

The Psalms

Psalm 104

Sequence

- Starting with poetry
- Reading Psalm 104
- To work: parallelism and images/metaphors
- Rhythm
- Place of Psalm 104
- Layout of Psalm 104
- Old Testament links
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- Commentary
- Summary
- Potential for today
- Conversation

Starting with poetry

Duvet, by Pádraig J. Daly, OSA

Reading Psalm 104 (NET)

- 1 Praise the LORD, O my soul!
O LORD my God, you are magnificent.
You are robed in splendour and majesty.
- 2 He covers himself with light as if it were a garment.
He stretches out the skies like a tent curtain,
- 3 and lays the beams of the upper rooms of his palace on the rain clouds.
He makes the clouds his chariot,
and travels along on the wings of the wind.
- 4 He makes the winds his messengers,
and the flaming fire his attendant.
- 5 He established the earth on its foundations;
it will never be upended.
- 6 The watery deep covered it like a garment;
the waters reached above the mountains.
- 7 Your shout made the waters retreat;
at the sound of your thunderous voice they hurried off-
- 8 as the mountains rose up,
and the valleys went down-
to the place you appointed for them.
- 9 You set up a boundary for them that they could not cross,
so that they would not cover the earth again.
- 10 He turns springs into streams;
they flow between the mountains.
- 11 They provide water for all the animals in the field;
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.
- 12 The birds of the sky live beside them;
they chirp among the bushes.
- 13 He waters the mountains from the upper rooms of his palace;
the earth is full of the fruit you cause to grow.
- 14 He provides grass for the cattle,
and crops for people to cultivate,
so they can produce food from the ground,
as well as wine that makes people feel so good,
and so they can have oil to make their faces shine,
as well as food that sustains people's lives.

- 16** The trees of the LORD receive all the rain they need,
the cedars of Lebanon which he planted,
- 17** where the birds make nests,
near the evergreens in which the herons live.
- 18** The wild goats live in the high mountains;
the rock badgers find safety in the cliffs.
- 19** He made the moon to mark the months,
and the sun sets according to a regular schedule.
- 20** You make it dark and night comes,
during which all the beasts of the forest prowl around.
- 21** The lions roar for prey,
seeking their food from God.
- 22** When the sun rises, they withdraw
and sleep in their dens.
- 23** Men then go out to do their work,
and labor away until evening.
- 24** How many living things you have made, O LORD!
You have exhibited great skill in making all of them;
the earth is full of the living things you have made.
- 25** Over here is the deep, wide sea,
which teems with innumerable swimming creatures,
living things both small and large.
- 26** The ships travel there,
and over here swims the whale you made to play in it.
- 27** All of your creatures wait for you
to provide them with food on a regular basis.
- 28** You give food to them and they receive it;
you open your hand and they are filled with food.
- 29** When you ignore them, they panic.
When you take away their life's breath, they die
and return to dust.
- 30** When you send your life-giving breath, they are created,
and you replenish the surface of the ground.
- 31** May the splendour of the LORD endure!
May the LORD find pleasure in the living things he has made!
- 32** He looks down on the earth and it shakes;
he touches the mountains and they start to smoulder.
- 33** I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God as long as I exist!
- 34** May my thoughts be pleasing to him!
I will rejoice in the LORD.
- 35** May sinners disappear from the earth,
and the wicked vanish!
Praise the LORD, O my soul!
Praise the LORD!

Imagery and metaphors

Clothing
Construction
Government
Food and drink

Shelter
Wisdom
Commander of the sea
Life-giver

Volcanoes
Music
Etc.

Rhythm

Free, accentual rhythms

Praise and trust (3 beats followed by 3 beats)
Lament (3 beats followed by 2 beats)
Not rigidly adhered to

Psalm 104: praise rhythm

30 When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

Place of Psalm 104

Psalms 103 + 104

Links: Bless the Lord, O my should (Psalm 103:1, 22; Psalm 104:1, 35—only occurrences —“works”)

- Psalm 103: the cosmic reign of God (salvation)
- Psalm 104: all God’s works praise the creator (creation)
- Thus creation and salvation belong together

Psalms 104+105+106

- The Hallelujah shout.
- It is found in this context in Psalms 104:35; 105:45; 106:1, 48

It is intended to construct a triad of Psalms 104–106—probably an overarching history from the beginning of creation to the present time of Psalm 106.

