

THE WATERS OF THE EARTH: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF PSALM 104:1-9

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Ps 104:6-9 is viewed as a reference to the flood of Noah, not the original creation week. Support for this interpretation is drawn from broad studies in the psalm's setting, literary structure, and grammar. Current literature on the psalm is brought into the discussion. The conclusion is drawn that the psalm displays a unique cosmology and a perspective including not only Yahweh's creative power, but also Yahweh's providential control in judgment and blessing. More specifically, Ps 104:8a speaks of the catastrophic tectonic activities associated with the Genesis flood.

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INTRODUCTION

PSALM 104 is a majestic hymn of praise which extols Yahweh as creator and sustainer of the natural world. As a companion hymn to Psalm 103, it calls upon the individual worshiper to add his voice to the vast chorus of praise ascending to the very heavenly dwelling place of God.

The specific issue for discussion in this study is the meaning of vv 6-9. Most would argue that the psalm reflects the six day creation week of Genesis 1, and that the specific reference in Ps 104:6-9 is to the events of the first two days of the week which culminate in Gen 1:9. However, others have suggested that the Noachic flood is in view, here, and that the psalm goes far beyond the limits of Genesis 1.

Additionally, a specific problem is encountered in the translation and interpretation of v 8a of the psalm. What is going up and down? Is it the waters or the mountains? If the former is accepted, both textual and imagery problems develop; if the latter, contextual problems arise.

The purpose of this article, therefore, is to determine if it is a viable alternative to interpret Ps 104:6-9 as a reference to the Noachic deluge. Additionally, it will seek to determine the best translation of v 8a in light of syntax, imagery and context. A more general purpose

of this study, however, is to exegete Ps 104:1-9 taking into consideration factors such as structure, setting, and literary history.

Essential to ascertaining the proper interpretation of Ps 104:6-9 is a broad analysis of the psalm in terms of its form, its setting in Israel's liturgy, and its literary relationships with similar ancient Near Eastern hymns. The first section of this study covers these areas. In particular, of great significance is the analysis of the psalm to determine if, in fact, the six day creation week forms the organizational skeleton, or if there are other structural analyses that would see the psalm in a broader perspective. Then the second section supplies an exegesis of vv 1-9 which is built upon the backgrounds and structural framework determined in the first section. The first five verses are included in this study in order to provide a preparatory textual analysis for the treatment of vv 6-9.

It is shown that vv 5-13 form an independent stanza of the psalm, with two subunits comprised of vv 5-9 and 10-13 respectively. Therefore, for the sake of completeness, vv 10-13 and their relationship to the previous subunit are summarized. The critical text for analysis is vv 6-9. Therefore, while the psalm is analyzed in its entirety for the purpose of ascertaining structure, the study basically limits itself to the first nine verses. While a thorough analysis of the entire psalm would obviously be profitable, a satisfactory solution to the problems noted above may be determined within the parameters outlined for this study.

THE SETTING OF PSALM 104

Several considerations must be taken into account when a study of the setting of Psalm 104 is undertaken. These may be enumerated as follows: (1) the question of the place of the psalm in the liturgy of Israel, (2) its literary relationship to other similar ancient Near Eastern hymns, (3) its literary relationship to the Genesis account of creation, and (4) an analysis of the structure of the psalm itself.

The Psalm in Israel's Liturgy

Allen argues that on the basis of the initial and final self exhortation, as well as the personal references in vv 33-34, the psalm can be characterized as an "individual hymn."¹ However, it has usually been assigned a role in the corporate worship of Israel as a self exhortation to praise which in turn was to inspire communal worship.² Several

¹Leslie K. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, in Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard, et al. (Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 28.

²Ibid.

have attempted to identify a specific setting for the psalm. Humbert links the psalm with some kind of Israelite autumn festival parallel with the Babylonian New Year Festival,³ though his position has not been widely accepted.⁴ Craigie argues for the setting of the dedication of Solomon's temple.⁵ He maintains that the psalm is firmly within the indigenous Hebrew poetic tradition, and that a reconstruction of 1 Kgs 8:12-13 based on the LXX reflects the imagery of Psalm 104.⁶ The first two lines of the Kings passage as reconstructed are viewed as reflecting Egyptian and Mesopotamian sun hymns⁷ with a polemic intent. Additionally, he believes that the last two lines reflect the adaptation of a Ugaritic Baal myth with, however, a retention of the distinctive Hebrew theology concerning the temple as a dwelling place for Yahweh. These same motifs are evident in Psalm 104; hence, its association with Solomon's temple dedication.⁸ Nevertheless, the evidence both for the reconstruction of the Kings text and the association of Psalm 104 with Solomon's Temple dedication is rather tenuous. Certainly, there is nothing that militates against an early date for the psalm, but the attempt to be this precise is somewhat precarious. Crusemann has contended for a late date and non-cultic setting for the psalm based on the mixed nature of the form of the hymn (plural summons, self exhortation, etc.).⁹ However, several lines of evidence have been forwarded which favor a pre-exilic date. These include the preterite use of the imperfect, the use of הִיָּתוּ in vv 11 and 20, and perhaps the usage of הֵן as a relative pronoun in vv 8 and 26 (cf. אֲשֶׁר in vv 16, 17).¹⁰

It should be noted that Psalm 103 opens and closes in the same way as Psalm 104 and is attributed to David. Psalm 104 is untitled except in the LXX which attributes it to David, and claims have been made that the LXX should be accepted because of the common opening and closing invocations. However, the common structure is reason enough to explain their juxtaposition in the psalter and

³ P. Humbert, "La relation de Genese et du Psaume 104 avec la liturgie du Nouvel-An israelite," *RHPR* 15 (1935) 22-27.

⁴ See in particular A. van der Voort, "Genese 1:1a 2:4a et Psaume 104," *RB* 58 (1951) 343-45.

⁵ Peter C. Craigie, "The Comparison of Hebrew Poetry: Psalm 104 in Light of Egyptian and Ugaritic Poetry," *Semitics* 4 (1974) 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 10, 19.

⁷ For examples of such hymns, see the "Hymn to Aton" (*ANET*, 369-71) and the "Shamash Hymn" (*ANET*, 389-90).

⁸ Craigie, "Comparison," 10, 19.

⁹ F. Crusemann, *Studien zur Formgeschichte von Hymnus and Danklied in Israel* (WMANT 32; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1969) 301-2.

¹⁰ Cf. D. A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry* (SBLDS 3; Missoula: Scholars, 1972) 42-43, 54, 63, 77; cf. Allen, *Psalms*, 29.

common authorship is in no way required.¹¹ Thus, the hymn seems to have been a companion hymn to Psalm 103 which then may very well place it into the Davidic liturgical setting.

The Psalm in Relation to ANE Hymnology

Recent scholarship has stressed the resemblances between this psalm and Ahkenaton's Hymn to the Sun (14th C. B.C.).¹² The references to lions creeping about at night (vv 20-21; cf. lines 17-20), man's daytime activities (vv 22-23; cf. lines 27-29), the contentment of animals and birds (vv 11-14; cf. lines 30-36), activities of creatures and ships of the sea (vv 25-26; cf. lines 37-40), the adulation of the creator by creation (v 24; cf. lines 58-60), the dependence of man upon God (v 27; cf. lines 66-67), waters and mountains (vv 6, 10; cf. lines 66-67), and finally the life giving character of the divine being (vv 29-30; cf. lines 108-9),¹³ all seem to indicate some kind of literary relationship.

