
PSALM 104: 1 Bless the LORD, my soul. The LORD, my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honour and majesty.

The majesty and power of God manifested in the creation of the heavens and the atmosphere, Psa 104:1-3; of the earth and sea, Psa 104:4-9; of the springs, fountains, and rivers, Psa 104:10-13; of vegetables and trees, Psa 104:14-18; of the sun and moon, Psa 104:19; of day and night, and their uses, Psa 104:20-23; of the riches of the earth, Psa 104:24; of the sea, its inhabitants, and its uses, Psa 104:25, Psa 104:26; of God's general providence in providing food for all kinds of animals, Psa 104:27-31; of earthquakes and volcanoes, Psa 104:32. God is praised for his majesty, and the instruction which his works afford, Psa 104:33, Psa 104:34. Sinners shall be destroyed, Psa 104:35.

This Psalm has no title either in the Hebrew or Chaldee; but it is attributed to David by the Vulgate, Septuagint, Ethiopic, Arabic, and Syriac. It has the following title in the Septuagint, as it stands in the Complutensian Polyglot: Ψαλμος τῷ Δαυιδ ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου συστάσεως "A Psalm of David concerning the formation of the world." The Syriac says it is "A Psalm of David when he went with the priests to adore the Lord before the ark." It seems a continuation of the preceding Psalm; and it is written as a part of it in nine of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS. It is properly a poem on the works of God in the creation and government of the world; and some have considered it a sort of epitome of the history of the creation, as given in the book of Genesis.

Verse 1

O Lord my God, thou art very great - The works of God, which are the subject of this Psalm, particularly show the grandeur and majesty of God. The strongest proofs of the being of God, for common understandings, are derived from the works of creation, their magnitude, variety, number, economy, and use. And a proper consideration of those works presents a greater number of the attributes of the Divine nature than we can learn from any other source. Revelation alone is superior.

PSALM 104: 2 He covers himself with light as with a garment. He stretches out the heavens like a curtain.

Verse 2

Who coverest thyself with light - Light, insufferable splendor, is the robe of the Divine Majesty. Light and fire are generally the accompaniments of the Supreme Being, when he manifests his presence to his creatures. He appeared thus to Abraham when he made a covenant with him, Gen 15:17; and to Moses when he appointed him to bring the people out of Egypt, Exo 3:2; and when he gave him his law on Sinai, Exo 19:18. Moses calls God a consuming fire, Deu 4:24. When Christ was transfigured on the mount, his face shone like the sun, and his garment was white as the light, Mat 17:2. And when the Lord manifests himself to the prophets, he is always surrounded with fire, and the most brilliant light.

Bishop Lowth has some fine remarks on the imagery and metaphors of this Psalm. The exordium, says he, is peculiarly magnificent, wherein the majesty of God is described, so far as we can

investigate and comprehend it, from the admirable construction of nature; in which passage, as it was for the most part necessary to use translative images, the sacred poet has principally applied those which would be esteemed by the Hebrews the most elevated, and worthy such an argument; for they all, as it seems to me, are taken from the tabernacle. We will give these passages verbally, with a short illustration: - והדר לבשת hod vehadar labashta. "Thou hast put on honor and majesty."

The original, לבשת, is frequently used when speaking of the clothing or dress of the priests. Psa 104:2 אור כשלמה או עטה oseh or cassalmah. "Covering thyself with light as with a garment."

A manifest symbol of the Divine Presence; the light conspicuous in the holiest is pointed out under the same idea; and from this single example a simile is deduced to express the ineffable glory of God generally and universally. נטה שמים כיריעה noteh shamayim kayeriah. "Stretching out the heavens like a curtain."

The word יריעה, rendered here curtain, is that which denotes the curtains or uncovering of the whole tabernacle. This may also be an allusion to those curtains or awnings, stretched over an area, under which companies sit at weddings, feasts, religious festivals, curiously painted under, to give them the appearance of the visible heavens in the night-season.

PSALM 104: 3 He lays the beams of his rooms in the waters. He makes the clouds his chariot. He walks on the wings of the wind.

Verse 3 עליותיו במים המקרה hamekareh bammayim aliyothaiv. "Laying the beams of his chambers in the waters."