Layout of Psalm 104

Levels: line, couplet, stanza, poem

Antiphon (1a)

A. Strophe 1 - the heavens and God’s presence (1b-4)

B. Strophe 2 - the earth and the seas (5-9)

C. Strophe 3 - water on the earth, fertility, life (10-18)

Nourishment for animals and plants (10-13)
Nourishment for human beings (14-15)
Nourishment for animals and plants (16-18)

D. Strophe 4 - time (19-24)

B’ Strophe 5 - the sea (25-26)

C. Strophe 6 - life, enough to eat, the spirit (27-30)

A’ Strophe 7 - the heavens and God’s presence (31-35b)

Antiphon (35c)

Old Testament links

- Genesis 1
- Psalm 8
- Sirach 44
- Widely available ancient Near Eastern material both Egyptian and Canaanite
 - E.g. Egyptian hymns to the sun god
 - E.g. Canaanite myths of creation as a battle

Links with Genesis 1

Psalm 104	Genesis 1
1-3 light 3-4 firmament 5-9 land and sea 10-18 vegetation	3-5 light 6-8 firmament 9-10 land and sea 11-13 vegetation
<i>addition 1: living creatures</i> <i>addition 2: nourishment</i>	
19-23 night and day	14-19 night and day
<i>addition 1: living creatures</i> <i>addition 2: nourishment</i>	
25-26 the sea and its creatures	20-23 living creatures and the sea (create) 24-28 <i>living creatures and the land (create)</i>
27-28 nourishment (eat)	29-30 nourishment (eat)
<i>29-30 living creatures and the land (create)</i>	

- Psalm 8
Ps 8:5 Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.
- Genesis
Gen 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness

New Testament links

- Importance of making New Testament links
- First step: citations and allusions
- Second step: serendipity!
- Ps 104:4
Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire." (Heb 1:7)
- Ps 104:12
[It] is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." (Mt 13:32; Mk 4:32; Lk 13:19)

- Ps 104:27
Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time? (Mt 24:45)

NB links:

2 Cor 4:6 For God, who said "Let light shine out of darkness," is the one who shined in our hearts to give us the light of the glorious knowledge of God in the face of Christ.

John 1:1-18; Col 1:15-20; Eph 1:3-14

Commentary by stanzas (see slides)

Summary

- God's Sustaining of the Cosmos
- Grateful Appreciation of Creation
- The Creature's Praise and Thanksgiving
- The Gift of the Spirit

Potential for today

- Wonder before the universes
- Praise of the creator
- Wonder at the variety of life forms
- Sense of connectedness with it all
- Sense of responsibility towards it all

Conversation

PSALM 104 NRSV

- 1 Bless the LORD, O my soul.
O LORD my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honour and majesty,
- 2 wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
- 3 you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot,
- 4 you ride on the wings of the wind,
you make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers.
- 5 You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.
- 6 You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
- 7 At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.
- 8 They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys
to the place that you appointed for them.
- 9 You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.
- 10 You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
- 11 giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.
- 12 By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;
they sing among the branches.

- 13** From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.
- 14** You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
- 15** and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.
- 16** The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
- 17** In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has its home in the fir trees.
- 18** The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the coney.
- 19** You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
- 20** You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
- 21** The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
- 22** When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.
- 23** People go out to their work
and to their labor until the evening.
- 24** O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
- 25** Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
- 26** There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.
- 27** These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
- 28** when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
- 29** When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
- 30** When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.
- 31** May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
may the LORD rejoice in his works—
- 32** who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.
- 33** I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
- 34** May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the LORD.
- 35** Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the LORD, O my soul.
Praise the LORD!