Some have tried to prove a direct relationship between Akhenaton's hymn and the psalm.¹⁴ Breasted states, "The hymn of Ikhnaton thus reveals to us the source of the Hebrew Psalmist's recognition of the gracious goodness of God in the maintenance of his creatures, even the most insignificant."¹⁵

While most commentators stress some kind of relationship, caution is usually expressed. Dahood and others posit a Canaanite mediation of the hymn.¹⁶ It is postulated that the Phoenicians, because of their close commercial and cultural contact with Egypt, brought the hymn into their own literary history, and that the Hebrews obtained it from the Phoenicians.¹⁷ Bernhardt argues, on the basis of both theological and cosmological differences, that the relationship is quite general. He maintains that there was a similar literary Gattung in ancient Egypt and that it is not necessary to suggest that the psalmist

¹¹ Allen, *Psalms*, 26.

¹² *ANET*, 369-71.

¹³ Cf. *ibid.*, 370-71; also Allen, *Psalms*, 29.

¹⁴ Crusemann, *Studien*, 287; James Breasted, *The Dawn of Conscience* (New York: Charles Scribners', 1933), 366-70; A. Weigall, *The Life and Times of Akhnaton. Pharaoh of Egypt* (revised; London: Butterworth, 1922), 134-36.

¹⁵ Breasted, *The Dawn of Conscience*, 368.

¹⁶ M. Dahood, *Psalms III*, 101-150 (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) 33; cf. Georges Nagel, "A propos des rapports du psaume 104 avec les textes égyptiens," *Festschrift für Alfred Bertholet*, ed. O. Eissfeldt, et al. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950) 395-403; H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen* (BKAT 15:2.5; Ausgabe, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978) 880; and Pierre Auffert, "Note sur la structure littéraire du Psaume 104 et ses incidences pour une comparaison avec l' Hymne à Aton et Gen 1," *RSR* (1982) 73-82.

¹⁷ Dahood, *Psalms III*, 33.

had a specific knowledge of the Egyptian hymn.¹⁸ Craigie argues from a similar angle, maintaining that common motifs, subject matter, and intent will naturally result in similar hymns.¹⁹ As noted previously, he finds parallels in other Egyptian sun hymns, a Mesopotamian hymn to Shamash, and in particular, the Ugaritic Baal myth.²⁰ However, he maintains that this may well indicate an association of ideas rather than a literary relationship.²¹ Craigie's thesis, particularly concerning the Ugaritic Baal myth, is built heavily upon the reconstruction of the 1 Kgs 8:12-13 text, and upon the fact that Phoenician craftsmen were used in the construction of the temple. This latter fact causes Craigie to see the psalm as a polemic against the theology of Baal. This may well be so, but it does not prove the literary dependence he seeks to demonstrate.

Kidner is aware of the various similarities between Ahkenaton's hymn and the psalm, but also aptly notes the wide divergences between the two, both in content and theology. He states, "Theologically, it displays the incalculable difference between worshipping the sun and worshipping its Maker; indeed the psalm's apparent allusions to this famous hymn seem designed to call attention to this very point."²² Hence, there is no reason to suggest literary dependence upon these pagan hymns or borrowing of theological concepts and ideas. A description by the psalmist of the natural world inevitably leads to ideas and imagery common to religious expression but which also can be used as an apology for the true God and a polemic against false gods.

The Psalm in Relation to Genesis

That there is some relationship to the Genesis account of creation is obvious. Sequences are largely the same and there is an overlap of vocabulary.²³ Kidner maintains that the psalm is modelled "fairly closely" on Genesis 1 and that the stages of creation are starting points for praise within the psalm.²⁴

However, the nature and extent of this relationship is not so obvious. Allen observes that there is a basic difference in style--the psalm is exuberant and free while Genesis is schematic and logical.

¹⁸ K. H. Bernhardt, "Amenhophis IV and Psalm 104," *MIO* 15 (1969) 205-6.

¹⁹ Craigie, "Comparison," 13-15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

²² Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*. in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1975), 367-68.

²³ *Ibid.*, 368.

²⁴ Cf. Kidner's chart (*Ibid.*) and also Allen's brief discussion (*Psalms*, 31).

There are also some differences in the order of events, particularly concerning men and animals.²⁵

Humbert argues that Psalm 104 depends upon Genesis,²⁶ while van der Voort argues, on the basis of various differences and the use of anthropomorphisms, that Genesis reflects the use of the psalm.²⁷ Craigie and Anderson opt for a mediating position of a common cultic origin for both texts.²⁸ From a more conservative perspective, one would have to acknowledge the priority of the Genesis text.²⁹ However, of greater concern for this study is the commonly accepted notion that the psalm reflects only the days of creation as recorded in Gen 1:1-2:3. Fullarton argues that the sequence of the creative days is "the most outstanding factor in the structure of the psalm."³⁰ Kidner also develops his whole discussion around the days of creation and says that later scenes in the psalm develop initial glimpses with the result that there is a mingling and overlapping of the creation days as described in Genesis.³¹ Yet as these various analyses are examined, one quickly finds that the attempt to relegate the psalm to such strictures is artificial. Some emend the text to fit their preconceived structure,³² while others excuse sections that do not precisely fit the pattern on the basis of an exuberant style or poetic license.³³

Therefore, one suspects that while Genesis 1 may be in view, this does not exhaust the full intent and content of the hymn. Rather, it is apparent that the psalm goes beyond the creation motif into a more general motif of providential preservation of the world by God. This not only explains statements regarding God's general preservation of creation, but also explains references to the destruction of his creation through the global catastrophe of the Noachic deluge, an integral part of ancient Hebrew cosmology.

²⁵ Allen, *Psalms*, 31.

²⁶ Humbert, "La relation," 21.

²⁷ van der Voort, "Genese 1:1 a 2:4a," 341-46.

²⁸ Craigie, "Comparison," 18; A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, vol. 2 (NCB; Greenwood: Attic, 1972) 7 17.

²⁹ Cf. Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 368; and F. Delitzsch, *Psalms*, vol. 3 trans. Francis Bolton in *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 127. It is far beyond the scope of this study to discuss the date and authorship of the Pentateuch. A Mosaic authorship and 15th century B.C. date for the Pentateuch is assumed for purposes of this study, which *de facto* results in the priority of Genesis over most of the psalmic materials.

³⁰ Kemper Fullarton, "The Feeling for Form in Psalm 104," *JBL* 40 (1921) 43.

³¹ Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 368.

³² As does Fullarton, "Feeling for Form," 48, who in turn accuses Gunkel, Staerk, Duhm, Briggs and others of going too far in this regard.

³³ As does Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 368.

The next logical step, therefore, is an analysis of the structure of the psalm to determine whether it can be structurally limited to the creation narrative.

