

Psalm 104

God's preservation of nature

Psalm 104: A truly joyful hymn of praise to the Creator, this hymn (along with Job chapter 38 and 39; Psalms 8 and 29), forms a divine poetic commentary on the Creation.

The introduction to the psalm is a brief call to praise (verse 1a).

The body of the psalm (verses 1b-30), expounds on the majesty of God's creative work as few psalms do:

He is infinite (verses 1b-4); He created and established the earth's land and seas (verses 5-9); He cares for the animal kingdom by giving food and drink (verses 10-18); He established the heavenly bodies as regulatory agents (verses 19-23); He created the sea and all its contents (verses 24-26), and all living creatures are completely dependent on Him (verses 27-30).

The conclusion (verses 31-35), summarizes the message of the psalm and calls upon all men to praise the LORD of creation, an act of devotion the psalmist had already demanded of himself (verses 1, 35).

Verses 1-35:

In vivid poetic detail, the psalmist sings of the Lord's glory in creation (compare Gen. chapters 1 and 2; Job chapters 38 to 41; Psalms 19:1-6; 148:1-6; Prov. 30:4; Isa. 40:1-6; John 1:1-3; Rom. 1:18-25; Col. 1:16-17).

He refers to the original creation (compare 104:5), without forgetting the fall of man and the cursed earth (104:23, 29, 35).

He alternates reciting God's greatness by:

- (1) Personal praise to the Creator (104:1-2, 5-9, 20-30); and
- (2) Declaring God's handiwork to His human audience (104:3-4, 10-19, 31-35).

The flow of the psalm loosely follows the order of creation at first reported in (Gen.1:1-31), but closes (verse 35), with an allusion to the end time events recorded (in Rev. chapters 20-22).

- I. The Heavens and Earth Created (104:1-9)
- II. The Needs of Creatures Met (104:10-18)
- III. The Sun and Moon (104:19-23)
- IV. The Sea and Its Inhabitants (104:24-26)
- V. God's Providential Care (104:27-30)

VI. Benediction to the Creator (104:31-35)

Verses 1-9:

Every object we behold calls on us to bless and praise the LORD, who is great.

His eternal power and Godhead are clearly shown by the things which he hath made.

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

The Lord Jesus, the Son of his love, is the Light of the world.

This section approximates the first two days of creation (compare Gen. 1:1-8).

Psalm 104:1 "Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honor and majesty."

“Very great”:

The Creator is greater than His creation.

Therefore, the Creator is to be worshiped, not the creation (compare Exodus 20:3-4; Rom. 1:29).

This almost seems to be a continuation of the praise in the last lesson.

We will see in this Psalm (as some noted scholars have), that this is a Psalm about creation and the praise due the Creator of it all.

I believe the praise in this verse, shows that even before anything had been created, He deserved to be praised.

The being clothed in honor and majesty, is just saying the whole world should see those two aspects of the LORD, when they first look.

Our first view with our spirit should be that we see more than can be imagined, He is majestic and His honor is beyond reproach.

What can be seen of the glow that's on a brand new Christian's face, when they first see that God is real?

They are feeling and seeing in their spirit the majesty and honor He has.

Psalm 104:2 "Who coverest [thyself] with light as [with] a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain:"

Referring to the first work of creation (Gen. 1:3). "And God said, Let there be light, and there was light."

He seemed to put on light as a garment; he himself appeared as if invested with light.

It was the first "manifestation" of God.

He seemed at once to have put on light as his robe.

"Who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain":

As an expanse spread over us.

The word used here means a curtain or hanging, so called from its tremulous motion, from a word meaning to tremble.

Thus it is applied to a curtain before a door; to a tent, etc.

It is applied here to the heavens, as they seem to be "spread out" like the curtains of a tent, as if God had spread them out for a tent for himself to dwell in (see the notes at Isa. 40:22).

We know that He is the Light of the world.

The Light had to be applied before anything, or anyone, could exist.

That is why the very first, Let there be, in Genesis was an application of the power of Light.

This Light gives everything, and everyone, the power to exist.

Genesis 1:3 "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."

We also know that the heavens were next.

Genesis 1:8 "And God called the firmament Heaven.

And the evening and the morning were the second day."

We must also remember from the last lesson, who did all of this.

John 1:3 "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."

This of course, is the Word of God.

He spoke and it became.

Verses 3-4:

As the Creator and the Master of all things, the whole universe exists to serve God's purposes: the storm "clouds" are His chariots, He uses the "wind" for transport, the storm blast is His messenger, and the flash of lightning is His servant.

The psalmist's lyric about creation portrays a God who brings order out of chaos and who can turn destructive forces into instruments of His mercy.