The sacred writer expresses the wonderful nature of the air aptly, and regularly constructed, from various and flux elements, into one continued and stable series, by a metaphor drawn from the singular formation of the tabernacle, which, consisting of many and different parts, and easily reparable when there was need, was kept together by a perpetual juncture and contignation of them all together. The poet goes on: - השם עבים רכבו hassem abim rechubo, המהלך על כנפי רוח, hamehallech al canphey ruach. "Making the clouds his chariot,

Walking upon the wings of the wind."

He had first expressed an image of the Divine Majesty, such as it resided in the holy of holies, discernible by a certain investiture of the most splendid light; he now denotes the same from that light of itself which the Divine Majesty exhibited, when it moved together with the ark, sitting on a circumambient cloud, and carried on high through the air. That seat of the Divine Presence is even called by the sacred historians, as its proper name, המרכבה hamercabah, The Chariot.

PSALM 104: 4 He makes his messengers winds; his servants flames of fire.

Verse 4 עשה מלאכיו רוחות oseh malachaiv ruchoth, משרתיו אש להט mesharethaiv esh lohet.

The elements are described as prompt and expedite to perform the Divine commands, like angels or ministers serving in the tabernacle; the Hebrew word משרתיו mesharethaiv being a word most common in the sacred ministrations.

PSALM 104: 5 He laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be moved forever.

Verse 5 יסד ארץ על מכניה yasad erets al mechonepha, בל תמוט עולם ועד bal tammot olam vaed.

"Laying the earth upon its foundations,

That it should not be shaken for evermore."

This image Bishop Lowth thinks evidently taken from the tabernacle, which was so laid upon its foundations that nothing could move it, and the dispensation to which it was attached, till the end purposed by the secret counsel of God was accomplished: and thus the earth is established, till the end of its creation shall be fully answered; and then it and its works shall be burnt up. On the above ground, the stability of the sanctuary and the stability of the earth are sometimes mentioned in the same words.

PSALM 104: 6 You covered it with the deep as with a cloak. The waters stood above the mountains.

Verse 6

Thou coveredst it with the deep - This seems to be spoken in allusion to the creation of the earth, when it was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the waters invested the whole, till God separated the dry land from them; thus forming the seas and the terraqueous globe.

The poet Ovid has nearly the same idea: -

Densior his tellus, elementaque grandia traxit,

Et pressa est gravitate sua; circumfluit humor

Ultima possedit, solidumque coeruit orbem.

Met. lib. i., ver. 29.

Earth sinks beneath, and draws a numerous throng

Of ponderous, thick, unwieldy seeds along:

About her coasts unruly waters roar;

And, rising on a ridge, insult the shore.

Dryden.

PSALM 104: 7 At your rebuke they fled. At the voice of your thunder they hurried away.

 Verse 7

At thy rebuke they fled - When God separated the waters which were above the firmament from those below, and caused the dry land to appear. He commanded the separation to take place; and the waters, as if instinct with life, hastened to obey.

At the voice of thy thunder - It is very likely God employed the electric fluid as an agent in this separation.

PSALM 104: 8 The mountains rose, the valleys sank down, to the place which you had assigned to them.

Verse 8

They go up by the mountains; they go down by the valleys - Taking the words as they stand here, springs seem to be what are intended. But it is difficult to conceive how the water could ascend, through the fissures of mountains, to their tops, and then come down their sides so as to form rivulets to water the valleys. Most probably all the springs in mountains and hills are formed from waters which fall on their tops in the form of rain, or from clouds that, passing over them, are arrested, and precipitate their contents, which, sinking down, are stopped by some solid strata, till, forcing their way at some aperture at their sides, they form springs and fountains. Possibly, however, vapours and exhalations are understood; these by evaporation ascend to the tops of mountains, where they are condensed and precipitated. Thus the vapours ascend, and then come down to the valleys, forming fountains and rivulets in those places which the providence of God has allotted them; that is, continuous valleys, with such a degree of inclination as determines their waters to run in that direction till they reach another river, or fall into the ocean.

Some have thought there is a reference to the breaking up on the fountains of the great deep, at the time of the flood; while the protrusion of the waters would raise the circumambient crust, so as to form mountains, the other parts, falling in to fill up the vacuum occasioned by the waters which were thrown up from the central abyss, would constitute valleys.

Ovid seems to paraphrase this verse: -

Jussit et extendi campos, subsidere valles,

Fronde tegi sylvas, lapidosos surgere montes.