Literary Analyses of the Psalm

As Allen observes, little specific work has been done on the structure of the psalm.³⁴ Paragraph divisions are usually assigned on the basis of apparent thought changes with little regard for internal textual criteria.³⁵

An early analysis was suggested by Fullarton who manipulated the material in order to fit in the first five days of the creation week of Genesis. He states, "The key to the analysis is, of course, the first chapter of Genesis."³⁶ He is rather free in his handling of the text, transposing vv 16 and 17 to fit between vv 11 and 12 in stanza 3 (vv 10-12),³⁷ and suggesting that v 18 was added when the last part of stanza 4 (vv 13-15) was lost.³⁸ Obviously there is a measure of artificiality here, since there is no attempt to establish the structure from internal textual data.

Kidner also maintains that the psalm is structured around the creation week.³⁹ Day 1 is seen in v 2a; day 2 in 2b-4; day 3 in 5-9 with elaboration in 10-18; day 4 in 19-23 and perhaps 24; day 5 in 25-26 (but only the sea); and day 6 is "anticipated" in 21-24 and discussed in 27-28 (and perhaps 29-30) in terms of "food appointed for all creatures."⁴⁰ As noted previously, he recognizes that the days of Genesis overlap and mingle and that the days of creation are only starting points for the creation drama.⁴¹ Yet there is still a measure of artificiality in his attempt to impose the structure of Genesis 1 on the psalm.

Recently, however, two studies have suggested structural formulations for the psalm. Alden postulates a ten-strophe chiasmic structure shown by the following pattern:⁴²

³⁴ Allen, *Psalms*, 31.

³⁵ E.g., G. R. Driver, "The Resurrection of Marine and Terrestrial Creatures," *JSS* 7 (1962) 22; cf. also E. Beauchamp, "Structure strophique des Psaumes" *RevScRel* 58 (1968) 199-223.

³⁶ Fullarton, "Feeling for Form," 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁹ Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 368.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Robert L. Alden, "Chiastic Psalms III: A Study in the Mechanics of Semitic Poetry in Psalms 101-150," *JETS* 21 (1978) 201.

I	A Bless the LORD, O my soul.
2-14	B God's creation of the land and what is on it.
15	C The benefits to man
16- I 8	D The benefits to animals
19a	E The moon
19b	E The sun
20-22	D Animals work at night
23	C Man works in the daytime
24-32	B God's creation of the seas and what is in them.
33-35	A Bless the LORD, O my soul.

He observes that the B stanzas are long, but notes several key terms that seemingly tie them together.⁴³ The major criticisms of this analysis are the relative imbalance of the various stanzas and the rather novel determinations of the boundaries of the stanzas.

Allen has suggested a five-strophe structure with subdivisions of the central three units.⁴⁴ His analysis may be schematized as follows:

A vv 1-4
B vv 5-13
b ₁ vv 5-9
b ₂ vv 10-13
C vv 14-23
c ₁ vv 14-18
c ₂ vv 19-23
B' vv 24-30
b ₁ vv 24-26
b ₂ vv 27-30
A' vv 31-35

Several factors that Allen notes need to be emphasized. First, the term **עֲשֵׂה** ends strophe A and begins strophe A'; it also ends strophe B and begins strophe B'; finally it stands in the middle of strophe C (v 19). Second, the divine name **יְהוָה** in strophes A and A' serve to indicate their complementary nature. Third, the repetition of the terms **אָדָם** and **עֲבֹדָה** in both vv 14 and 23 indicate an inclusio, marking the limits of the central strophe (C). A similar phenomenon is observable with the repetition of the term **אֶרֶץ** in vv 5 and 13, again indicating an inclusio and marking the limits of strophe B, as well as a central instance of the term at v 9. Additionally, a clear theme dominates strophe B as indicated by the fourfold repetition of the term **יָרִים**. Finally, clear indications of a new thought are observable by the exclamation at v 24 (beginning strophe B') and the expression of the wish at v 31 (beginning stroph A).⁴⁵

43 Ibid.

44 Allen, *Psalms*, 32.

45 Ibid.

Allen's presentation is quite convincing, especially in light of the fact that it essentially retains the more traditional subdivisions (such as in *BHS*), yet puts them into structural perspective. Allen concludes, "The common exegetical divisions are thus vindicated by and large, but their role within the overall structure has hitherto been missed."⁴⁶ This particular analysis has clear implications for the present study. As noted earlier, commentators have insisted that the psalm essentially reflects the six day creation week of Gen 1:1-2:3. However, while the events of the six day creation week may be reflected in the material, these events are not the skeleton upon which the psalm is constructed. The hymn goes beyond the stricture of Genesis 1 into a statement of Yahweh's general relationship to the world, both as creator and sustainer (cf. Col. 1:16-17). When the artificial limiting of the scope of the psalm to the creation event in Israel's cosmology is removed, God's general providence throughout history can be seen. This opens the way for seeing vv 6-9 in particular as a reference to the great deluge of Genesis 6-9.

For purposes of this study, therefore, Allen's structural analysis has been adopted and applied directly to the verses under study.

Summary

It may be stated in summary that although the date and provenience of the psalm are uncertain, there is no reason to relegate it to the post-exilic era.

Second, although there are resemblances to other ancient Near Eastern hymns, there is no convincing evidence to suggest that the psalm is either directly or indirectly dependent upon such sources. Rather, similarities arise from common imagery and intent. The theology of Psalm 104 is vastly different from the other ancient Near Eastern materials and one must conclude that there was an autonomous literary development. This is not to say that the hymn was composed in a vacuum, but that the theological concepts are founded in the moral and ethical monotheism of the Hebrew faith.

Third, there is an obvious literary relationship to the Genesis account of creation. However, from a structural analysis, it is clear that the psalm cannot be restricted to the scope of Genesis 1. Rather, the psalm describes the creative and providential acts of Yahweh in the world.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF PSALM 104:1-9

As stated at the outset, the primary purpose of this study is to determine the significance of the psalmist's statements concerning Yahweh's activities in relation to the waters described in vv 6-9. It has already been established structurally that the psalm speaks of more than the creation week of Genesis. Now it becomes necessary to examine the text in detail to determine more precisely the intent of the psalmist.

An Outline of the Psalm

Based on Allen's analysis, the following broad outline has been developed:

- 1A. Prologue: Yahweh is introduced as the majestic and sovereign God of the created universe (vv 1-4)
- 2A. Stanza 1: Yahweh uses the waters of the earth both to destroy and to sustain the creation (vv 5-13)
 - 1b. The waters of the earth once covered the earth but now are established in their place (vv 5-9)
 - 2b. The waters of the earth now provide for all of Yahweh's creation (vv 10-13)
- 3A. Stanza 2: Yahweh providentially controls and provides for the world of man (vv 14-23)
 - 1b. This providential care extends to the vegetation of the earth by which provision is made for man's joy and strengthening (vv 14-18)
 - 2b. This providential care extends to the control of the heavens by which both human and animal activities are regulated (vv 19-23)
- 4A. Stanza 3: Yahweh is in total sovereign control of the world, both in its creation and in its sustaining (vv 24-30)
 - 1b. This sovereign activity created the waters upon and in which ships and living creatures exist (vv 24-26)
 - 2b. This sovereign activity determines life and death for all of creation (vv 27-30)
- 5A. Epilogue: Praise to Yahweh for his powerful creative and providential activities (vv 31-35)

Outline of Verses 1-13

Since this study is primarily concerned with vv 6-9, a more precise outline has been developed for the prologue and first stanza.