Psalm 104:3 "Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind:"

Or "his upper rooms"; one story over another being built by him in the heavens (Amos 9:6).

The chambers where he resides; his courts, as the Targum.

His palace and apartments, his presence chamber particularly, the floor and beams of them are the waters bound up in the thick clouds.

Or the region of the air, from whence the rain descends to water the hills, as in (Psalm 104:13).

"The waters":

Refers to the original creation with the waters above the heaven (compare Gen. 1:7-8).

Who maketh the clouds his chariot":

To ride in.

In these sometimes Jehovah rides to execute judgment on his enemies (Isa. 19:1).

And in these sometimes he appears in a way of grace and mercy to his people (Exodus 13:21).

In these, as in chariots, Christ went up to heaven; and in these will he come a second time.

And into these will the saints be caught up to meet the Lord in the air at his coming (Acts 1:9).

"Who walketh upon the wings of the wind" (see Psalm 18:10).

Which is expressive of his swiftness in coming to help and assist his people in time of need.

Who helps, and that right early; and may very well be applied both to the first and second coming of Christ.

Who came leaping upon the mountains, and skipping upon the hills, when he first came.

And, when he comes a second time, will be as a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices (SOS 2:8).

The Targum is, "upon the swift clouds, like the wings of an eagle."

Hence, perhaps, it is, the heathens have a notion of Jupiter's being carried in a chariot through the air, when it thunders and lightning.

The waters here, are what the heavens were formed of.

Do not ask me how, I do not know.

I just know the Word says it and I believe it.

We do know that the clouds took Jesus wherever He wanted to go.

In Acts, we read of their part in Jesus' ascension into heaven.

Acts 1:9 "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight."

We also know that we are promised that He will come back in like manner.

Acts 1:11 "Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

We also know that the Presence that led the Israelites across the wilderness, led them in a cloud by day.

This is enough said about all of this.

Psalm 104:4 "Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire:"

"Angels ... flaming fire":

Hebrews 1:7, attributes these characteristics to angels describing their swiftness and destructiveness as God's instruments of judgment.

Angels are sometimes seen in a visible form, but they are really spirits.

We know that the two angels that led Lot out of Sodom were in the form of men.

God is spoken of as a consuming fire.

We do know that there is a spiritual fire and a literal fire.

I would assume this is speaking of fire in the spiritual nature.

Jesus baptized with the Holy Ghost and fire.

This is speaking of fire of a spiritual nature.

I believe those who are full of the Spirit of God are, also filled with this spiritual fire.

Verses 5-24:

The order that exists in creation testifies to God's magnificent wisdom, with which He designed and created the world (Prov. 8:22-31; Isa. 45:7).

Psalm 104:5 "[Who] laid the foundations of the earth, [that] it should not be removed for ever."

Referring still to the creation of the earth.

The margin is, "He hath founded the earth upon her bases."

The Hebrew word that is rendered in the margin "her bases" means properly a place; then a basis or foundation.

The idea is, that there was something, as it were, placed under the earth to support it.

The idea is not uncommon in the Scriptures (compare the notes at Job 38:4).

"That it should not be removed for ever":

So that it cannot be shaken out of its place.

That is, it is fixed, permanent, solid. Its foundations do not give way, as edifices reared by man.

But it abides the same from age to age, the most fixed and stable object of which we have any knowledge (compare the notes at Psalm 78:69).

I have said this numerous times, but it still amazes me how God flung this planet we call earth, out into space and told it to stay in orbit.

That is far above my comprehension.

If nothing else, this would cause me to have great awe of God.

This alone sets God so far above man, that there is a great vast separation.

Verses 6-9:

While this might sound like the worldwide flood (of Gen. chapters 6 to 9), it continues to refer to the creation (especially Gen. 1:9-10), regarding the third day of creation.

Psalm 104:6 "Thou coveredst it with the deep as [with] a garment: the waters stood above the mountains."

Compare the notes at (Job 38:9).

The meaning is, that God covered the earth with the sea, the waters, the abyss, as if a garment had been spread over it.

The reference is to (Gen. 1:2).

Where, in the account of the work of creation, what is there called "the deep", the abyss, (the same Hebrew word as here ("tehôm")), covered the earth, or was what "appeared".

Or was manifest, before the waters were collected into seas.

And the dry land was seen.

"The waters stood above the mountains":

Above what are now the mountains.

As yet no dry land appeared.

It seemed to be one wide waste of waters.

This does not refer to the Deluge, but to the appearance of the earth at the time of the creation, before the gathering of the waters into seas and oceans (Gen. 1:9).