Met. lib. i., ver. 43. "He shades the woods, the valleys he restrains

With rocky mountains, and extends the plains."

Dryden.

PSALM 104: 9 You have set a boundary that they may not pass over; that they don't turn again to cover the earth.

Verse 9

Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass - And what is this bound? The flux and reflux of the sea, occasioned by the solar and lunar attraction, the rotation of the earth on its own axis, and the gravitation of the waters to the center of the earth. And what is the cause of all these? The will and energy of God. Thus the sea is prevented from drowning the earth equally where there are flat shores as where the sea seems hemmed in by huge mounds of land and mountains. The above, not these, are the bounds which it cannot pass, so that they cannot turn again to cover the earth.

PSALM 104: 10 He sends springs into the valleys. They run among the mountains.

Verse 10

He sendeth the springs into the valleys - Evaporation is guided and regulated by Divine Providence. The sun has a certain power to raise a certain portion of vapours from a given space. God has apportioned the aqueous to the terrene surface, and the solar attraction to both. There is just as much aqueous surface as affords a sufficiency of vapours to be raised by the solar attraction to water the earthy surface. Experiments have been instituted which prove that it requires a given space of aqueous surface to provide vapours for a given space of terrene surface; and the proportion appears ordinarily to be seventeen of water to three of earth; and this is the proportion that the aqueous bears to the terrene surface of the globe. See Ray's three Physico-theological Discourses.

PSALM 104: 11 They give drink to every animal of the field. The wild donkeys quench their thirst.

Verse 11

The wild asses quench their thirst - The פרא pere, onager or wild ass, differs in nothing from the tame ass, only it has not a broken spirit, and is consequently more lively and active. It is so very swift that no horse except the Arab barb can overtake it. It is a gregarious animal, and they go in troops to feed and to drink. It is very timid, or rather jealous of its liberty, and therefore retires deep into the desert; yet even there the providence of God regards it; springs are provided, and it has the instinct to find them out.

PSALM 104: 12 The birds of the sky nest by them. They sing among the branches.

Verse 12

By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation - All fowls love verdure, and have their residence where they can find wood and water.

PSALM 104: 13 He waters the mountains from his rooms. The earth is filled with the fruit of your works.

 Verse 13

From his chambers - The clouds, as in Psa 104:3.

The earth is satisfied - The inhabitants of it.

PSALM 104: 14 He causes the grass to grow for the livestock, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may produce food out of the earth:

Verse 14

He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle - Doth God care for oxen? Yes, and there is not a beast of the field that does not share his merciful regards.

And herb for the service of man - Plants, esculent herbs, and nutritive grain in general; and thus he brings forth food (לֶחֶם lechem, bread) out of the earth. In the germination and growth of a grain of wheat there is a profusion of miracles. God takes care of man, and of all those animals which are so necessary to the convenience and comfort of man.

PSALM 104: 15 wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face to shine, and bread that strengthens man's heart.

Verse 15

And wine - Wine, in moderate quantity, has a wondrous tendency to revive and invigorate the human being. Ardent spirits exhilarate, but they exhaust the strength; and every dose leaves man the worse. Unadulterated wine, on the contrary, exhilarates and invigorates: it makes him cheerful, and provides for the continuance of that cheerfulness by strengthening the muscles, and bracing the nerves. This is its use. Those who continue drinking till wine inflames them, abase this mercy of God.

Oil to make his face to shine - That is, to anoint the body; and particularly those parts most exposed to the sun and weather. This is of high importance in all arid lands and sultry climates. By it the pores are kept open, and perspiration maintained.

Bread which strengtheneth man's heart - In hunger not only the strength is prostrated, but the natural courage is also abated. Hunger has no enterprise, emulation, nor courage. But when, in such circumstances, a little bread is received into the stomach, even before concoction can have time to prepare it for nutriment, the strength is restored, and the spirits revived. This is a surprising effect; and it has not yet been satisfactorily accounted for.

Three of the choicest and most important articles of life are here mentioned: Wine, for the support of the vital and intellectual spirits; Bread, for the support of the nervous and muscular system; and Oil, as a seasoner of food, and for those unctions so necessary for the maintenance of health. Where wine, oil, and bread can be had in sufficient quantities, there animal food, ardent spirits, and all high-seasoned aliments, may be well dispensed with. Heavy taxes on these necessities of life are

taxes on life, itself; and infallibly lead to adulteration of the articles themselves; especially wine and oil, which, in countries where they are highly taxed, are no longer to be found pure.