- 1 A. Prologue: Yahweh is introduced as the majestic and sovereign God of the created universe (vv 1-4)
 - 1b. Invocation (v 1a)
 - 2b. A statement of Yahweh's greatness and majesty (v 1bc)

- 3b. A description of Yahweh's greatness and majesty (vv 2-4)
 - 1c. Yahweh's regal attire (v 2a)
 - 2c. Yahweh's regal tent (v 2b)
 - 3c. Yahweh's regal chambers (v 3a)
 - 4c. Yahweh's regal chariot (v 3b)
 - 5c. Yahweh's regal walk (v 3c)
 - 6c. Yahweh's regal messengers (v 4)
- 2A. Stanza 1: Yahweh uses the waters of the earth both to destroy and to sustain the creation (vv 5-13)
 - 1b. The waters of the earth once covered the earth, but now are established in their place (vv 5-9)
 - 1c. The earth is founded (v 5)
 - 2c. The earth undergoes a deluge of water (vv 6-9)
 - 1d. The waters cover the earth (v 6)
 - 2d. The waters flee from the surface of the earth (vv 7-8)
 - 3d. The waters are established in their place (v 9)
 - 2b. The waters of the earth now provide for all of Yahweh's creation (vv 10-13)
 - 1c. The act of Yahweh in providing water for sustenance (v 10)
 - 2c. A specific statement from grateful recipients for such provision (vv 11-12)
 - 3c. A general statement of the creation's satisfaction for God's care (v 13)

Textual Analysis

PROLOGUE: Yahweh is introduced as the majestic and sovereign God of the created universe (vv 1-4)

Invocation (v 1a)

The anonymous introductory phrase אֶת־יְהוָה בְּרַכֵּי נַפְשִׁי is repeated at the end of the psalm (v 35) forming an inclusio. This establishes the psalm as a hymn of praise to Yahweh, with particular emphasis upon individual praise as indicated by the term נַפְשִׁי.⁴⁷ The term נַפֵּשׁ is probably best rendered by the term "person" or "self," or even simply by the personal pronoun.⁴⁸ Hence, the psalmist is calling upon himself to praise Yahweh. At the same time it should be remembered that the psalm was in all likelihood sung as a corporate expression of praise in temple worship.⁴⁹

The term בְּרַכֵּי, a piel imperative from בָּרַךְ, means to "bless, praise, salute."⁵⁰ Oswalt states that to bless in the OT means "to endue with

⁴⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁸ Bruce K. Waltke. "נַפֵּשׁ," *TWOT* 2:590.

⁴⁹ Allen, *Psalms*, 28.

⁵⁰ BDB, 138.

power for success, prosperity, fecundity, longevity etc.”⁵¹ However, when used in acknowledgement of Israel's covenant God, the emphasis is upon praise for Yahweh and his saving activities on behalf of Israel or the individual worshiper.⁵² Hence, the psalm begins with a personal invocation for praise for Yahweh's mighty and majestic acts in the world of man.

A Statement of Yahweh's Greatness and Majesty (v 1bc)

This unit is identifiable by the usage of two perfect verbs (גָּדַלְתָּ, לָבַשְׁתָּ; note the following participles in v 2). After an introductory self-appropriation of Yahweh as the psalmist's personal God,⁵³ the psalmist makes a straightforward attributive statement, גָּדַלְתָּ מְאֹד, followed by a metaphorical statement, הוֹד וְהָדָר לָבַשְׁתָּ. The terms הוֹד and הָדָר seem to have been chosen for their literary assonance and contain clear royal connotations (cf. Job 40:10; Ps 96:6). Thus royal imagery is consistent with the descriptions that are to follow (cf. vv 2-4). Delitzsch observes הוֹד וְהָדָר is not the glory that belongs to God (as Jude 25), but rather it is the glory that he has put on.⁵⁴ The psalmist is seeing the greatness of Yahweh in terms of his actions rather than his essential being. His actions, however, reflect his essential being, particularly his sovereignty over the universe. The metaphorical usage of לָבַשְׁתָּ effectively anticipates the subsequent descriptions of the divine theophany as covered and housed by the components of nature.

A Description of Yahweh's Greatness and Majesty (vv 2-4)

Following a clear statement of the greatness and royal majesty of Yahweh, the psalmist employs six participles to describe his God. These participles not only indicate further characteristics of Yahweh, but the change from the perfect (v 1b) to participles (vv 2-4) delineates separate structural units within the prologue.

Allen sees עָטָה as parallel with לָבַשְׁתָּ and observes that there is a problem created by the participial form. He argues that the synonymous content of 1c and 2a point to a bicolon, and so suggests the proposed emendation תְּעַטֶּה based on haplography. He states that such a change "while not essential, would ease the problem."⁵⁵ How-

⁵¹ John N. Oswalt, "בָּרַךְ," *TWOT* 1:132.

⁵² Josef Scharbert, "בָּרַךְ," *TDOT* 2:286, 293.

⁵³ DSS 11QPs reads אֵל וְהִינוּ making it more of a communal statement; cf. J. A. Sanders, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1967) 160.

⁵⁴ Delitzsch, *Psalms III*, 128.

⁵⁵ Allen, *Psalms*, 26. The emendation comes from H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (HKA T 2.2.4; Ausgabe, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1926) 454; Kraus, *Psalmen*, 879; and Crusemann, *Studien*, 287, n. 2. Cf. also BHS apparatus, 1183.

ever, Allen has failed to take into account the nature of the six participial statements as introduced by 1bc. If one recognizes the statement and preparatory metaphor (as discussed above), there is no difficulty in taking the text as it stands.

Yahweh's Regal Attire (v 2a). As light was the first creation after the initial creation of an unformed and unfilled chaos (Gen 1:1-2), so the psalmist portrays the creator, first and foremost, as royally clad in light. The term **עָטָה** means to "wrap oneself, enwrap, envelop oneself."⁵⁶ In Ps 104:2a, then, Yahweh is portrayed as almost totally controlled by or identified as light (cf. Jer 43:12). Hence, this fundamental element of the natural world is relegated to merely being a part of Yahweh's garb—one may see the first hint of a polemic against the common sun worship that surrounded the Hebrews.

The term for garment here, **שָׂמְלָה**,⁵⁷ often rendered **שְׂמֹלֶת**,⁵⁸ means a "wrapper" or "mantle," usually referring to the outer cloak.⁵⁸ Dahood notes **כְּשָׂמְלָה** literally reads "as the garment," but observes on the basis of Pss 55:23; 85:13; 89:48; and 90:16 that the article may serve as a substitute for the pronominal suffix.⁵⁹ Hence, with Dahood (contra *KJV* and *NASB*) the line should read in the third person, "who is robed with the sun [1] as his garment."⁶⁰ This accords well with the third person configuration of the subsequent lines.

Dahood further calls **אֹר** "an accusative of material-with-which";⁶¹ hence the rendering "who is robed with. . . ." However, to translate **אֹר** as "sun" seems rather bold since there is nothing in the context to demand this translation and the evidence adduced by Dahood for this translation is less than convincing.⁶² Habel observes that "light is the theophanic mode of self manifestation which both reveals his presence and veils his holiness."⁶³

Yahweh's Regal Tent (v 2b). The psalmist next describes the abode of the royal creator in terms of a tent curtain. The term **יְרֵעָה**, while communicating the panoramic sense involved in the idea of heavens, reminds the worshiper of Yahweh's presence in the tabernacle. Hence, the stretching out of the heavens as a tent not only

⁵⁶ BDB, 741.

