

Psalm 104:19-35

Continuing the survey of creation, this section looks at the heavens and the sea.

Perhaps this portion is paired with Balaam's blessing of Israel because of the reference to "Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his" (**Numbers 23:10**) Here, that death is explained as including a resurrection:

Psalm 104:29-30 - "Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth."

The Moon and the Sun

Psalm 104:19 - "He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down."

These heavenly bodies are God's creation, not gods themselves as the heathen imagine (although the sun is personified as "knowing" it's times).

The moon marked the seasons of the Jewish festivals in their lunar calendar.

They finally appear serving the Bride of Christ (or Mary, as a picture of bearing Christ within us):

- **Revelation 12:1** - "And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed in the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head."

The sun served her as a garment of glory, the moon as the basis of her fulfilling the festivals, which all point to Christ

- **Song of Solomon 6:10** - "Who is this who shines like the dawn, as fair as the moon, as bright as the sun, as majestic as the stars in procession?"

The Night

Psalm 104:21 - "Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God."

Night was created first - **Genesis 1:2**. The Jewish day begins at evening, so it is described here first. Night serves a natural purpose for those creatures who inhabit it, but also a spiritual purpose of contrast with the day.

- **John 3:10-11** - "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

The lion is used as a picture of Christ (the Lion of the tribe of Judah)

Revelation 5:5 - "And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof."

...but also sometimes is an emblem of Satan, who goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (**1 Peter 5:8**).

"Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing?" (**Amos 3:4**)

The main idea here is that God provides his creatures with food, whether they are predators or prey.

- **Matthew 6:26** - "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"

The Day

Psalm 104:22-23 - "The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens. Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening."

The night's proper service to man is for sleep to refresh him for the day.

Wisdom

Psalm 104:24 - "O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches."

Wisdom is personified in **Proverbs 8**, and elevated to a heavenly eternal status in Enoch and other pseudepigrapha:

- **Enoch 42:1-2** - "Wisdom found no place where she could dwell, and her dwelling was in Heaven. Wisdom went out, in order to dwell among the sons of men, but did not find a dwelling; wisdom returned to her place, and took her seat in the midst of the Angels."

...And wisdom is identified with the Logos by Philo, and the Logos is identified with Christ by John:

- **John 1:1-3** - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."

- **Proverbs 3:19** - "The LORD founded the earth by wisdom and established the

heavens by understanding."

The Sea

Psalm 104:25-26 - "So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships: there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein."

The instability of the sea is often a type of humanity:

- **Isaiah 57:20** - "But the wicked are like the storm-tossed sea, for it cannot be still, and its waves churn up mire and muck."

- **Habakkuk 1:13-15** - "Your eyes are too pure to look upon evil, and You cannot tolerate wrongdoing. So why do You tolerate the faithless? Why are You silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? You have made men like the fish of the sea, like sea creatures with no ruler. The foe brings all of them up with a hook; he catches them in his dragnet, and gathers them in his fishing net; so he rejoices gladly."

Rulers of great power and authority are often signified by beasts rising out of the sea, **Daniel 7:3**.

- **Revelation 13:1** - "Then I saw a beast with ten horns and seven heads rising out of the sea."

But this psalm is focused on displaying God as creator of everything, and as caring for his creation. In fact, everything will "work together for good" in the end.

Leviathan

The Leviathan is an example of this. In Jewish tradition Leviathan is the largest creature in the sea (Whale? Crocodile? Sea Serpent?)

Two strands intertwine in this tradition - The bad Leviathan and the obedient Leviathan.

Leviathan had as many eyes as the days of the year; his scales shone like the sun, he had massive jaws, a mouth that spewed fire and flames, nostrils that breathed smoke and eyes that sprayed jets of light. "Its heart is as hard as stone, as hard as the lower millstone" (Job 41:19-31)

One tradition says at creation, God had to fight and subdue Leviathan and other monsters of chaos before He could bring order into the world. He had to cut the sky loose from the waters of the abyss. (This is reflected in the Sumerian myth of Marduk battling Tiamat).

In Genesis, this is handled in one verse:

- **Genesis 1:6** - "And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters."

(See also previously, **Psalm 104:6-9**)

The story continued: According to legend, God ordered Gabriel to pull Leviathan from the Great Sea (the Mediterranean). Although Gabriel succeeded in catching it with his hook, he is swallowed up in the attempt to pull it out on to dry land, whereupon God himself is obliged to seize the monster, and slays it in the presence of the pious.

Elsewhere, Leviathan is conflated with Rahab, the Dragon, the Serpent and other monsters.

