

Israel's Hymnal
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PSALM ONE HUNDRED FOUR

[Pss 104:1] Bless Jehovah, O my soul. O Jehovah my God, thou art very great;
Thou art clothed with honor and majesty:
[Pss 104:2] Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment; Who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain;
[Pss 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;
[Pss 104:4] Who maketh winds his messengers; Flames of fire his ministers;
[Pss 104:5] Who laid the foundations of the earth, That it should not be moved for ever.
[Pss 104:6] Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a vesture; The waters stood above the mountains.
[Pss 104:7] At thy rebuke they fled; At the voice of thy thunder they hasted away
[Pss 104:8] (The mountains rose, the valleys sank down) Unto the place which thou hadst founded for them.
[Pss 104:9] Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over; That they turn not again to cover the earth.
[Pss 104:10] He sendeth forth springs into the valleys; They run among the mountains;
[Pss 104:11] They give drink to every beast of the field; The wild asses quench their thirst.
[Pss 104:12] By them the birds of the heavens have their habitation; They sing among the branches.
[Pss 104:13] He watereth the mountains from his chambers: The earth is filled with the fruit of thy works.
[Pss 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,
[Pss 104:15] And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, (And) oil to make his face to shine, And bread that strengtheneth man's heart.
[Pss 104:16] The trees of Jehovah are filled (with moisture), The cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted;
[Pss 104:17] Where the birds make their nests: As for the stork, the fir-trees are her house.
[Pss 104:18] The high mountains are for the wild goats; The rocks are a refuge for the conies.
[Pss 104:19] He appointed the moon for seasons: The sun knoweth his going down.
[Pss 104:20] Thou makest darkness, and it is night, Wherein all the beasts of the forest creep forth.
[Pss 104:21] The young lions roar after their prey, And seek their food from God.
[Pss 104:22] The sun ariseth, they get them away, And lay them down in their dens.
[Pss 104:23] Man goeth forth unto his work And to his labor until the evening.
[Pss 104:24] O Jehovah, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all: The earth is full of thy riches.
[Pss 104:25] Yonder is the sea, great and wide, Wherein are things creeping innumerable, Both small and great beasts.

[Pss 104:26] There go the ships; There is leviathan, whom thou hast formed to play therein.

[Pss 104:27] These wait all for thee, That thou mayest give them their food in due season.

[Pss 104:28] Thou givest unto them, they gather; Thou openest thy hand, they are satisfied with good.

[Pss 104:29] Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled; Thou takest away their breath, they die, And return to their dust.

[Pss 104:30] Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; And thou renewest the face of the ground.

[Pss 104:31] Let the glory of Jehovah endure for ever; Let Jehovah rejoice in his works:

[Pss 104:32] Who looketh on the earth and it trembleth; He toucheth the mountains, and they smoke.

[Pss 104:33] I will sing unto Jehovah as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have any being.

[Pss 104:34] Let thy meditation be sweet unto him: I will rejoice in Jehovah.

[Pss 104:35] Let sinners be consumed out of the earth. And let the wicked be no more. Bless Jehovah, O my soul. Praise ye Jehovah.

THE HYMN OF CREATION AND RECONSTRUCTION

I. God the Sovereign of universe (vss. 1-5).

II. The original catastrophe which overtook the earth (Gen. 1-2; Ps. 104:6).

III. The work of the third day of reconstruction (Gen. 1:9-13; Ps. 104:7-18).

IV. The work of the fourth day of reconstruction (Gen. 1:14-19; Ps. 104:19,20).

V. The sixth day--creation of beast and man (Gen. 1:24-31; Ps. 104:21-23).

VI. Observations (Ps. 104:24-30).

VII. Petition and praise (Ps. 104:31-35).

Let us remember that the Psalms are the poetical versions of the Prophets. In order for one fully to appreciate a poem, one should understand if possible the author and the circumstances which gave rise to its composition. Moreover, one must get all available light from every source in order to understand a poem more completely. These general principles are applicable to the Book of Psalms.

The hymn which we are studying this month is not the poetical version of a message from the Prophets--although Moses was a prophet--but it is a poetical version of Genesis, chapter 1. In order that we might understand this marvelous hymn the more perfectly, we should study carefully Genesis, chapter 1. When we have its message firmly in mind, we can the more readily understand Psalm 104. As we examine it, we shall see that the inspired author first spoke of God as the Sovereign of the universe (vss. 1-5). Then he mentioned the original catastrophe which overtook the earth (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:6); the work of the third day of reconstruction (Gen. 1:9-13; Ps. 104:7-18); the work of the fourth day (Gen. 1:14-19; Ps. 104:19,20); and the work of the sixth day-- especially the creation of man (Gen. 1:24-31; Ps. 104:21-23). He then made some observations (vss. 24-30), and concluded the psalm with a petition and with praises (vss. 31-35).