PSALM 104: 16 The LORD's trees are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon, which he has planted;

Verse 16

The trees of the Lord are full of sap - ישבעו yisbeu, "are saturated."

The cedars of Lebanon - God's providence not only extends to then and cattle, but also to the trees of the field and forest. Many of these are not only sustained, but planted by his providence. Who ever planted the seeds of the cedars of Lebanon, or of the thousands of woods and forests on the globe? God himself sowed those seeds, and they have sprung up and flourished without the care of man.

PSALM 104: 17 where the birds make their nests. The stork makes its home in the fir trees.

Verse 17

Where the birds make their nests - צפורים tsipporim signifies swallows, sparrows, and small birds in general; here opposed to the חסידה chasidah or stork. Perhaps the heron may be understood, which is said to be the first of all birds to build her nest, and she builds it on the very highest trees. The general meaning is, that God has provided shelter and support for the greatest and smallest birds; they are all objects of his providential regard.

PSALM 104: 18 The high mountains are for the wild goats. The rocks are a refuge for the rock badgers.

Verse 18

The high hills are a refuge - The barren tops of the highest hills, and the craggy abrupt precipices of the most stupendous rocks, are not without their uses: they afford protection, refuge, and food, for creatures whose dispositions and habits are suited to such places; and thus no part of the creation is useless. The creatures who are their inhabitants are necessary links in the great chain of animated beings, and show the wisdom and providence of God.

For a description of the covey, see Lev 11:5. The יעל yael, translated here the wild goat, is no doubt a creature of the stag or deer kind; the ibex, chamois, antelope, etc.

PSALM 104: 19 He appointed the moon for seasons. The sun knows when to set.

Verse 19

He appointed the moon for seasons - The heathens thought that the sun and moon were gods, and worshipped them as such. The psalmist shows, 1. That they are creatures dependent on God for their being and continuance; and, 2. That they were made for the use of man. See what has been said on these luminaries in the notes on Gen 1:14-16 (note).

PSALM 104: 20 You make darkness, and it is night, in which all the animals of the forest prowl.

Verse 20

Thou makest darkness - It is not the design of God that there should be either constant darkness or constant light. That man may labor, he gives him, by means of the sun, the light of the day; and that he may rest from his labor, and get his strength recruited, he gives him night, and comparative darkness. And as it would not be convenient for man and the wild beasts of the forest to collect their food at the same time, he has given the night to them as the proper time to procure their prey, and the day to rest in. When Man labors, They rest; when Man rests, They labor.

PSALM 104: 21 The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their food from God.

Verse 21

The young lions roar after their prey - It is said of the lion, that his roaring is so terrible as to astonish and quite unnerve the beast which he pursues; so that, though fleetier than himself, it falls down and becomes an easy prey.

PSALM 104: 22 The sun rises, and they steal away, and lay down in their dens.

Verse 22

The sun ariseth - The dawn of day is the warning for man to arise and betake himself to his work; and is the warning to them to retire to their dens.

PSALM 104: 23 Man goes out to his work, to his labour until the evening.

PSALM 104: 24 The LORD, how many are your works! In wisdom have you made them all. The earth is full of your riches.

Verse 24

O Lord, how manifold are thy works - In this verse there are three propositions:

1. The works of the Lord are multitudinous and varied.
2. They are so constructed as to show the most consummate wisdom in their design, and in the end for which they are formed.
3. They are all God's property, and should be used only in reference to the end for which they were created.

All abuse and waste of God's creatures are spoil and robbery on the property of the Creator. On this verse Mr. Ray has published an excellent work, entitled, "The Wisdom of God in the Creation," which the reader will do well, not only to consult, but carefully to read over and study.

PSALM 104: 25 There is the sea, great and wide, in which are innumerable living things, both small and large animals.

Verse 25

This great and wide sea - The original is very emphatic: זֶה הַיָּם גָּדוֹל וְרַחֵב יָדַיִם zeh haiyam gadol urechab yadayim, "This very sea, great and extensive of hands." Its waters, like arms, encompassing all the terrene parts of the globe. I suppose the psalmist was within sight of the Mediterranean when he wrote these words.