- **Isaiah 27:1** - "On that day the LORD with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea."

- **Isaiah 51:9-10** - "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD! Awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago! Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon [Hebrew: tannin - crocodile?]? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to cross over?"

The similar myth from Ugarit has the twisting/fleeing serpent with seven heads.

The Jewish tradition in fact has three monsters as representatives of the enemy of God - Leviathan in the sea, Ziz in the air and Behemoth on land.

Satan is referred to as the prince of the power of the air:

- **Ephesians 2:2** - "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience"

...and he is "the god of this world":

- **2 Corinthians 4:4** - "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ"

In the matching Egyptian myth, the word for crocodile is a wordplay on the similar word for "lust and greed."

In the Babylonian Talmud (A.D. 257-320), Rabbi Yochanan suggests that the sea monster was originally thought to possess the qualities of a serpent rather than a fish (Baba Batra, 74b). Citing the above Biblical verse, he interprets it to mean that God created a male (piercing serpent) and female (crooked serpent) Leviathan, and killed the female to prevent them from mating and destroying the world.

At this point in the story an interesting transformation takes place.

You can see some of this in Jonah's experience in the belly of the whale. There the whale is obedient to God's instructions. But at the same time, it was the vehicle for Jonah's symbolic death, and his subsequent resurrection, "vomited up" on land. Christ uses this imagery for his own death and resurrection.

- **Matthew 12:40** - "...just as Jonah was in the stomach of the sea creature for three days and three nights,[b] so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights."

[Interesting aside: Ninevah, the city Jonah was running from, means "fish house" and it's cuneiform inscription looks just like a fish.]

And in fact, Ninevah eventually repents through Jonah's preaching.

In the world to come (*Ha'olam Haba*), the meat of Leviathan (the supreme sea beast) will be eaten at the messianic banquet. And the skin of Leviathan will be used as a tent to shelter the festivities.

The Targum agrees with the tradition, saying Leviathan was made, "for the righteous at the feast of the house of his habitation."

In other words, what was at first regarded as a dangerous and implacable enemy has been subdued, and become obedient to God (like Satan coming before the Lord in the heavenly council and asking permission to afflict Job).

Of course, the Book of Revelation has a different end for Satan and the false prophet and the beast. They are cast into the lake of fire:

- **Revelation 20:10** - "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

But the important truth here is that Leviathan is used by God, and "serves" the Bride even as he opposes her.

Leviathan becomes "bread" for Israel, like Joshua and Caleb said about the Giants:

- **Numbers 14:9** - "Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not."

- **Romans 8:28** - "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

<http://www.cismor.jp/uploads-images/sites/3/2015/05/ffa6904f942488ee32d841f42242e6a3.pdf>

Psalm 104:27-28 - "These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good."

See **Psalm 145:15-16** - "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing."

Spiritually, God has provided His Son, the true Manna, the bread that comes down from heaven for our sustenance.

Death and Renewal

Psalm 104:29-30 - "Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth."

"thou takest away their breath" - Targum: removes his Shechinah, or divine Majesty and Presence.

Rashi - "You will send forth Your spirit": with the resurrection of the dead.

Psalm 104:31 - "The glory of the LORD shall endure for ever: the LORD shall rejoice in his works."

The Targum, Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and all the Oriental versions render it as a prayer, "let the glory of the Lord be for ever"; or, let him be for ever glorified.

Psalm 104:32 - "He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth: he toucheth the hills, and they smoke."

Rashi - they smoke as is depicted of Sinai (Exodus 19:18): "And Mount Sinai was all in smoke."

Psalm 104:33-34 - "I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD."

What we begin singing here we will continue in heaven after our death.

The Targum renders it as a petition, "let my meditation be sweet before him"

Psalm 104:35 - "Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless thou the LORD, O my soul. Praise ye the LORD."

Sinners or Sins?

The Talmud (Berachot 10a) records a story about a remarkable woman named Bruriah, who lived in the Land of Israel shortly after the second Temple period with her husband, the great sage Rabbi Meir.

Rabbi Meir had been abused by vagrants, and he prayed for their destruction. Bruriah quoted this psalm, and noted that the verse should be understood as saying, “May sins disappear from the earth,” instead of wishing for the actual destruction of the sinners themselves. Once their evil behavior ends, they will no longer be sinners, for they will return to God. Rabbi Meir accepted his wife’s advice and instead prayed for his enemies to repent. God accepted his prayers and they turned from their evil ways.

Bottom line: In this way God uses the skin and meat of Leviathan (the attack by the vagrants) for his own purposes (to bring them to repentance).