From this cursory review and comparison of Genesis, chapter 1, and Psalm 104, we see that the psalmist omitted discussion of the work of certain of the days of reconstruction. He was led by the Spirit of God to select only the labors of certain days of the original account which served his purpose in writing his hymn.

Since by singing, truths can sometimes be impressed upon the heart as in no other way, the Lord gave us this poetical version of the original creation and the reconstruction period, which followed a primitive

disaster that came upon the earth, in order to keep these marvelous truths before the minds and hearts of Israel.

In order that we might appreciate this hymn, let us glance at Genesis chapter 1. According to verse 1, God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning. In the eternity of the past God alone existed. At a certain period of that far-off beginning, He put forth His creative activity, the result of which was the bringing into being the material universe. As to how long it took Him to create it or the methods or means employed, the Scriptures do not say. We therefore must be silent on these points.

According to verse 2 a great calamity struck the earth and reduced it to chaos: "And the earth became a desolation and a waste ..." (lit. trans.)

There were six days of reconstruction, during which God was repairing the damage that was wrought in order that the earth might be a habitable place for man whom He intended to create and whom He did bring into existence, as we shall see, on the sixth day.

On day one God caused a miraculous light to illuminate the earth. This phenomena caused "evening and morning day one" (vss. 3-5).

The earth at that time was submerged in water. On the second day the Lord removed a part of these waters and put them above the firmament. This was accomplished on the second day.

On the third day the Lord caused the remaining waters upon the earth to flow into one place. Originally there was but one sea. He also caused the dry land to appear. This language means that originally there was but one continent. On the same day the Lord produced the vegetation of the earth, causing each individual plant or tree to produce after its own kind (vss. 9-13).

On the first three days the miraculous light produced on the first day was the cause of the illumination, but on the fourth day God caused the light from the sun, moon, and stars to penetrate the darkness that had been enveloping the earth. From this time onward the day and night were caused by the natural phenomena from the sun, moon, and stars. Such was the work on the fourth day (vss. 14-19).

On the fifth day the Lord created all the life with which the seas swarm and also the birds of the heavens. The Lord blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth" (vss. 20-23).

The cattle and the beasts of the field were brought into existence on the sixth day. Finally, after a conference in the Godhead (vs. 26), the Lord created man in His own image after His likeness. To him He gave authority over the earth, "over every living thing that moved upon the earth." All of the beasts of the world were submissive to him. He was, in his own sphere, the lord of creation--in the limited sense set forth in verses 24-31.

The Lord completed His work on the seventh day and rested (Gen. 2:1-3).

By this cursory review of the account of the beginning of all things, we see that God alone existed in eternity, that He at a certain period created the universe, that a catastrophe overtook it, reducing it to rubble, and that, during a period of six days of reconstruction, God repaired the damage wrought by the catastrophe in order that life, as we know it today, might be possible upon the earth. With this brief outline of the of things, we are now prepared to look at Psalm 104.

I. God, the Sovereign of the universe (vss. 1-5)

1 Bless Jehovah O my soul. O Jehovah my God, thou art very great;
 Thou art clothed with honor and majesty:
 2 Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment;
 Who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain;
 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;
 4 Who maketh winds his messengers;
 Flames of fire his ministers;
 5 Who laid the foundations of the earth,
 That it should not be moved forever (Ps. 104:1-5).

Our inspired author looked up in vision and observed the throne room of the Almighty, beholding Him in His regal splendor, the Sovereign of the universe. This vision caused him to exclaim, "Bless Jehovah, O my soul ... O Jehovah my God ... Thou art clothed with honor and majesty." Whenever the two last words, honor and majesty, occur together, they always refer to the divine honor and glory. The Lord dwells "in light unapproachable ..." (I Tim. 6:13-16). As we contemplate the throne room of the Almighty as the psalmist does in these verses, let us look at the marvelous description of the same found in Psalm 89:5-18. Daniel was granted a vision of the Almighty and His being seated upon the throne of glory as we see in Daniel 7:9-12.

In verse 3 the psalmist speaks of the palace of the king, "who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters ..." With this hint of the royal palace of the Almighty, compare another description of the same found in Amos 9:5-6.

The Lord whenever He leaves His palace on any mission, "maketh the clouds his chariots;" and "... walketh upon the wings of the wind" (vs. 3). This passage reminds one of the theophany described in Psalm 18. It is also suggestive of the return of our Lord at the end of the Tribulation--as we learn in the New Testament--when He will come with the clouds of heaven. As one contemplates these lofty themes, he is reminded of that prediction concerning the birth of our blessed Lord (Micah 5:2), where it is said that his "goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." An examination of the Old Testament Scriptures shows that the Lord at various times has come to this earth on different missions. As illustrative of this fact, see the visions of Ezekiel found in chapters 1 and 10.

