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בס"ד

על ההתיחסות שׁל תהלים ק"ד ובראשׁית א'

On the Linkage Between Psalm 104 and Genesis 1

Psalm 104, ברכי נפשׁי, a hymn of praise to the Creator that expresses admiration and appreciation of Him and the world He created, is clearly related to Genesis 1. It views the world through the categories of the Genesis account and appears to use it as a frame of reference throughout. But whereas Genesis 1 is framed in sublime simplicity the psalm gives free reign to imaginative expansion.

The praises to Hashem in verse 1 גָּדַלְתָּ מאד ("You have become exceedingly great") and הוֹד והדר לָבָשְׁתָּ ("You dressed Yourself in glory and majesty"), speak of His having done something extraordinary, in this case referring to His great act of creation, corresponding to the first verse of Genesis. In verse 2 the psalm speaks of His wrapping Himself with אוֹר (light) as with a garment and stretching forth שׁמים (the heavens) as a curtain. This imagery parallels the creation of light on the first day and the firmament (termed שׁמים in Gen. 1:4) on the second day. The following verse, depicting Him as having established the beams of His upper chambers with water (or in water, depending on how to translate the "ב"), is strikingly reminiscent of the Genesis 1 account of His having separated the waters beneath the firmament from those above it, an act that requires the mind to think of a heavenly beam.

While focusing on second day activity, prior to the creation of any type of life, in verse 4 the psalm admires the great natural phenomena of clouds, winds and fire, seeing them as the Deity's chariot and His angels and ministers respectively, expanding on the Genesis "wind of G-d" that hovered over the waters. (Ber. Rabbah 3:8 cites this verse as the source for Rabbi Yohanan's statement that He created the angels on the second day.)

In verses 5 and 6 the psalm relates the founding activity regarding the earth and its waters: "He had established the earth on its foundation that it not totter forevermore" and "covered it with the *tehom* (great waters) as with a garment," such that even "upon the mountains the waters stood." Use of the words ארץ מים ותהוֹם immediately following אוֹר שׁמים ורוּח recalls the first few verses of Genesis where these words are all prominent. Verses 7-9 relate that at His shout (a poetic description of a verbal command) the waters scattered in all directions, going to where He assigned them, observing the boundaries He set that they not return to cover the land. This account poetically reflects the Genesis description of the water covering the earth in an early stage of its existence (Gen. 1:2) and of G-d commanding it to gather into one place causing the land to appear in the beginning of Day 3 activity (ibid. vv. 9-10). (The psalm may here be polemicizing against a popular ancient Near Eastern mythological belief that ascribed divinity and independence to the "*tehom*" and its waters.)

Although following Genesis 1 chronology, the psalmist views the world from his contemporary perspective, describing it from the standpoint of the positive impact its various components have on each other and on life, recognizing the interrelationships within the natural order. Thus, after enriching the account of the separation of water from the land with the description of His directing the former all over the land through springs and rivers, the psalmist devotes several verses to depict the great benefit the waters provide.

Thus, in verses 11 and 12 he depicts animals slaking their thirst by the riverside while birds are singing in the foliage above the waters. Use of the term חיתוֹ שׂדי recalls חיתוֹ ארץ (Gen. 1:24) and חית השׂדה (ibid. 2:19). In verse 13, the psalmist imagines G-d watering the mountains from His upper chambers, satiating the earth מִפרי מַעשׂיך "with the fruit of Your works," an extremely unusual usage. It appears to be a play on the עשׂה פרי referring to trees in Genesis 1:11, a term "borrowed" in the psalm and used at the spot where it is turning to the Day 3 creation of vegetation.

The psalm continues with the elaboration of the second part of Day 3 activities: G-d causes grass to sprout forth for animals and vegetation for man's labor, that the latter may bring forth food from the earth. The assonantal verb-noun construction of verse 14a - מצמיח חציר - substitutes for the assonantal verb-noun construction of תדשׁא הארץ דשׁא (Gen. 1:11), with which it is synonymous, both phrases introducing the vegetation category and both immediately followed by עשׂב.

Once again, the psalmist turns to life around him. One cannot speak of vegetation without recognizing the joy wine makes available to mankind, recognizing the benefits of oil and gratefully acknowledging man's dependence on bread. All are included in verse 15.

Verse 16 comprises an extension of G-d's just-previously described activities, depicting the great trees He planted being satiated with water, completing the references to the Day 3 דשׁא-עשׂב-עץ grouping of Gen 1:11. Verse 17 describes a function of these trees: they provide a haven for birds, who make their nests in them. The succeeding verse continues the concept of haven, depicting the high mountains and rocks that serve as refuge for various creatures.