At that stage in the work, all that appeared was a wide waste of waters.

I believe the penman to be David here, but whoever he is, the Holy Spirit moved upon him for all of these facts to be so perfect.

We see in this, the water covered the earth before the dry land appeared.

Genesis 1:9-10 "And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry [land] appear: and it was so." "And God called the dry [land] Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that [it was] good."

Psalm 104:7 "At thy rebuke they fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away."

The depths of water that covered the earth fled, went off apace, when Christ, the essential Word, gave the word of command that they should.

Saying, "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear, and it was so" (Gen. 1:9).

And this being called a "rebuke", suggests as if there was something amiss, irregular and disorderly, and to be amended; as if these waters were not in their proper place.

"At the voice of thy thunder they hasted away":

Ran off with great precipitancy.

Just as a servant, when his master puts on a stern countenance, and speaks to him in a thundering, menacing manner, hastes away from him to do his will and work.

This is an instance of the mighty power of Christ.

And by the same power he removed the waters of the deluge; when they covered the earth, and the tops of the highest hills.

And rebuked the Red sea, and it became dry land; and drove back the waters of Jordan for the Israelites to pass through.

And who also rebuked the sea of Galilee when his disciples were in distress.

And with equal ease can he and does he remove the depth of sin and the darkness from his people at conversion.

Rebukes Satan, and delivers out of his temptations, when he comes in like a flood.

And rebukes the waters of affliction when they threaten to overwhelm.

Who are his servants, and come when he bids them come, and go when he bids them go.

Even the vapors and waters and in fact everything that is, is part of God's creation.

The water must obey the voice of its Creator.

God is Supreme Ruler of the universe.

Everything, and everyone is under His control.

We may do our thing for a while, but it is only because He allows it.

We are His creation.

He could destroy us the same as He created.

Not only us, but the entire universe.

God could tell it to be gone, and it would be gone.

Psalm 104:8 "They go up by the mountains; they go down by the valleys unto the place which thou hast founded for them."

That is, when they were gathered together into seas.

They seemed to roll and tumble over hills and mountains, and to run down in valleys, until they found the deep hollows which had been formed for seas, and where they were permanently collected together.

The margin here is, "The mountains ascend, the valleys descend."

So it is translated in the Septuagint, in the Latin Vulgate, by Luther, and by DeWette.

The more natural idea, however, is that in our translation: "They (the waters), go up mountains; they descend valleys."

"Unto the place":

The deep hollows of the earth, which seem to have been scooped out to make a place for them.

"Which thou hast founded for them":

Where thou hast laid a permanent foundation for them on which to rest.

That is, which thou hast prepared for them.

God created this earth, and in fact, everything on it for the use of man.

We may live on the highest mountain, but it is God's creation.

We may choose to live in the valley, but that is His creation also.

Notice, He founded this for man.

Psalm 104:9 "Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over; that they turn not again to cover the earth."

The Targum adds, "to the rolling waves of the sea."

Set doors with bolts and bars, cliffs, rocks, and shores.

And, what is more surprising, sand.

Which is penetrable, flexible, and moveable, is set as a perpetual bound to the raging ocean and its waves, which they cannot pass over (see Job 38:8).

So the LORD has set a bound to the proud waters of afflictions, and says, thus far shall ye go, and no farther.

And to the life of man, which he cannot exceed (Job 14:5).

But he has given man a law, as a rule to walk by, as the boundary of his conversation, and this he transgresses.

In which he is less tractable than the raging sea and its waves.

"That they turn not again to cover the earth":

As they did when it was first made (Psalm 104:6).

That is, not without the divine power; for they did turn again and cover the earth, at the time of the flood; but never shall anymore.

Some think there is no need to make this exception; since this was written after the flood, and when God had sworn that the waters should no more go over the earth (Isa. 54:9).

We know that the flood of Noah was not just the rain that fell from the sky, but was water that was released from its bounds as well.

The water was from under the earth, as well as from the sky.

The glorious promise that God will never ever allow the earth to be destroyed by water again is sealed with the rainbow in the sky.

When it rains and we see the rainbow, we know that God has not forgotten His promise.

Verses 10-18:

When we reflect upon the provision made for all creatures, we should also notice the natural worship they render to God.

Yet man, forgetful ungrateful man, enjoys the largest measure of his Creator's kindness.

The earth, varying in different lands.

Nor let us forget spiritual blessings; the fruitfulness of the church through grace, the bread of everlasting life, the cup of salvation, and the oil of gladness.

Does God provide for the inferior creatures, and will he not be a refuge to his people?

