



Psalms in Interfaith Contexts

Was Genesis 1 dependent on Psalm 104?
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The creation psalm, Psalm 104, has some remarkable parallels with the Priestly creation narrative in Genesis 1. Most notably, each day of creation in Genesis 1 has corresponding parallels in Psalm 104 coming in the same order.

Gen 1:1-5 (day 1). Creation of light; cf. Ps 104:2a, God wrapped in light.

Gen 1:6-8 (day 2), Creation of the firmament, cf. Gen 104:2b.

Gen 1:9-10 (day 3a), God controls the waters, and the dry land appears; cf. Ps 104:5-9.

Gen 1:11-13 (day 3b), Creation of vegetation; cf. Ps 104:14-18.

Gen 1:14-19 (day 4), Creation of the heavenly luminaries; cf. Ps 104:19-23.

Gen 1:20-23 (day 5), Creation of sea creatures; cf. Ps 104:25-26.

Gen 1:24-27 (day 6a), God creates animals and humans; cf. Ps 104:30.

Gen 1:29-30 (day 6b), God gives animals and humans food; cf. Ps 104:27-28.

There are also numerous parallels in vocabulary between Genesis 1 and Psalm 104, and these occur in all six days of creation. For example, the expression *l'mô'â dîm*, “for appointed times”, is applied to the role of the heavenly luminaries only twice in the whole of the OT, once in Ps 104:19 and the other time in Gen 1:14.

Overall, the parallels between Genesis 1 and Psalm 104 are too great to be ascribed to coincidence. But the question remains, which came first? In this paper I shall argue that the psalm is earlier, and Genesis 1 is dependent on it. I shall bring forward five main points in support of this argument.

- (1) Psalm 104 is more mythological, e.g. God has a battle with the sea, whereas in Genesis 1 God's control of the waters is simply a job of work. It seems likely that P has demythologized the *Chaoskampf* myth. Again, Ps 104:26 uses the mythological term “Leviathan”, whereas Gen 1:21 speaks of “great sea monsters”.
- (2) The rare form *hay'êtô*, “beasts”, found in Gen 1:24, is elsewhere attested only in poetry, including Ps 104:11, 20. This strongly suggests that a poetic source underlies Genesis 1, presumably Psalm 104.

- (3) It makes more sense to suppose that Gen 1:1-2:3 has based itself on Psalm 104 (which the author could easily have known from the cult) and expanded it to highlight the special role of humanity in creation and the sacred nature of the 7th day than to suppose that the psalm has deliberately omitted two of the most important theological topics in the Genesis creation account
- (4) Ps 104:9 declares that the waters overcome at creation will never flood the earth again. But if Psalm 104 was dependent on Genesis 1, the psalmist would surely have known the story of Noah's flood a little later in Genesis.
- (5) Every verse of Ps 104:20-30 has remarkable parallels with the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten's hymn to the sun (doubtless mediated through the Canaanites) and here there are 6 parallels all coming in the same order, with one exception. These remarkable parallels are as follows:

Ps 104:20-21, cf. Akhenaten lines 27-33. When darkness comes the lions leave their dens.

Ps 104:22-23, cf. Akhenaten lines 38-45. At sunrise people go to work.

Ps 104:24, cf. Akhenaten lines 76-82. How manifold are the deity's works.

Ps 104:25-26, cf. Akhenaten lines 53-58. Ships go their way, and the deity and a sea creature frolic; mention of "the great sea".

Ps 104:27-28, cf. Akhenaten lines 85-86. The deity provides food for all.

Ps 104:29-30, cf. Akhenaten lines 127-28. The deity is the source of life and death.

The important point for my argument here is that the strong evidence for the dependence of Ps 104:20-30 on Akhenaten's hymn to the sun implies that there is little scope for Ps 104:20-30 also to be dependent on Genesis 1. The obvious order of dependence is Akhenaten's hymn/Psalm 104/Genesis 1.

In the light of this conclusion various other consequences also follow:

- (i) Since the word *ṯhôm* is used of the chaos waters in Ps 104:6, there is no need to suppose that Gen 1:2's reference to *ṯhôm* is dependent on the sea monster Tiamat in Enuma elish, as many scholars have supposed since Gunkel. (In any case, the order of creation in Genesis 1 is far closer to Psalm 104 than it is to Enuma elish.)
- (ii) The fact that Yahweh rides on the wings of the wind in Ps 104:3, prior to the conflict with the waters, indicates that God's *rûah*, mentioned in Gen 1:2 prior to God's control of the waters, is God's wind, not spirit or breath. (This is in agreement with the earliest Jewish interpretation attested in the LXX, as well as the Targums and early rabbis.)
- (iii) Ps 104:8's allusion to the primeval waters going to the *place* that God assigned them, supports reading *māqôm*, "place", in the parallel passage in Gen 1:9, where God similarly gathers the primeval waters. This is in agreement with the MT, Samaritan Pentateuch, and 4QGen^b rather than reading *miqweh*, "gathering point" with 4QGen^h and the LXX. (Some modern scholars have preferred *miqweh*.)