

# PSALM 104



**GOD, MY EXCEEDING JOY**  
A JOYFUL JOURNEY THRU THE PSALMS

December 11, 2022 – THE MASTER MAKER

## I. GENRE: Song of **Praise** from the Individual

- A.** Ps 104 has all the marks of a praise song, including introductory and concluding calls to praise and an explicit cause for praise.
- In this psalm the cause for praise is a lengthy meditation on God's creative power (vv. 5-30).
  - The worshipper in this song is an individual who marvels at God's creative power. He knows that though Yahweh is majestic and mighty, he still relates to him individually ("my God," vv. 1, 33).
  - Near the end of the song is an imprecatory **prayer** for the removal of the wicked (v. 35a), but this lone element does not convert the prayer into a lament.
- B.** Ps 104 is often called a "**creation** psalm" because of its focus on God's creative work. Other creation pss include 8, 19, 29, 65, & 148. Ps 104 is the longest of these.
- There is no single "creation" genre, so this label relates to the songs content rather than its form.
  - The form of this poem is a song of praise, and the cause for praise relates to God's masterful work in creation.
- C.** Students of the Ancient Near East have observed some similarities between this psalm and some Egyptian and Canaanite texts praising various deities. But the similarities are very general and do not indicate that the Israelites have merely adapted pagan texts.

## II. SETTING

### A. AUTHOR & BACKGROUND

<b>PSALM 104</b> <small>© M. Scott Bashor 2022</small>		<b>PURPOSE:</b> The psalmist muses on Yahweh's great glory evidenced in His creation, a work which He not only executed magnificently but also maintains sovereignty. Yahweh's preservation motivates the psalmist's praise & creates a yearning for a cleansing in the world of humanity.		<b>TYPE:</b> Song of Praise from the individual <b>Author:</b> Unknown <b>Date:</b> Perhaps during the Babylonian exile, 586 - 539 BC <b>Note:</b> This vision of the created world may include elements from both the Creation and Flood narratives (Gen 1 & 7).	
<b>OPENING PRAISE:</b> BLESSING THE CREATOR FOR HIS MAJESTIC GREATNESS vv. 1-4	<b>CENTRAL MEDITATION:</b> YAHWEH, THE MASTERFUL CREATOR & SUSTAINER vv. 5-30	<b>CONCLUDING PRAISE:</b> BLESSING THE CREATOR FOR HIS SOVEREIGN GREATNESS vv. 31-35	<b>Self-Exhortation to Bless Yahweh</b> v. 1a	<b>Declaration of Praise for the Creator</b> v. 1b-4	<b>Personal Ascription of Praise</b> v. 1b
<b>Description of Yahweh's Greatness</b> vv. 1c-4 <i>Clothed with Light &amp; Glory</i> v. 1c-2a <i>Inhabiting the Space above the Earth</i> vv. 2b-3a <i>Traveling the Heavens Freely</i> vv. 3bc <i>Commanding the Elements as His Messengers</i> v. 4	<b>Yahweh's Founding of the Earth &amp; Sea</b> vv. 5-9 The Earth Established Firmly v. 5 The Ancient Deep Separated vv. 6-9 The Land Once Covered v. 6 <i>The Retreat of the Waters</i> v. 7 <i>The Formation of Land Features</i> v. 8 <i>The Boundaries Firmly Established</i> v. 9	<b>Yahweh's Watering of the Fruitful Earth</b> vv. 10-18 <b>Well-Watered Valleys</b> vv. 10-12 <i>The Creation of Springs</i> v. 10 <i>The Nourishment of Wild Animals &amp; Birds</i> vv. 11-12 <b>Well-Watered Mountains</b> vv. 13-18 <i>The Provision of Rain</i> v. 13 <i>For Domesticated Cattle &amp; Irrigated Crops</i> v. 14 <i>For Cultivated Vineyard &amp; Orchard Products</i> v. 15 <i>For High Forest Habitats: Tall Cedars for Birds, &amp; Heights for Wild Creatures</i> vv. 16-18	<b>Yahweh's Ordering Seasons &amp; Time</b> vv. 19-23 <b>The Creation of Lunar Seasons</b> v. 19a <b>The Ordaining of the Solar Night</b> v. 19b-22a <i>Sunset &amp; the Transition to Night</i> v. 19b-20a <i>Nocturnal Creatures Supplied by God</i> vv. 20b-21	<b>Yahweh's Mastery of the Majestic Sea</b> vv. 24-30 <b>Exclamation of Praise for Yahweh's Wonders of Creation</b> v. 24 <i>Musing on the Wonders of the Sea</i> vv. 25-26 <i>The Great Place of Swarming Life</i> v. 25 <i>The Place of Great Ships &amp; Greater Creatures</i> v. 25	<b>Declaration of Praise for the Creator</b> vv. 31-34 <b>Wish-Prayer for God's Glory</b> v. 31 <b>Responses to Yahweh's Glory</b> vv. 32-34 <i>The Creation's Impersonal Response</i> v. 32 <i>The Psalmist's Vowed Response</i> vv. 33-34 <b>Imprecation on the Wicked: A Prayer for the Earth's Cleansing</b> v. 35ab <b>Self-Exhortation to Bless Yahweh</b> v. 35c <b>Concluding Hallelujah</b> vv. 35d

