

PSALM 104 THE PSALM OF CREATION AND PROVIDENCE

Like the preceding Psalm, this one begins and ends with the inspired poet's call to his soul to bless Jehovah. The lesson from this fact is that Nature – when looked at by an eye that sees that it is full of God – yields material for devout gratitude, just like His fatherly “mercies to them that fear him.” The 103rd sings of God in salvation, while the 104th sings of Him in creation. The keynote of this Psalm is struck in verse 24, which breaks into an exclamation concerning the manifoldness of God's works, and the Divine Wisdom that has shaped them all. The Psalm is a gallery of vivid Nature-pictures, touched with wonderful grace and sureness of hand. Clearness of vision and sympathy with every living thing make the swift outlines exceptionally firm and lovely. The poet's mind is like a mirror, in which the Cosmos is reflected. He regards Nature neither from the scientific nor the aesthetic standpoint. To him, Nature is the garment of an

Overview of the Psalm, adapted from Charles Spurgeon:

Here we have one of the loftiest and longest sustained flights of the inspired Psalmist's musings. The composition gives an interpretation to the many voices of nature, and sings sweetly of both Creation and Providence. The poem contains a complete cosmos; sea and land, cloud and sunlight, plant and animal, light and darkness, and life and death are all proved to be expressive of the presence of the Lord. Traces of the six days of Creation are very evident; and even though the creation of man – which was the crowning work of the sixth day – is not mentioned, this is accounted for from the fact that Man himself is the singer. Some have even discerned marks of the Divine rest upon the seventh day, in verse 31. This Psalm is a poet's version of Genesis chapter 1. Nor is it only the present condition of the earth which is here the subject of song, for a hint is given of those holier times when we shall see “a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness” – out of which, the sinner shall be consumed (verse 35). The spirit of ardent praise to God runs throughout the whole Psalm; and with it, there is a distinct realization of the Divine Being as a personal existence, Who is loved and trusted as well as adored.

After ascribing blessedness to the Lord, the devout Psalmist sings of the light and the firmament, which were the work of the first and second days of Creation-week (verses 1-6). By an easy transition, he describes the separation of the waters from the dry land; the formation of rain, brooks, and rivers; and the uprising of green herbs, which were the productions of the third day (verses 7-18). Then the appointment of the sun and moon to be the guardians of day and night commands the poet's admiration (verses 19-23), and so he sings the work of the fourth day. Having already alluded to many varieties of living creatures, he proceeds – from verses 24-30 – to sing of the life with which the Lord was pleased to fill the air, the sea, and the land; these forms of existence were the peculiar works of the fifth and sixth days. We may regard the closing verses (31-35) as a Sabbath meditation, hymn, and prayer. The entire Psalm lies before us as a panorama of the universe, as it is viewed by the eye of devotion. O for grace to render due praise unto the Lord while reading it!



ever-present God, Whose sustaining energy is only the continuation of His creative act. All creatures depend upon Him. His unceasing action is their life. And He rejoices in all His works!

The opening of this Psalm conveys a sense of being bowed down with the greatness of the Divine Majesty. No description of God is attempted. Only His robe is seen. Light is the robe of God, with which He has covered Himself; and water is the robe of earth, with which God has covered it. For the sustenance of physical life, water is essential. In the natural universe, it is only in this very tiny region where water exists, and where life of any kind is found. Life can only live in earth's water-robe, and the Psalmist grandly describes it! In clouds, the waters gather above the mountains, and await the Divine bidding. Then they hasten to their appointed work. Some roll up the hillsides in mists, and some stream down in rivulets; but all go to the place where the Lord has appointed them. In the deep seas, they dance in waves and roar on the beach; but still, they keep within their appointed bounds. With splendid vivacity, the inspired poet then describes the water at work in sustaining life. The wild donkey drinks, and his strength is renewed. The roots of the cedars of Lebanon soak up the life-giving moisture. The great trees, thus sustained by water, provide homes for the birds. Grass for cattle and bread for mankind are produced with water; without it, we would not have these essential supplies to meet our needs. Moreover, in the far-stretching seas, there is vigorous life in many various forms. And then there comes the beautiful remark: "These all wait upon thee, O God!"

St. Augustine, in his remarkable series of sermons on this Psalm, speaks much of its spiritual meaning. He refers to the water as representing "the love of God which is shed abroad on our hearts, by the Holy Spirit which is given us." By the world which the Lord has so founded "that it shall not be moved for ever and ever," he understands the Church. As light is the garment of God, and as water is the garment of earth; so also, love is the garment of the Church. It is only as she is robed in this that she is attired with beauty! It is her wedding-garment, for the person who does not love is not in Christ. It is in love that God lays the beams of the chambers of His home where there are many mansions. It is love that flows up over the lofty mountains and down in cascades to the humble valleys – sometimes in rushing torrents, and sometimes in hidden springs. It is love that gives life and refreshment, and through which souls find a home. In the Lord's works in nature, His glory and majesty are seen; but in the Church is manifested His love. And it is as we consider this that we sing – with sweetest notes – "My meditations of him shall be sweet, I will be glad in the Lord!"

Lord, we praise You as the ever-present God, Whose sustaining energy is the continuation of Your work of Creation. We thank You for the assurance that all creatures may depend upon You and Your unceasing actions for their good! Amen.