According to Psalm 104:4 the Lord makes the winds His messengers. The marginal reading in the Revised Version is that He makes "his angels winds." This passage is quoted in Hebrews 1:7. From the later passage we learn that the Lord "maketh his angels winds, And his ministers a flame of fire," that is, they assume these forms in carrying out the divine will in providential acts.

Not only is the Lord sovereign in heaven, but He is also the creator of the universe. For we are told that He "laid the foundation of the earth. That it should not be moved for ever" (Ps. 104:5). The Lord, in Job, chapter 38, spoke of His laying the foundation of the earth and establishing it. Our translation speaks of His establishing the earth so that it shall not be removed forever. The word rendered "forever" in the

original does not connote what the English word "forever" does. And examination of the usage of the term shows that it means continuity, perpetuity. In each connection where it appears, one must determine from the facts whether or not any limitations are placed upon this perpetuity or continuity. If we understand "forever" to mean without end, throughout the eternity of the future, then we have a conflict between this passage and others which declare that the present heavens and earth shall pass away and cease to exist. For instance, in Psalm 102:23-28 we have this doctrine. It is repeated also in Revelation 20:11. We must therefore understand that the word "forever" is here limited by the existence of the material universe, which, as we have just seen, does eventually pass out of existence at the end of the Millennium. At that time the Lord creates the eternal order which shall remain so far as the revelation of God informs us, forever and ever--eternity without an end.

II. The original catastrophe which overtook the earth (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:6)

In verse 6 of our psalm we see that the earth was covered with water. This was not its original condition. When God created the earth it was perfect, but there was a calamity that overtook it and that reduced it to this state of desolation and waste, when it was submerged in water. As to what was the direct cause of this catastrophe, we cannot be dogmatic in our assertions. We may, however, suspect Satan and his activities, since he is an opponent of the Lord Almighty.

As to how long the earth was in that submerged condition, we cannot say, since our data is so very limited.

As stated in the introductory discussion of this psalm, our writer passes over the work of day one and two.

III. The work of the third day of reconstruction (Gen. 1:9-13; Ps. 104:7-18)

In verse 7-18 of our psalm the writer presents the labor of the third day. As stated above, on the second day God removed some of the waters that were on the earth and placed them above the expanse. Those that were left upon the earth were gathered together into one place, one sea. In the poetical language of the psalmist, the Lord rebuked the waters and they fled away. The mountains arose and the valleys sank down into their places, which God had ordained for them. Then the Lord set the boundaries for the sea beyond which they can never pass. On this point Jeremiah declared, "Fear ye not me? saith Jehovah: will ye not tremble at my presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it? ..." (Jer. 5:22).

After the waters had left the dry land and it was elevated above the sea, the Lord caused springs to burst forth in the valleys and to run down the mountains. These waters were for the purpose of watering the earth and for giving drink to the beasts of the field. Along beside these waters trees were to grow in which the birds of the heavens were to have their habitation and were to sing their melodious songs.

From His chambers, to which He draws the waters by evaporation, He waters the mountains and causes the vegetation of the earth to come forth for food for man and for beasts (vss. 13,14). He made the grape in order that man might strengthen himself with the fruit of the vine and also the olive tree from which he can procure oil, that has wonderful medicinal properties. He also gives man bread by the harvest of the field. Thus in the vegetable kingdom God has provided for man and beast.

IV. The work of the fourth day of reconstruction (Gen. 1:14-19; Ps. 104:19,20)

The work of the fourth day of reconstruction is discussed in verse 19 and 20. The sun and the moon were created in the beginning; but when the catastrophe mentioned in Genesis 1:2 occurred, darkness enveloped the globe and cut off the light from these heavenly bodies. On the fourth day, however, their light penetrated this vale of darkness and has from that time to the present been flooding the earth--the sun by day and the moon by night. Both the sun and the moon determine the seasons and climatic conditions which exist upon the earth.

The Lord gave us the day during which we should work and the night for a period of rest and recuperation. It is God's intention that men should work and accomplish their tasks during the daytime and that they should take a sufficient amount of rest during the night. One is sinning against oneself and against one's Maker if one does not take sufficient rest at the time appointed by the Lord.

We have but one life to live. Only that which is done for Christ and for immortal souls will last throughout eternity. Let us therefore work while we have time and opportunity, in order that we may have a rich harvest when we appear before the Lord.

V. The sixth day--creation of man (Gen. 1:24-31; Ps. 104:21-23)

From the work of the fourth day the psalmist passes by that of the fifth and refers to the Lord's labors on the sixth. In verse 21 he speaks of the young lions that roar after their prey and seek their food from God. Of course originally the animals were tame and docile, being implicitly obedient to man. After the Fall, however, their nature became vicious and bloodthirsty. Nevertheless, they get their food from God, just as the sparrows do--according to our Lord's statement in the "Sermon on the Mount." The lion, being the king of the beasts, is mentioned here as looking to God for his sustenance. From the Genesis account we see that the beasts of the earth were made on the sixth day.