PSALM 104: 26 There the ships go, and leviathan, whom you formed to play there.

Verse 26

There go the ships - By means of navigation, countries the most remote are connected, and all the inhabitants of the earth become known to each other. He appears at this time to have seen the ships under sail.

That leviathan - This may mean the whale, or any of the large marine animals. The Septuagint and Vulgate call it dragon. Sometimes the crocodile is intended by the original word.

To play therein - Dreadful and tempestuous as the sea may appear, and uncontrollable in its billows and surges, it is only the field of sport, the play-ground, the bowling-green to those huge marine monsters.

PSALM 104: 27 These all wait for you, that you may give them their food in due season.

Verse 27

These wait all upon thee - The innumerable fry of the smaller aquatic animals, as well as whales, dolphins, porpoises, and sharks, all have their meat from God. He has in his gracious providence furnished that sort of food which is suitable to all. And this provision is various; not only for every kind of fish does God provide food, but a different kind of aliment for each in its different periods of

growth. Here are displayed the goodness and infinitely varied providence of God: "He giveth them their meat in due season."

PSALM 104: 28 You give to them; they gather. You open your hand; they are satisfied with good.

Verse 28

That thou givest them they gather - All creatures are formed with such and such digestive organs, and the food proper for them is provided. Infinitely varied as are living creatures in their habits and internal economy, so are the aliments which God has caused the air, the earth, and the waters to produce.

Thou openest thine hand - An allusion to the act of scattering grain among fowls.

PSALM 104: 29 You hide your face: they are troubled; you take away their breath: they die, and return to the dust.

Verse 29

Thou hidest thy face - If thou bring dearth or famine on the land, contagion in the air, or any destruction on the provision made by the waters, then beasts, fowl, and fish die, and are dissolved.

PSALM 104: 30 You send out your Spirit and they are created. You renew the face of the ground.

Verse 30

Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created - יִבְרְאוּן yibbareun, "They are created again."

And thou renewest the face of the earth - Do not these words plainly imply a resurrection of the bodies which have died, been dissolved, or turned to dust? And is not the brute creation principally intended here? Is it not on this account it is said, Psa 104:31, "the glory of the Lord shall endure for ever, (לְעוֹלָם leolam)," to be manifest in those times which are secret, when Jehovah himself shall rejoice in his works; when the brute creation shall be delivered from the bondage of its corruption? See the notes on Rom 8:19-23 (note).

PSALM 104: 31 Let the LORD's glory endure forever. Let the LORD rejoice in his works.

PSALM 104: 32 He looks at the earth, and it trembles. He touches the mountains, and they smoke.

Verse 32

He looketh on the earth - Even the look of God terrifies all created nature!

He toucheth the hills - So easy is it for God to burn up the earth and the worlds thereof, that even his touch kindles the mountains into flames! See Etna, Vesuvius, Stromboli, etc.; these are ignited by the touch of God. How majestic are these figures!

The renewal of the earth, and re-creation of deceased animals, shall take place when he shall shake terribly the heavens and the earth; when they shall be wrapped together as a scroll, and the earth and its works be dissolved, that is, after the general convulsion and conflagration of the world.

PSALM 104: 33 I will sing to the LORD as long as I live. I will sing praise to my God while I have any being.

Verse 33

I will sing unto the Lord - The psalmist exulting in the glorious prospect of the renovation of all things, breaks out in triumphant anticipation of the great event, and says, I will sing unto the Lord בְּחַיַּי bechayai, with my lives, the life that I now have, and the life that I shall have hereafter.

I will sing praise to my God - בְּעוֹדִי beodi, "in my eternity;" my going on, my endless progression. What astonishing ideas! But then, how shall this great work be brought about? and how shall the new earth be inhabited with righteous spirits only? The answer is,

PSALM 104: 34 Let your meditation be sweet to him. I will rejoice in the LORD.

PSALM 104: 35 Let sinners be consumed out of the earth. Let the wicked be no more. Bless the LORD, my soul. Praise the LORD!

Verse 35

Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more - Or, He shall consume the wicked and ungodly, till no more of them be found. Then the wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God. No wonder, with these prospects before his eyes, he cries out, "Bless Jehovah, O my soul! Hallelujah!" And ye that hear of these things, bless the Lord also.