With water (verses 10-13), vegetation (verse 14), food producing vines, trees, and grain (verse 15), trees (verses 16-17), and cliffs (verse 18), as the Creator provides for the basic needs of all His creation.

This corresponds to the third day of creation (compare Gen. 1:11-13).

Psalm 104:10 "He sendeth the springs into the valleys, [which] run among the hills."

The Targum is, "who sendeth fountains into the rivers."

Either from the waters of the sea, which being drained through the sand, have now become sweet and drinkable.

Or from the hills and mountains.

This is an instance of divine goodness, that having removed the waters from the earth, and shut them up in the sea, and which, through the saltiness of them, not being proper drink for either men or beasts.

He has been pleased to form and open springs, fountains, wells, and rivers of fresh water in the valleys, for the supply of both.

Though this is not to be compared with the wells of salvation, and springs and fountains of grace, which he has opened for his chosen people.

God himself is a spring or fountain of living water; his love is a river; whose streams delight the city of God.

His covenant a source and spring of all blessings and promises.

Christ is the fountain of gardens; his fullness is a supply for all his people.

The Spirit of God and his grace are a well of living water, springing up unto eternal life.

The word and ordinances are the springs in Zion;

"Which run among the hills":

The several congregated churches, to the watering and refreshing of them.

Just as the springs and rivers of water run in the dales and valleys among the hills, by which they are bounded.

When America was discovered, it was a land of fields and streams.

We are privileged to live on a farm where springs of water gush from the ground.

This is always clear water.

When I drink of it, I reflect on the water that flows from the throne of God.

Before pollution, you could drink from the brooks and the streams that flowed down between these hills.

Now man has fouled the water up.

You would be afraid to drink from an open brook.

Psalm 104:11 "They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst."

These fountains, springs, and rivers, afford water for all the beasts of the field.

Who are therefore said to honor and praise the LORD on account of it (Isa. 43:19).

"The wild asses quench their thirst":

Those creatures that live in dry and desert places, and are themselves dry and thirsty.

And though so stupid as they be, yet provision of water is made for them.

And they are directed where to seek for it, and find it (see Job 39:5).

And if God takes care of the beasts of the field, even the wildest and stupid, will he not take care of his own people?

He will, and does.

He opens rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys.

He gives waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to his people, his chosen (Isa. 41:18).

God cares for the animals.

He sees that they have water to drink.

In our part of the country, there are a good many wild deer.

There is plenty of grass for them to eat and an abundance of water for them to drink.

Psalm 104:12 "By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, [which] sing among the branches."

Among them the fowls of the air dwell.

That is, among the trees which spring up by the fountains and water-courses.

The whole picture is full of animation and beauty.

"Which sing among the branches":

Margin, as in Hebrew, "give a voice."

Their voice is heard, their sweet music, in the foliage of the trees which grow on the margin of the streams and by the fountains.

There is scarcely to be found a more beautiful poetic image than this.

Have you ever noticed how the trees grow more plentifully, near the water?

Now, we see that God did this to have a place of rest for the fowl.

Water is necessary to the life of every living thing, the same as light is.

Psalm 104:13 "He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works."

The waters, as stated before, run in the valleys, in the natural channels made for them among the hills (Psalm 104:10).

But still, it was a fact that the hills themselves were watered.

That there were springs far up their heights; and that vegetation was sustained above the reach of the fountains and streams below.

And it was a proof of the divine skill and beneficence that, in some way, water was furnished on the summits and sides of the hills themselves.

This was caused, the psalmist says, by God's pouring water on them, as it were, from his own "chambers", his abode on high.

The allusion is, doubtless, to rain, which seems to be poured down from the very abode of God.

The word rendered "chambers" means "upper rooms and refers to rain clouds." (see the notes at Psalm 104:3).

And the reference is to the dwelling-place of God, as far above the earth.

The earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.

Thy doings; with what thou hast done.

All the needs of the earth seem to be met and "satisfied;" all that it could desire to make it fertile and beautiful.

And the proper abode of man, of beast, and of fowl, has been granted.

It has no cause of complaint; nothing has been left undone.

In the valleys or on the hills, on the dry land or in the waters, that was needful to be done to carry out the purpose for which it has been called into being.

Have you ever watched the rays from the sun gather water into the clouds?

Sometimes when it rains, they say it was a cloud burst.

The cloud gathered the water, and on the command of God released the water upon the earth.

Elijah prayed to God, and it did not rain upon the earth until Elijah prayed again and asked for God to release the rain.

The LORD is in control of everything on the earth.

Satan has only the power that God permits him to have.

Psalm 104:14 "He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth;"

By means of rain falling upon the tender herb, and upon the mown grass, whereby provision of food is made for those creatures that live upon grass.

