis is borne out in the descriptive analysis of Psalm 104. For instance, the

[48] The full text of the three foundational principles affirmed by SATS can be found at the following: https://www.sats.edu.za/about-us/statement-faith/.

association of 'light' (v. 2) with the Creator is also found in John 1:4–5. The Evangelist revealed that both before and after Jesus' incarnation, his light continued to shine so that the lost might move from unbelief (darkness) to belief.[49] Even death itself could not snuff out the light of the Word, for he conquered death through his bodily resurrection.[50]

In Hebrews 1:7, the writer uses the LXX version of Psalm 104:4 to support his argument for the superiority of the Son over angels. They are subservient creatures over whom the divine-human Messiah reigns. Furthermore, a correlation between verse 7 and Jesus' use of a stern command to still a raging tempest confirmed his identity as the Sovereign over all creation.[51] Jesus' control of the temporal realm is one reason why it is appropriate to associate Matthew 6:28–30 with Psalm 104:10–18. He ensures that life flourishes all throughout the globe. He especially provides for his spiritual children with whatever they need to serve him faithfully.

Throughout the world God brought into existence, his boundless power and artistry bear witness to his 'wisdom' (v. 24). The Father's creative genius is even more on display in believers, whom he has made his living masterpieces in baptismal union with the Son (Eph 2:10). The more believers conform to the image of Christ, the more they reflect the glory of the Creator, who gives them new life because of the Saviour's atoning sacrifice at Calvary.

The provision of God's common grace among all humankind enables them to flourish in their daily activities (Ps 104:27–28). In turn, the Creator's generous beneficence is the basis for the Messiah directing his

[49] cf. John 12:46.
[50] cf. John 20:1–9.
[51] All three Synoptic Gospels record the miracle; cf. fn 24.

followers to be unconditional in showing compassion and kindness to others, including their adversaries. Admittedly, Jesus' disciples cannot bring this about on their own; instead, as reborn children of God, they must operate in the power of the Spirit to do what otherwise seems humanly impossible.[52]

The poet of Psalm 104 recognised that ultimately life and death rest with the Creator (vv. 29–30). In the fourth gospel, the evangelist repeatedly linked the preceding truth to the Messiah. For example, he is the source of life (1:4; 5:21, 26), the resurrection incarnate (11:25), and the reason why believers can live in a close, personal relationship with the Father (17:3). The Son, due to his sacrificial death on the cross, transfers believers from the mountain of terror described in Exodus 19:16 and Deuteronomy 5:22—and hinted at in Psalm 104:32—to the mountain of joy (Heb 12:22).

In unison with the poet's declaration in Psalm 104:33–34, Peter enjoined his readers to declare God's 'praises' (1 Pet 2:9), especially the eternal blessings they experience through faith in the Messiah. The songwriter was grateful that God would banish miscreants from his future kingdom (Ps 104:25). Likewise, the last book of scripture declares that no form of moral impurity would exist in the eternal state (Rev 21:27; 22:15). Such a stark reality also serves as a vindication of the faith the redeemed have placed in the Saviour. In turn, it is yet another reason to join with the poet in offering praise to the triune God (Ps 104:1, 35; Heb 12:28).

[52] cf. Zech 4:6. The emphasis here on the importance of the Spirit in the lives of believers draws attention to the third of the foundational principles affirmed by SATS, namely, the imperative to 'trust and obey God the Holy Spirit'.

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