In verse 19 the psalmist turns to G-d's Day 4 activity. He created the moon which provides "times," and the sun, which knows its setting. Use of מוֹעדים is common to this verse and to Genesis 1:14, while the "sun knowing its setting" poetically complements the Genesis statement that its rule is limited to the day. In the four following verses, the psalmist elaborates with wonder on the impact the day-night cycle has on the lives of wild animals and man, how darkness and daylight allow each to function in their respective spheres. This appreciation of ויהי ערב ויהי בקר prompts an expression of awe in verse 24 at the multitudinous of G-d's doings and all with wisdom.

Verse 25 proceeds to Day 5 creations, specifically sea life. Contemplating "the great, wide sea," one can only imagine what is out there: "countless רמשׂ and חיות small and large," using terms corresponding to the account in Genesis 1:21. The "countless" designation for this category reflects the fact that in Genesis 1 the plural למינהם (to their species) is only used with sea life הרמשׂת, implying "to their very many species." Verse 26 includes with the description of the sea appreciation that it affords man the possibility of water travel and recognizes the presence of the Leviathan. The latter requires comment.

A literary feature of this psalm is illustrating a general assertion with a specific example (such as the wild asses of v. 11, the stork of v. 17). Consistent with this, verse 26 singles out one particular creature from those of the sea: "This Leviathan that You formed to sport with." In Genesis 1, however, G-d's creative activity is described in generalities; no particular species of tree, sea creature, bird or animal is cited except for one: the תנינים הגדלים (great sea monsters, 1:21). In our psalm, although many creatures are mentioned, the Leviathan is the only one specifically described as created by G-d. This follows the Genesis precedent, as Leviathan is the parallel of the great Taninim, a linkage alluded to elsewhere in Tanakh. Psalms 74:13-14, describing G-d's victories of old, reads: "You...smashed the heads of the Taninim in the waters...crushed the heads of Leviathan." Isaiah 27:1, regarding G-d's Judgment Day, states: "G-d will punish Leviathan...and slay the Tanin of the sea."

Cassuto and others explain the reason Taninim were singled out in Genesis is to combat idolatrous beliefs current at the time of the Torah-giving, as Near Eastern mythology attributed divinity to these sea monsters. Thus, Genesis 1 states specifically that G-d created them and following that precedent our psalm emphasizes the point regarding Leviathan.

The verse's continuation supports this understanding. It gives the reason for Leviathan's creation as לשׂחק בוֹ - as Rab explained (BT, A.Z. 3b), "for G-d to sport with." This is consistent with Job 40:29, where G-d, in challenging Job, refers to the Leviathan, התשׂחק בוֹ כצפוֹר ("Can you play with him as with a bird?") The Aggada further develops these metaphoric images of Leviathan.

Verse 27 begins a discussion related to Day 6. As the psalm spoke throughout about animals and man as beneficiaries of various aspects of Creation, it does not now elaborate on their creation. (Perhaps this also explains why birds were not mentioned in the Day 5 segment, as they had been depicted earlier.) Rather, it expands on G-d's Day 6 declaration that He provides all living creatures their sustenance (Gen. 1:29-30). Thus, verses 27-30 articulate the great dependence of all living creatures

for their sustenance on Him and His ultimate control of life. They lead to an apex proclaimed in verse 31, which begins the psalm's conclusion.

Verse 31a, recognizing all the foregoing as a manifestation of Divine glory, expresses the prayer that it should always be so recognized, while 31b contains the hope that "Hashem should rejoice in His works." This latter phrase corresponds with the end of Day 6 where it states that upon viewing all that He had made, G-d saw that it was very good (Gen. 1:31), prompting the thought that He was happy with everything.

What about earthquakes and volcanoes? Verse 32 may be bringing them into the picture, expressing reverence for G-d who manifests His awesome power through such events. In verses 33 and 34, as a result of the insights brought out in the mizmor, the psalmist resolves to sing G-d's praises always, hopes that his musings will be acceptable to Him and that he may rejoice in Him. In the final verse, after contemplating the magnificent panorama of Creation, the psalmist recognizes the profound truth that the wicked spoil the harmony of Creation and expresses the hope that they (or, as some take it, their sinning) be eliminated from the land.

At first sight Shabbat appears not to have been referred to in the psalm. However, it is the day that brought the Six Days to their denouement with the great potential that was latent in it. Eventually it blossomed into the great vehicle for social justice and the sign of the Covenant, designed to counteract evil and restore the lost harmony to the world. As such, the prayer of the psalm's last verse perfectly corresponds to Shabbat.

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