⁵⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 971.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Dahood, *Psalms III*, 34.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶² *Ibid.* The only text that could in any way support Dahood's suggestion is Job 31:6 where there is a clear context of moon and sun. Such a context is not present in Psalm 104.

⁶³ N. C. Habel, "He Who Stretches out the Heavens," *CBQ* 34 (1974) 422.

speaks of Yahweh's creative act but also directs attention to his personal abode. Such a phrase serves to portray Yahweh "as the creator who pitches the heavens to be an overarching tent within which he appears in luminous splendor."⁶⁴

Based on his suggestion that עֲטֹה should be emended to עֲטֹהָ, Allen assumes haplography again and emends נוֹטָה to הַנוֹטָה in accordance with *BHK*, *BHS*, and Kraus.⁶⁵ However, Allen's first suggestion was shown to be questionable; thus to have an anarthrous נוֹטָה accords well with the anarthrous עֲטֹה. Dahood further observes, "In 'ofeh and noteh are present fine rhyme and assonance. Hence the recommendation of *BHS* to add the article to noteh (*hannoteh*) may be declined without qualms."⁶⁶

Yahweh's Regal Chambers (v 3a). The description of the great Yahweh, clothed with honor and majesty, continues by means of hymnic participles. However, at this point the participles become arthrous (forming the basis of some of Allen's suggestions). Yet Delitzsch aptly notes the fact that determinate participles alternating with anarthrous participles (cf. Isa 44:24-28) indicate no more "than that the former are more predicative and the latter more attributive."⁶⁷ The imagery portrayed here is that of a celestial palace whose foundation beams are laid in the waters. Presumably, based on the context of "light" (2a), "heavens" (2b), "clouds" (3b), and "wind" (3c), the waters are heavenly waters (cf. Amos 9:6). Kidner observes, "The dizzy height of 'the waters above the firmament,' or the clouds, is pictured as but the base of God's abode, and this insubstantial support quite sufficient for the ethereal lightness of His palace."⁶⁸

The term הַמְקָרָה is apparently a denominative verb coming from קוֹרָה meaning "rafter" or "beam."⁶⁹ Both ideas, however, seem to derive from the verb קָרָה meaning "encounter, meet, befall."⁷⁰ Hence, the rafter or beam is that which meets or encounters some kind of structural support.

Dahood attempts to link the Hebrew term with a Ugaritic term *qryt* and Akkadian term *qaritu*, both meaning "granary."⁷¹ Hence, he suggests the translation, "Who stored with water his upper chambers." This, he argues, is congruent with the imagery of v 13. Additionally,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 423.

⁶⁵ Kraus, *Psalmen*, 879.

⁶⁶ Dahood, *Psalms III*, 33.

⁶⁷ Delitzsch, *Psalms III*, 128.

⁶⁸ Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 369; cf. Delitzsch, *Psalms III*, 128-29 for similar suggestions.

⁶⁹ BDB, 900.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 899.

⁷¹ Dahood, *Psalms III*, 34.

he adduces Job 37:9 in which קָרָה occurs (normally translated "cold" from קָרָר; cf. *KJV* and *NASB*). He translated this text, "Out of the chamber comes the tempest, and flowing waters[?] out of the store-room."⁷²

While Dahood's suggestion is plausible, the major argument against it is that to make this simply a statement of Yahweh storing water in the upper chambers would destroy the imagery describing Yahweh's regal chambers and thus the polemic involved. Additionally, as Habel notes, "these chambers are constructed 'in' the waters as might be expected from similar motifs pertaining to celestial storehouses or firmaments (Gen 1:6-8; Amos 9:6; Job 38:22)."⁷³ Hence, the more traditional rendering will be retained.

The term עֲלֵי יִתְיֹ is derived from the common verb עָלָה, and has the idea of a roof chamber or upper chamber (cf. Judg 3:23-25; 2 Kgs 4:10; 23:12; etc.). Hence, the picture is that of Yahweh's heavenly palace placed in the sky. His abode is above the celestial waters.

Yahweh's Regal Chariot (v 3b). Dahood argues that the force of עַל in the phrase עַל־כַּנְפֵי־רוּחַ (v 3c) extends to הַשָּׁמַיִם־עַבִּים (v 3b) resulting in the translation "who sets his chariot upon the clouds."⁷⁴ He is attempting to distinguish between Yahweh being transported by the clouds and Yahweh driving his chariot across the heavens.⁷⁵ However, the suggestion is grammatically unprecedented, and additionally, Baal is called "the Rider of the Clouds."⁷⁶ Yahweh is the true master of the heavens; it is he who rides the clouds.

Yahweh's Regal Walk (v 3 c). Again, polemic imagery is being used here. Yahweh is master of the storm. The prepositional phrase עַל־כַּנְפֵי־רוּחַ clearly speaks of Yahweh as creator and portrays his majestic and regal dominion of the atmospheric elements. The identical phrase appears in Ps 18:10[11], in a context of Yahweh's majesty of the created world. Hence, celestial forces are subjects of the divine creator an sovereign.⁷⁷

Yahweh's Regal Messengers (v 4). The final description of Yahweh has, in contrast to the previous five descriptions, a dual predicate to the initial participle עֹשֶׂה. The predicative phrases are

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Habel, "He who Stretches out," 423.

⁷⁴ Dahood, *Psalms III*, 34.

⁷⁵ Cf. S. Mowinkel, "Drive and/or Ride in the Old Testament," *VT* 12 (1962) 278-99.

⁷⁶ *ANET*, 132.

⁷⁷ Habel, "He who Stretches out," 422.

very similar and clearly **עֲשֵׂה** is implied from the first line to the second.

However, several problems are apparent. First, **אֵשׁ לִהְטֹת** is apparently improperly coordinated with **מִשְׂרָתָיו** in terms of number. Dahood attempts to reconcile this by taking **אֵשׁ** and **לִהְטֹת** as two separate nouns coordinated by asyndeton ('fire and flame' [cf. Joel 2:3]).⁷⁸ Similarly HHS suggests an emendation to **אֵשׁ וְלִהְטֹת**.⁷⁹ Dahood rejects the insertion of the **וְ** on the basis of meter.⁸⁰ Probably the best suggestion comes from Allen and others who suggest that **אֵשׁ** may have been considered a collective noun.⁸¹

Second, **אֵשׁ** is usually regarded as a feminine noun, and thus **לִהְטֹת** is improperly coordinated with respect to gender. 11QPs^a eliminates the problem by reading **לִהְטֹת**.⁸² However, since improper coordination of gender is not all that infrequent in the Hebrew text,⁸³ it would seem best to allow the MT to stand.