1. Since the author is unknown, this poem is called an “orphan ps.”
2. Because there are no references to organized worship or the people of Israel, it is possible that the psalm was written during the Babylonian **exile** (586 BC – 539 BC).

## B. PLACEMENT

1. Pss 103 and 104 balance each other in numerous ways.
  - a. They both begin and end with, “Bless Yahweh, O my soul,” and these are the only pss that contain the phrase.
  - b. Ps 103 ends by speaking of all things in God’s dominion, and Ps 104 lists out many creatures within it.
  - c. Both teach about God as the King : He is the King of redemption (103) and the King of nature (104).
  - d. Both repeat Yahweh’s name often (103 = 11; 104 = 10).
  - e. Both mention birds (103:5; 104:12, 17).
2. Pss 104 and 105 focus on God’s sovereign control: of nature (104) and Israel’s history (105).
3. Ps 104 is part of the conclusion (103-106) to Book IV.
  - a. From Ps 103-106, each psalm gets progressively **longer**, creating a crescendo of praise.
  - b. Each is a poem of praise focusing on God’s worthiness.
  - c. Beginning with Ps 104, each contains the term, “Hallelujah.”

## III. STRUCTURE

- A. As a song of praise, it follows the normal form: a call to praise (1-4), cause for praise (5-30), & repeated call to praise (31-35).
- B. The cause for praise is the central **meditation** of the poem which itself divides into 4 segments of unequal length.

## IV. FEATURES & APPLICATION (more to be shared next week)

- A. **Repeated Terms & Concepts.** In addition to the name of Yahweh (10 x’s), other repeated notions include God’s activity with creation (about 30 x’s), water sources (12+ x’s), and the “earth” (7 xs).
- B. **Shifting Pronouns.** Ps 104 alternates between speaking about Yahweh (14 vv.) to speaking to Yahweh (13 vv.). These shifts do not mark change in focus or thought but are a kind of poetic variation.
- C. **The First Hallelujah.** V. 35 ends with, “Praise the LORD.” This is one Hebrew word, *hallelujah*, means, “you [all] must praise Yah.” The term appears here for the first time. In the OT it is found only in the Pss & only in orphan pss, suggesting it was a term that developed later in OT history as a phrase used in corporate **worship**.
- D. **The **Days** of Creation.** Ps 104 is in some ways a poetic retelling of the creation account of Gen. 1. There are loose parallels between the days of creation and the progress of the psalm.
  - Day 1 (Gen. 1:3–5) light—Ps 104:2
  - Day 2 (Gen. 1:6–8) firmament divides the waters— Ps 104:2–4
  - Day 3 (Gen. 1:9–10) land and water distinct— Ps 104:5–9
  - Day 3 (Gen. 1:11–13) vegetation and trees— Ps 104:14–17
  - Day 4 (Gen. 1:14–19) luminaries as timekeepers— Ps 104:19–23
  - Day 5 (Gen. 1:20–23) creatures of sea and air— Ps 104:25–26
  - Day 6 (Gen. 1:24–28) animals & man— Ps 104:14-15, 21–24
  - Day 6 (Gen. 1:29–31) food for all creatures—Ps 104:27–28
- E. **Recreation After the **Flood**.** The discussion in vv. 5-9 about God’s placing restricting the waters may refer partly to God’s original creative work (Gen 1) & His re-creative work after the Flood (Gen 7).
- F. **The Personal Creator:** The ps focuses on Yahweh as the masterful Creator of nature, and Israel is never mentioned. Nonetheless, the psalmists refers to him as “my God.” The Creator is also a redeemer.
- G. **The Problem with Creation:** The description of the creation is beautiful, but it is not Edenic. There is death in the world (21, 29-30). And the worst problem is sinful man (35ab) which must be dealt with. The psalm ends with a realization that a remaking of the creation, an earth in which righteousness will dwell. This sets the mood for the hope of restoration through God’s Son.