

Seeing the Glory of God in Creation: Genesis 1 and Psalm 104

Psalm 104 is an elongated meditation on God's creative glory. It is a hymn of praise, that seems to be intentionally paired with Psalm 103. Both begin the same way: "Bless the Lord, oh my soul!" They are both hymns of praise: Psalm 103 is praise for God the Savior-King; Psalm 104 praise for God the Creator-King. And both make explicit use of God's history with Israel, especially as it is recorded by Moses. Psalm 103 quotes Exodus 34:6-7 as it recounts the glory of God in redemption; and Psalm 104, as we will see, structures its entire praise chorus based on the creation account of Genesis 1. It is this creative glory that we will consider today and this week.

Genesis 1

In Genesis 1, Moses recounts the creation of the world. Using a literary structure that highlights the creative wisdom and beauty of God, Moses gives a poetic description of creation, that is historical and accurate, even though it does not measure up to the scientific standards of our day. (For a discussion on the genre and the intention of Genesis 1, see G.K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy*).

Moses describes how God in six days created the world *ex nihilo*. While not giving us exact information about all that was happened in creation; the testimony of Scripture is clear. God alone is the maker of heaven and earth. In the New Testament, Hebrews 11:3 describes creation like this, "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." Likewise, Colossians says of Jesus the Divine Word, "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things were created through him and for him" (1:16).

Thus, in the first three days God forms the world—YHWH created light and darkness (Day 1), he separated the waters above from the waters below (Day 2), and he divided the land and the sea (Day 3). Then he fills it. On Day 4, the sun and the moon are placed in the sky to govern, respectively, the day and the night. On Day 5, the sea and sky are filled with sea creatures and birds. And finally, on the pinnacle of creation, Day 6, land animals and men and women, made in God's image, are created.

Psalm 104

In Psalm 104, the same emphasis on God's creativity can be found. But even more striking is the way that the Psalmist (David?) follows the six-days of creation to worship the king of glory. In opposition to those who see Genesis 1 as a myth borrowed from another ancient Near Eastern culture, this Psalm seems to affirm the veracity of the event. Or at least, it gives praise to God

for his creation, without questioning in the slightest the truthfulness of Genesis 1.

But more than an apologetic confirmation, Psalm 104 is a hymn of praise, and it wonderfully recounts the six days of creation.

Day 1. Verses 1-2 describe the formation of light. Majestic is the description: Like the priest who robes himself with beauty and glory (Exod 28:2), God clothes himself with splendor and majesty. The language is figurative, but I believe it is meant to awaken us to the reality that the beauty of the heavens tells us something about God. His heavens declare his glory; the skies above proclaim his handiwork. He cannot be seen by men, but in the kaleidoscope of light that resides in the sky, we are introduced to the kind of glorious light in which he dwells.

Day 2. Verses 2-4 depict the separation of the upper chambers from the lower chambers. Just like a cosmic temple, God has created heaven and earth to dwell with his image bearers. The colors, patterns, shapes, and images in the tabernacle were meant to reproduce much of what is seen in nature. They are not incidental. The macrocosm of the universe is related to the microcosm of the tabernacle/temple/Christ/church. What takes place in the microcosm has effects for the macrocosm. For instance, when Christ (the tabernacle of God) was crucified, the heavens (the cosmic dwelling place of God) grew dark. Likewise, the promise of universal restoration will not happen apart from the revelation of the sons of God (Rom 8). There is much to ponder in this reality, that God dwells with us in his creation, but is not in anyway dependent on his creation. (Again, G.K. Beale is helpful, see his *The Temple and the Church's Mission*).

Day 3. In Genesis, this day included both the division of land and sea, and the planting of vegetation. Psalm 104 develops both of these things in verses 5-18,; plus, it shows how their creation supports men and animals which come later in the Genesis narrative. Verses 5-9 tell of the way God commanded the waters to flee, how he made dry land. They recount the first act of the third day. Verses 10-13 are a bridge between the sections. They explain how God split the earth with rivers, but how these formations function to serve the animals that are coming. Verses 14-18 is the second act of Day 3. Here the land is sown with vegetation for man and beast. The world is a cornucopia of fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, spices, herbs.

Day 4. Verses 19-23 describes the way God put the sun and moon in place to give order to our seasons and the days. Just as man is positioned to govern the animals (cf Psalm 8), so the sun and moon govern the day and night, respectively. Like the horn blast from our local factory, which tells all the inhabits of Seymour that it is 7am; 930am; or noon... the sun and moon are messengers to us. When the sun arises: It is time to work. Verse 23, "Man goes out to his work... until evening." Even more, in Psalm 89:37, Ethan speaks of the moon as a perpetual witness to God's covenant with David. In other words, just like the moon which testifies to God's unchanging reign over the universes; the throne of David will stand until the moon is no more

(Ps 72:7).

Day 5. Embedded in verses 17, 24 are the description of the birds and sea creatures formed on Day 5. With freedom and beauty, God has designed birds to glide on the wind, and for humpback whales to “play” in the deep. Who says God is prudish! His world is filled with wonder, mystery, beauty, energy, and productivity. He waters to earth and satisfies its inhabitants. If a sparrow does not die apart from his will; than neither will one of his own image-bearers perish apart from his will and decree.

Day 6 is the capstone and it is described throughout **verses 14-24**. In **verse 14**, the land animals are supplied with food; man is likewise given ground to cultivate. **Verse 15** anticipates the gladness that comes from God’s creation given to man—oil for his face, bread for his stomach, wine for his for his heart. **Verse 23** gives us instruction for man’s relationship with the world—we are to work it, mine it, grow it, organize, develop it. **Verse 24** is the culminating feature of all God’s creation! Why has God made anything? It is to display his manifold wisdom, power, benevolence, and perfection. The king of all the earth has filled his planet with boundless life. Each aspect tells us something about him.

Therefore, we ought to study the creation in order to better know and love our Maker and Savior, Jesus Christ. God has made the world good, and even under the curse of sin, its beneficence is evident. So good is it still, that people worship the creation instead of the Creator. Yet, we are better to follow the words of Psalm 104, to bless the Lord for all that he has given to us in creation. For indeed, “all things were created through him and for him.”

Soli Deo Gloria, dss