Finally, the major problem is that of determining the direct object of the participle **עֲשֵׂה**. Contextually it seems clear that **רוּחַוּת** and **אֵשׁ לִהְטֹת** should be direct objects so that the psalmist would be continuing to see nature as Yahweh's instrument: "He makes the winds his messengers, Flaming fire his ministers" (*NASB*). However, the LXX grammatically reverses the sentence: Ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πυρὸς φλόγα. Additionally, the author of Hebrews cites the LXX rendition in Heb 1:7. Kidner sees no contextual difficulty with this rendering which has the psalmist looking beyond the natural order of things to the heavenly host.⁸⁴ He further argues that the normal word order favors the LXX and notes that the argument of Heb I :7ff. is based on this rendering.⁸⁵

Yet as Allen notes, the LXX rendering is contextually improbable.⁸⁶ The psalmist is describing how the sovereign God of the universe is master of all natural forces and how he uses them to enhance his glory or to perform his service. Hence it would seem best to render v 4 with *NASB*. The LXX, therefore, with its tendency to spiritualize and elevate the supernatural, took the verse in the alternative sense, and the author of Hebrews, in making his point concerning

⁷⁸ Dahood, *Psalms III*, 35.

⁷⁹ BHS, 1183.

⁸⁰ Dahood, *Psalms III*, 35.

⁸¹ Allen, *Psalms*, 26; cf. GKC, 463. Delitzsch observes that this word has no plural (*Psalms III*, 129).

⁸² Cf. Y. Yadin, "Another Fragment (E) of the Psalms Scroll from Qumran Cave 11 (11QPsaa)," *Textus* 5 (1966) 1-10.

⁸³ Cf. GKC, 459-67.

⁸⁴ Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 369.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 369, n. 2.

⁸⁶ Allen, *Psalms*, 26.

Christ and the angels to his readers, used a text known to them. That Christ and the apostles used the LXX, even in places where it is at variance with the MT, is a well known fact. Apparently, they felt that they could make their point without compulsion to correct and clarify the difference between the Hebrew and Greek texts. McCullough observes that the author of Hebrews in particular may have deliberately used the version known to the local church to which he was writing in order to avoid confusion or opposition.⁸⁷ Thus, there is no evidence that would demand an adjustment of the more natural and contextual rendering of the MT in favor of the LXX or its citation in the NT.

Summary

Ps 104:2-4 describes Yahweh's greatness and majesty. It is interesting to note that the terms used in this description (upper waters, clouds, wind, and flaming fire [lightning]) collectively portray a common thunderstorm. This serves both to heighten its polemical value, and to prepare the worshiper for the description of the watery cataclysm which follows in the subsequent stanza.

STANZA 1: Yahweh uses the waters of the earth both to destroy and to sustain the creation (vv 5-13)

As noted in the outline, this stanza may be divided into two smaller units, the first discussing the use of water to destroy the earth in the past, and the second indicating the use of water to sustain the earth in the present. The parameters of this study necessitate emphasis upon the first subunit.

The scene changes from the heavens to the earth. In the prologue Yahweh is praised as the sovereign of the heavens which serve as his celestial tabernacle.⁸⁸ Even the storm with its wind, lightning, clouds, and waters is mastered by him. In this stanza Yahweh is portrayed as sovereign of the earth. The connection between the two is that the

⁸⁷ John C. McCullough, "The Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews," *NTS* 26 (1980) 379. To go into the occurrences and ramifications of the use of the LXX in the NT is beyond the scope of this study. A selected bibliography, particularly for Hebrews, is included by S. Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Amsterdam: Van Soest, 1961); K. J. Thomas, "Old Testament Citations in Hebrews," *NTS* (1965) 303-25; G. Howard, "Hebrews and the Old Testament Quotations," *NovT* 10:2-3 (1968) 208-16; and James W. Thompson, "Structure and Purpose of the Catena in Hebrews 1:5-13," *CBQ* 38 (1976) 352-63.

⁸⁸ Cf. Habel, "He who Stretches out," 417-30 for thorough discussion of this concept.

rain and storms portrayed in the prologue provide the water by which Yahweh's activities are performed in the following stanza.

The Waters of the Earth Once Covered the Earth,
But Now are Established in Their Place (vv 5-9)

Two movements are observable in this stanza. The first (v 5) is introductory, and establishes the setting for the new scene. The second (vv 6-9) is descriptive, and elaborates upon Yahweh's use of the waters to destroy the earth.

The Earth is Founded (v 5). A significant change in verbal aspect is seen in the term **יָסַד**. Since this is a Qal perfect, it interrupts the participial chain of vv 2-4. Most commentators want to reposit the term to **יָסֵד** as supported by LXX^A, LXX^L, and the Targums⁸⁹ and thus continue the hymnic participles. However, there is a major shift of scene from the heavens to the earth. The psalmist has highlighted this shift by a break in the verbal pattern. Thus, there is justification to retain the pointing of the MT.

The metaphorical expression **יָסַד אֶרֶץ עַל-מְכוֹנֶיהָ** (cf. Ps 24:2; Job 38:4-6) typically has been understood to reflect a primitive cosmology, namely, "the world, like a floating saucer, is anchored 'upon the seas.'"⁹⁰ This would seem to be particularly apparent in Ps 24:2a, "He has founded it [the earth] upon the seas." However, this kind of thinking fails to take into consideration two factors. First, as Craigie observes, Yam and Nahar represented a threat to order in Canaanite mythology, and Baal's victory over them resulted in his kingship. The psalmist here, however, shows that Yahweh is the creator of the ordered world.⁹¹ This, in turn, is linked with Yahweh's kingship. It was Yahweh who was the creator. It was Yahweh who brought order out of chaos.

Second, the cosmology known to the psalmist would be that of the Genesis account. To go to Ugaritic or other ancient Near Eastern materials to derive the basis for the Hebrews' conception of the creation and existence of the world, and to ignore Israel's own literary sources is unwise. Hebrew cosmology includes a seven day creation by

⁸⁹ Dahood, *Psalms III*, 35; Allen, *Psalms*, 26; Kraus, *Psalmen*, 879; and BHS, 1183.

⁹⁰ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms I-50*, in the Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard, et al. (Waco: Word, 1983) 212. Cf. A. R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1955) 52; L. I. J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World: A Philological and Literary Study* (AnBib 39; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970) 126-30; and T. M. Ludwig, "The Traditions of Establishing the Earth in Deutero-Isaiah," *JBL* 92 (1973) 345-57.

⁹¹ Craigie, *Psalms*, 212; cf. also Craigie, "Comparison," 10-21; and Anderson, *Psalms 2*, 720.

divine fiat, a flood destruction of that creation by an all powerful God, and a present providential maintenance of the post-flood world.

This becomes an essential factor in understanding any apparent link to Canaanite literature. First, one must acknowledge that there may well have been a common pool of imagery used by various peoples. Second, even if literary links can be demonstrated, Canaanite literature was not the basis or source for Hebrew thought. Rather, if it is cited, it is cited for polemical purposes to exalt Yahweh and his great acts above any other deity that might vie for the Hebrews' allegiance. The ethical monotheism of the Hebrew people was vastly different from the surrounding religions, and the thought of religious or cosmological dependence is extremely difficult to maintain.

Thus, while polemical aspects of this phrase may be granted, it is firmly rooted in the Hebrew traditions of a supernatural creation and the providential maintenance of the world. Since the foundations of the world were laid by divine fiat, the world was as permanent as the God that established it, namely, **בְּלִ-תְּמוֹט עוֹלָם וְעַד** (Ps 104:5; cf. Ps 33:9).