"And herb for the service of man":

Some herbs being for physic for him, and others for food, and all more or less for his use.

Herbs were the original food of man (Gen. 1:29).

And still a dinner of herbs, where love is, is better than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith (Proverbs 15:17).

Some render it, "and herb at the tillage of man":

Grass grows of itself for the use of the cattle.

But the herb, as wheat and the like, which is for the use of man, is caused to grow when man has taken some pains with the earth, and has tilled and manured it.

But the former sense seems best.

"That he may bring forth food out of the earth":

Either that man may do it by his tillage; or rather that the LORD may do it, by sending rain, and causing the grass and herbs to grow.

However, man's food, as well as the food of beasts, comes out of the earth, as he himself does, and to which he must return.

Have you ever heard anyone say, which came first the chicken or the egg?

The chicken did and the seed was in itself.

This is true of the grass as well.

The seed for the next grass is in the first grass.

The farmers would call this a voluntary crop.

When you do not plant it, the crop comes directly from God.

God cares for the animals and provides food for them in the form of grass.

I want to show just one Scripture that shows the first garden, with food for mankind, was not planted by man, but God.

God prepared the earth for the habitation of mankind.

Genesis 2:8 "And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed."

You see even now; we cannot even take credit for the crops we grow.

We did not create the dirt for it to grow in.

We did not create the seed to plant.

We do not even cause the rain to come and water it.

We have no control over the sun shining on it to cause it to grow.

Do you suppose knowing this, is what makes farmers more humble than the average person?

Psalm 104:15 "And wine [that] maketh glad the heart of man, [and] oil to make [his] face to shine, and bread [which] strengtheneth man's heart."

Literally, "And wine gladdens the heart of man to make his face to shine more than oil."

Margin, "to make his face shine with oil, or more than oil."

The latter expresses the idea most accurately.

So DeWette renders it.

The meaning is, that the earth is made to produce wine (or grapes which produce wine), and this exhilarates the heart.

So that the effect is seen on the countenance, making it more bright and cheerful than it is when anointed with oil.

On the use of oil (see the notes at Psalm 23:5).

The reference here, in the original, is not to wine and oil as produced by the earth, as would seem to be implied in our translation, but to wine that makes the heart glad, and the face brighter than if anointed with oil.

The psalmist here states a fact about the use of wine, a well known fact that it exhilarates the heart, and brightens the countenance.

And he states it merely as a fact.

He says nothing on the question whether the use of wine as a beverage is, or is not, proper and safe (compare the notes at John 2:10).

"And bread which strengtheneth man's heart":

That is, which sustains the heart, that being regarded as the seat of life (compare Gen. 18:5).

One thing that makes us know for sure that it is God who feeds and clothes His people, is the Manna that fell from heaven.

In the verse before this one, we saw that God provided for the necessities of life for the man.

In this verse, we see the LORD going beyond the necessities, and bringing man some of the things to make him happy, as well.

The Bread spoken of here is not physical bread, because it strengthens the heart of man.

This is speaking of that Bread which saves our soul, (Jesus Christ).

The oil, in the verse above that makes the face to shine, could easily be speaking of the Holy Spirit, which causes our face to shine when we are full of Him.

Psalm 104 Questions

1. What two things is the LORD clothed with in verse 1?
2. What is this Psalm about?
3. When was the beginning time for the LORD to be praised?
4. Have you ever seen the glow on a new Christian's face?
5. In verse 2, what is He covered with that is like a garment?
6. It also says that He stretches out the heavens like a _____.
7. Why must the Light be applied first?
8. On what day did He make the heaven?
9. What was created by the Word of God?
10. What are the waters in verse 3?
11. What did Jesus use frequently as a chariot of the heavens?
12. What presence led the children of Israel across the wilderness?
13. What are angels?

14. Is the flaming fire in verse 4 physical or spiritual?
15. What does the author say is amazing in verse 5?
16. God is _____ of this universe.
17. In verse 8, we find that God made the mountains and the valleys for whom?
18. Was the flood in Noah's day just rain? Explain.
19. What promise of God to man does the rainbow show us?
20. When America was discovered, it was a land of _____ and _____.
21. Who provided drink for the animals?
22. Whose habitation is in the trees?
23. Who prayed and it didn't rain, until he prayed again and asked for it to rain?
24. Why do you suppose that farmers seem to be more humble than the average citizen?
25. Who planted the garden of Eden?
26. In verse 14, we saw God providing the needs of man, what is He doing in verse 15?
27. What is the Bread in verse 15?
28. What is the oil symbolic of in verse 15?