In verse 22 and 23 the psalmist speaks of man, who was likewise created on the sixth day. He was the crowning work of the Lord's creative activity.

Men, having rested and recuperated during the darkness of the night, should arise with the dawn of the day and accomplish the labors which God has for them. The animals, when the sun rises, "get them away, And lay them down in their dens" (vs. 22) but "man goeth forth unto his work And to his labor until the evening." God expects every man and women to have some useful occupation. Idleness, the proverb tells us, is the devil's workshop. Those who have never learned to work should do so and should occupy their days at useful employment. It is a wonderful thing to be called by the Lord and to His service and to be faithful to Him in advancing His cause and propagating His truth among men. May all born-again people realize the God-appointed program for their lives and labor while it is day, realizing that the night is coming in which no man can work.

VI. Observations (Ps. 104:24-30)

Having made this brief survey of God's work in creation and in reconstructing the earth preparatory to man and of having prepared the necessary sustenance for his existence and an environment in which he could live, the psalmist exclaimed:

"O Jehovah, how manifold are thy works!
In wisdom hast thou made them all: The earth is full of thy riches."

If one will just go out under the open skies on a clear night, look up into the starry heavens and contemplate the movements of the celestial bodies, one will be over-awed with the impression that there is an omnipotent, and omnipresent Being who created and who controls all things. The order and system that are manifest in the earth should lead one to the conclusion that all things are moving toward a definite, specific goal in the future. On the other hand, if one looks down into the microscope, one will get a glimpse into the world of germs and microbes, invisible to the naked eye, all of which play a most important part in history. Moreover, through this instrument one can look at the glorious symmetry and order of various tissues of all sorts. Behind all this, the thoughtful person sees the Almighty standing in His omnipotence and omnipresence. He therefore can, with the psalmist, exclaim that the world is full of the riches of God and that the Lords works are manifold.

Our psalmist looked toward the sea and began to contemplate marine life, its existence and activity. Then he looked at the ships of his day and time as they moved across the waters of the deep. As he was thinking of the sea and its teeming life, he told us that God prepares the food and sustenance for all of these. They are all dependent upon Him. The Lord opens His hand and satisfies them with His goodness. On the other hand, whenever He withdraws His favor, they die and perish.

In verse 30 is a marvelous statement:

"Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; And thou renewest the face of the ground."

This verse seems to be talking about God's creative activity during time. We are informed that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Then during those six days of reconstruction, He created the marine life, birds of the heaven, beasts of the field, and finally man. But this verse seems to speak of God's continuing to create things and to renew the face of the ground. We know that there are new diseases that appear among men and animals, as well as in the plant kingdom. At least they are new to the scientists. Does God create new germs? Does He bring pestilences upon men? Is that included in this verse? We may be unable to answer these questions, but we know from the second line of verse 30 that the Lord does renew the face of the ground with vegetation and that is included in the creative activity of which the first part of this verse is speaking. Truly, it is in God that we live and move and have our being. We are dependent upon Him every moment of our lives. To Him we should be thankful for all things and should express our gratitude, not only by words, but also by actions and deeds.

VII. Petition and praise (Ps. 104:31-35)

This marvelous hymn concludes with the petition which is followed by praise. Hence we read:

"Let the glory of Jehovah endure forever;
Let Jehovah rejoice in his works;
Who looketh on the earth, and it trembleth;
He toucheth the mountains and they smoke" (vss. 31-32).

In silent contemplation the psalmist looked out to the time when the earth will tremble at the sight of God and the mountains will smoke. When I read this passage in the light of prophetic statements, I feel certain that the psalmist was speaking about the time of the great Tribulation when the Lord will return, will lift the curse, and will cause His glory to encircle the earth as the waters cover the sea. Earth's golden era is yet in the future. There is to be a time of permanent peace, when every man shall dwell under his own vine and fig tree; when there will be a warless world. But that era will never dawn until the world is ready to receive Him whom it rejected at His first coming, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the last three verses of this hymn the psalmist declares that he will sing unto Jehovah as long as he has life, as long as he has any being. He is desirous that his meditations might be acceptable to God and pleasing to Him. That should be the hearts desire of every regenerated, born again person.

Our author in the last verse prays that the time may come when all sinners might be consumed from the earth and the wicked be no more. That prayer will be answered by the judgments of the Tribulation which will sweep the wicked from the earth and leave only the righteous. Then they will turn to the Lord and plead for Him to return. When Israel, especially, pleads for the return of King Messiah, He will burst forth from the heavens and come and establish His era of peace, plenty, and prosperity for which the world is sighing and longing.