The Earth Undergoes a Deluge of Water (vv 6-9). A major element in Hebrew cosmology was the Noahic flood described in Genesis 6-9. Since the psalm cannot be restricted to the scope of the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2, it is not surprising that a reference to such a catastrophic event would be found in this psalm. Hence, the psalmist proceeds to describe this event.

The waters cover the earth (v 6). The masculine pronoun on **כִּסִּיתוּ** probably refers to the feminine noun **אֲרָץ** and may be explained either by the phenomenon of attraction (cf. 1 Sam 2:4), or by a reversion back to a basic masculine form as the discourse proceeds (cf. Exod 11:6; 2 Sam 17:13; Ezek 2:9).⁹² Allen suggests, however, that the **ו** may be an adaptation of an original **ה**, regarded as an archaic **ה**. Thus, **הַיָּם** is the subject and the form should be rendered **כִּסְתָהּ**. This results in vv 6a and 6b being synonymously parallel.⁹³ This latter view is speculative and problematic; in either case the sense is clear.

The term **הַיָּם** basically means a large body of water (cf. Pss 77:16; 107:26; Isa 51:10; 63:13; Ezek 26:19; Jonah 2:5). The attempt to link **הַיָּם** with Tiamat of the Enuma Elish story is well known,⁹⁴ but

⁹² Delitzsch, *Psalms III*, 130.

⁹³ Allen, *Psalms*, 26.

⁹⁴ Cf. D. W. Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times* (New York: Nelson, 1958) 19; also H. G. May, "Some Cosmic Connotations of Mayim Rabbim 'Many Waters,'" *JBL* 74 (1955) 9-21; and L. R. Fischer, "Creation at Ugarit and in the Old Testament," *VT* 15 (1965) 313-24.

has been generally rejected. Linguistically, **תְּהוֹם** cannot be derived from Tiamat. The root merely refers to deep waters and this meaning was kept in Hebrew but divinized in animistic Akkadian thought and perhaps also in Ugaritic thought.⁹⁵ The psalmist is merely stating that the earth was covered by a deluge of water, so much so that the waters stood "**עַל-הַיָּם**," This latter term reflects Gen 7:19-20, and any attempt to relate it to Genesis 1 in order to avoid the flood account must be considered rather arbitrary.

There is an interesting interchange of perfect and imperfect verbs in this verse as well as throughout the rest of the stanza. The account is initiated with the perfect verb **כָּסִיתוּ** (completed action⁹⁶) and then followed by a series of imperfects (incomplete action⁹⁷) until v 9 where the perfect verb is re-introduced to terminate the discourse. That there is a literary intent behind this seems clear. The psalmist sets the scene in motion with waters covering the earth. He then heightens the drama by verbs of incomplete action (imperfects) denoting the waters as "standing," "fleeing," "hastening away," etc. He then concludes the unit with another perfect verb, making the statement that a boundary has been set, thus indicating the completed and final nature of this act. Thus, while the worshiper is aware of the historical setting of the psalm, he is also allowed to enter into the drama of Yahweh's activity on earth.

The waters flee from the surface of the earth (vv 7-8). An example of synonymous parallelism is observable in v 7 with both lines of the verse introduced by a causal **מֵן**,⁹⁸ and with **גְּעַרְתֶּךָ** parallel to **קוֹל רַעְמָךָ** and **יְנוּסוּן** parallel to **יִחַפְּזוּן**. The term **גְּעַר** simply indicates "a check applied. . . through strong admonitions or actions."⁹⁹ To read the word in the sense of "war cry"¹⁰⁰ is too narrow a meaning for what the parallelism or context of the verse entails. The construct phrase **קוֹל רַעְמָךָ** may well be taken as an adjectival phrase¹⁰¹ and probably is best rendered "thunderous voice."

A major exegetical problem occurs in v 8. The question concerns the subjects of **יַעֲלוּ** and **יִרְדּוּ**. Is the subject of both verbs **מַיִם** (v 6) so

⁹⁵ R. Laird Harris, "תְּהוֹם," *TWOT* 2:965-66; also R. Laird Harris, "The Bible and Cosmology," *JETS* 5 (1963) 11-17; and W. White, "Tiamat," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* 5:744-45.

⁹⁶ Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline* (2d ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto, 1976) 29.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹⁹ Harold Stigers, "גְּעַר," *TWOT* 2:170.

¹⁰⁰ A. Caquot, "גְּעַר," *TDOT* 3:49; cf. also A. A. Macintosh, "A Consideration of the Hebrew גְּעַר," *VT* 19 (1969) 471-79.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1971) 69.

that v 8 continues the discussion of the activities of the flood waters, or are the subjects **הַרִים** and **בְּקַעוֹת**, respectively so that v 8 creates an interlude or parenthesis describing the means by which the waters returned to their place?

Sutcliffe has argued for the former possibility. He says that the psalmist is describing the ordering of the world in terms of his own experience. Thus, when he thinks of places destined by God for the waters, he is also reminded of the fact that springs are found in the mountains. Thus, even though water naturally flows downwards, it nonetheless gushes out high in the mountain regions.¹⁰² Sutcliffe translates the verse, "They go up to the mountains, they go down to the valleys to the place thou hast established for them."¹⁰³ His major objection to seeing "mountains" and "valleys" as subjects is that the context is describing the activity of waters.¹⁰⁴

Clifford, although he also understands "waters" to be the subject, effectively answers Sutcliffe's particular objections. He notes that the context (vv 8b, 9) is speaking of what confines the cosmic waters, not the water supply of Palestine.¹⁰⁵ Allen further observes that the scenario presented in those verses, in light of OT thinking, must be understood to refer to the ocean (cf. Gen 1:9).¹⁰⁶ Thus, Allen, who takes **הַיָּם** to be the subject of these verbs, concludes that the verse is a reference to the helter-skelter movement of ocean waters as they leave the mountains (cf. v 7).¹⁰⁷

Dahood views the mountains as celestial mountains and the valleys as the nether chasms. He observes that **הַרִים** in v 6 refers to mountains on earth, but suggests that it may legitimately be taken as something different in v 8.¹⁰⁸ However, Dahood's whole scenario is based upon a mythical concept of a three-tiered universe which is illegitimate in light of Hebrew cosmology (see above). Additionally, Clifford has demonstrated that Dahood's transfer of scenes from earth to heaven is contextually improbable.¹⁰⁹

Grammatically, the verse can be taken either way. **הַרִים** and **בְּקַעוֹת** can be taken as accusatives of place after verbs of motion,¹¹⁰ or as subjects following their respective verbs.¹¹¹ Thus, the argument is reduced to one of context and interpretation.

¹⁰² Edmund F. Sutcliffe, "A Note on Psalm CIV 8," *VT* 2 (1952) 14.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Richard J. Clifford, "A Note on Psalm 104:5-9," *JBL* 100 (1981) 88.

¹⁰⁶ Allen, *Psalms*, 27.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Dahood, *Psalms III*, 36-37.

¹⁰⁹ Clifford, "A Note," 88.

¹¹⁰ GKC, 373, per Allen, *Psalms*, 27.

¹¹¹ GKC, 455. Terrien is incorrect when he states that **יָרַד** is a masculine verb; therefore, **בְּקַעוֹת** (feminine plural) must be its indirect object (S. Terrien, "Creation,

Fullarton takes the line as parenthetical.¹¹² He maintains that v 8a offers an explanatory note as to how the waters fled to their established places (vv 7, 8b). He is supported textually by the LXX, Vulgate, Peshitta, and, more recently, *RSV*, *NAB*, and *NASB*. Thus, such a rendering is a clear viable alternative.¹¹³

As Allen and Clifford have demonstrated, Sutcliffe's suggestions create more problems than they solve. However, Allen's alternative of flood waters moving over mountaintops and down into valleys depends upon necessary grammatical elements not present in the text (cf. "over" and "into" in the NIV) and upon imagery that violates the natural order of things (waters moving up and down mountains). Hence, it seems best to read the line in its normal verb-subject syntactical pattern and to recognize it as an explanatory parenthetical line. The antecedent of לָהֶם (v 8b) is then taken to be מַיִם.

With this interpretation, the cataclysmic events of the Noahic deluge can be understood better. Massive tectonic activities characterized the latter part of the flood year with tremendous orogenic events. Mountain chains were thrust up and deep valleys and ocean basins were formed, the latter providing reservoirs for the massive amounts of water accumulated on the surface of the earth during the flood year. Whether this tremendous orogenic activity occurred in situ or as a result of the cataclysmic movement of continental plates¹¹⁴ is not elucidated in this text. However, the tectonic interpretation is completely consistent with the descriptions found in Genesis 6-9 (particularly Gen 7:11), and provides helpful information concerning this global catastrophe.¹¹⁵

The waters are established in their place (v 9). The psalmist now concludes the discussion of the Noahic deluge with a reference to the covenant with Noah described in Gen 8:20-22 and 9:11-17. That this psalmic statement cannot be a reference to Gen 1:9 (as Anderson maintains¹¹⁶) is evidenced by the fact that, according to Hebrew cos-

Cultus, and Faith in the Psalter," *Theological Education* 2 [1966] 116-28). The gender of a perfect 3 pl. verb is common.

¹¹² Fullarton, "Feeling for Form," 52, n. 8.

¹¹³ Cf. also Ludwig, "Traditions of Establishing the Earth," 351.

¹¹⁴ Such a suggestion has been made by Stuart Nevins, "Continental Drift, Plate Tectonics, and the Bible," *Acts and Facts*, Impact Series no. 32, 5 (February 1976) 3; cr. also David G. Barker, "Biblical Evidences for Continental Drift," *Bible Science Newsletter* 15:10 (October 1977) 2-3.

¹¹⁵ To go into the arguments, evidences and mechanisms for a global flood is beyond the scope of this study. The reader is referred to two basic texts: John C. Whitcomb, Jr. and Henry Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962); and Joseph C. Dillow, *The Waters Above: Earth's Pre-Flood Vapor Canopy* (Chicago: Moody, 1981); as well as the voluminous literature on the subject particularly produced by the Institute for Creation Research.

¹¹⁶ Anderson, *Psalms* 2, 720.

mology, the waters did return to cover the earth. The promise that such would never occur again was not given in Genesis 1 but in Genesis 9.

A significant parallel passage occurs in Isa 54:9 where a similar reference is made to waters not covering the earth again. It is notable that the first reference to this promise is in the clear context of the Noahic flood (Gen 8:21-22). Hence, even though the Noahic flood does not occupy a prominent place in the written record of the Hebrew Scriptures, it was a matter of general knowledge to the Hebrew people. The imagery of flood waters confined permanently within set boundaries is taken from the Genesis 6-9 context.¹¹⁷

It is instructive to observe that the psalmist emphasizes the permanence of the boundary grammatically in three ways. First, he returns to the perfect form of the verb. Second, גְּבוּל is placed in emphatic position (גְּבוּל־שָׁמַיִת).¹¹⁸ Third, this verbal clause governs both parallel relative clauses introduced by בְּל and is an emphatic description of permanence. To view this as description of Gen 1:9 creates serious theological and historical difficulties.

Summary. The psalmist includes all of Hebrew cosmology in his psalm of praise to Yahweh, including the Noahic deluge. The first unit of the second stanza of the hymn is clearly marked by a change in verbal aspect and includes two parts: the setting of the unit (v 5) and a description of the destruction of the earth via a global flood (vv 6-9).

The text of major concern for this study (vv 6-9) is demonstrated to be (1) a description of the flood of earth subsequent to initial creation (vv 6-7, 8b), (2) a parenthetical note describing the tectonic mechanism that moved the waters to their present place (v 8a), and (3) a reference to the promise of Genesis 8 and 9 which assured the boundary of the global seas.

The Waters of the Earth Now Provide for All of Yahweh's Creation (vv 10-13)

The psalmist now turns from the destructive role of the waters in Yahweh's providential care of the earth to their constructive role. Allen states that the psalmist now "proceeds to describe how water, the potential enemy of terrestrial life, has been harnessed to become

¹¹⁷ Johns has argued that the Isaiah reference finds its strongest parallels with Job 38:4-30 and Prov 8:22-31 (Warren H. Johns, "The Rebuke of the Waters," *Ministry* [May 1983] 26). It is acknowledged that the imagery of Job 38:10-11 and Prov 8:29 point to Gen 1:9. However, a significant difference lies in that both speak of creative declarations governing the normative activity of the seas under Yahweh's providential hand, and not a decree preventing inundation of water in future earth history.

¹¹⁸ GKC, 455; Williams, *Syntax*, 96.

its means of sustenance, serving God by serving its creatures.”¹¹⁹ This unit may be divided into three movements: first, the act of Yahweh in providing water for sustenance (v 10); second, a specific statement of grateful recipients of such provision (vv 11-12); and third, a general statement of the creation's satisfaction with Yahweh's care (v 13). The first and last movements are grammatically distinguished by the third masculine singular form of the verbs with their antecedent as Yahweh, in contrast to the central movement which commences with a third plural form of the verb with its antecedent being the "springs" of v 10.

CONCLUSION

In light of the purposes and parameters of this study, several conclusions may be drawn. First, this psalm is unique among ancient Near Eastern hymns in terms of its theology and cosmology. Any apparent links with other ancient Near Eastern literature are due to a common pool of imagery for describing a sovereign deity and the natural order of things and / or to a polemic against foreign deities that would vie for the Hebrews' allegiance.

Second, a structural analysis of the psalm demonstrates that the scope of the psalm reaches far beyond the creation week of Genesis 1. It includes the totality of Yahweh's relationship to his world, both as creator and sustainer.

Third, in light of the broader cosmological perspective of the psalm and the similar citation in Isa 54:9, vv 6-9 clearly point to the Noahic deluge of Genesis 6-9 rather than the creation account of Genesis 1. To relegate these verses to the creation account creates serious theological and historical problems, especially in light of the emphatic statements regarding the finality of the determination of the oceanic boundaries. Recognizing that Ps 104:6-9 refers to the Noahic flood provides an acceptable alternative to the more traditional interpretations.

Finally, in spite of the apparent contextual incongruity, v 8a is best taken as a parenthetical line descriptive of the mechanism of the retreat and settling of the waters behind their final boundaries. It was the mountains that went up and the valleys that went down. This provides valuable insight into the catastrophic tectonic activities of the flood year.

¹¹⁹ Allen, *Psalms*, 33.

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