

Q. 9. What is the work of creation?

A. The work of creation is, God's making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.

Q. 10. How did God create man?

A. God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.

Q. 11. What are God's works of providence?

A. God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.

What is the difference between creation and providence?

In the beginning, God created all things of nothing.

But Genesis 1 distinguishes between different ways in which God created things.

The idea of "create" from nothing is used in three places:

God *created* "the heavens and the earth" (1:1)

Then God *created* the inhabitants of the sea and of the air on day 5 (1:21),

And then God *created* man (1:27).

In other places in Genesis 1, it speaks of God forming – or fashioning:

when he formed the firmament in 1:7,

or when he formed the sun, moon, and stars in 1:16.

Or it speaks of God separating things that he had created,

or calling upon the earth to bring forth vegetation and living creatures.

In other words, sometimes God spoke, and it simply "was" –

but other times, God formed or separated the things that he had made;

and sometimes God commanded the earth to do something, and it obeyed.

Psalm 104 is one of the most extensive discussions of creation and providence in the scriptures.

But Psalm 104 gives us a very different perspective on nature than we get today.

Today we tend to view nature in terms of natural processes.

We look at the sky and think about the likelihood of lake-effect snow this week.

We think in terms of the food-chain,

so that if we don't get enough rain,

then the cows won't get enough food next year,

and then milk and meat prices will go up...

Psalm 104 calls us to look at creation with new eyes.

Sing Psalm 104
Read John 1

As we talk about creation and providence in Psalm 104,
we must always keep in mind “in the beginning was the Word.”

The Word by which God spoke all things into being
is none other than his co-eternal Son –
the one who was in the beginning with God.

1. God’s Work of Creation: Forming the Three Realms (104:1-9)

The Psalmist begins by speaking of how God formed the three realms –
the heavens, the earth, and the seas.

In Genesis 1, this was the work of the first three days of creation.

The Psalmist now describes that work in song.

But the Psalmist does not speak of creation as a work that was completed long ago.

He speaks of the creation in the present tense.

It’s not that God *once* clothed himself with splendor and majesty –
but that God *is* clothed with splendor and majesty.

a. The Glory of the LORD above the Heavens (v1-4)

Bless the LORD, O my soul!

O LORD my God, you are very great!

You are clothed with splendor and majesty,

² *covering yourself with light as with a garment,
stretching out the heavens like a tent.*

³ *He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters;*

he makes the clouds his chariot;

he rides on the wings of the wind;

⁴ *he makes his messengers winds,*

his ministers a flaming fire.

Verses 1-4 set forth the glory of the LORD above the heavens.

The LORD is covered with light as with a garment.

The picture here is that all the most glorious attributes of the creation
are but “clothing” for God.

Psalm 102:25-27,

“Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,

and the heavens are the work of your hands.
They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment.
You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,
but you are the same, and your years have no end.”

The glory of the heavens is but a change of garments for the glorious One who made them

In verse 3, the Psalmist says that God lays the beams of his chambers on the waters.

What “waters”?

Since the seas are not mentioned until verse 6, I would suggest
that it is referring to the waters above the heavens.

In Genesis 1 we are told that God separated the waters above from the waters beneath,
by means of a firmament (Hebrew—*raqia*).

This “firmament” God called “heaven”—what we normally call the sky.

Everywhere in scripture this firmament is assumed to be a solid object.
(Which is what everyone thought until the 16th century)

And when God appears to various prophets (Ezekiel 1, or the 70 elders in Ex. 24),
he appears at the peak of the firmament.

In other words, as verse 3 says—he lays the beams of his chambers on the waters.

God’s dwelling place is at the pinnacle of the heavens.

The clouds are his chariot.

God comes from the heavens riding on the clouds,
He rides on the wings of the wind.

Indeed, the very winds come as his messengers,
and the flaming fires of lightning are his servants.

How often do you think this way?

How often do you look at the heavens,
and behold the dwelling of God.

And I’m not talking about some place way up there light-years beyond the stars.
That’s the language of modern science.

I’m talking about right up there at the peak of that blue sky.

Now, the biblical authors knew that God’s dwelling was not so easy to find.
Solomon speaks of how the heavens, and the heaven of heavens,
could not contain God.

But they speak of God’s dwelling as being that close to the earth,
because it is.

He is exalted over all,
and yet he stretched out the heavens as a tent,
He built the heavens and the earth,
as a place where he could dwell with his people.

Psalm 150 speaks of this when it declares,

“Praise the Lord in his sanctuary,
Praise him in his mighty firmament.”

It compares the sanctuary of the temple—the place where God dwelt with Israel--
to the firmament—the place which God created to dwell with all men.

The heavens and the earth were created to be a temple.

The earthly temple was needed only because of sin.

Do you think of the heavens this way?

Do you look up at the sky and see the vault of the temple?

The glorious tent that God spread over the place where he would dwell with man?

b. The Foundations of the Earth and the Boundaries of the Seas (v5-9)

⁵ *He set the earth on its foundations,
so that it should never be moved.*

⁶ *You covered it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.*

⁷ *At your rebuke they fled;
at the sound of your thunder they took to flight.*

⁸ *The mountains rose, the valleys sank down
to the place that you appointed for them.*

⁹ *You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.*

Verses 5-9 then speak of the earth in language that could apply either to the creation or the flood.

In the first creation God separated dry land from the waters on the third day,
and in the flood (a second creation, in a sense) he did the same thing.

But either way, this speaks of the power of the voice of God over creation.

“At your rebuke the waters fled; at the sound of your thunder they took to flight.”

Psalm 104 well illustrates the point that question 9 of the shorter catechism:

Q. 9. What is the work of creation?

A. The work of creation is, God’s making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.

Remember John 1:1 –

“In the beginning was the Word...
all things were made through him,
and without him was not anything made that was made.”

And you see the ordering of creation by the Word of God in verses 10-23.

Just as Genesis 1 speaks of the creation of the three realms in the first three days,
and then the filling and ordering of the three realms in days four to six,

so also Psalm 104 then turns to the ordering of the three realms in verses 10-23.

2. God's Works of Providence: Ordering the Three Realms (v10-23)

a. The Land (v10-18)

i. Watering the Earth for the Beasts and the Birds (v10-13)

¹⁰ *You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills;*
¹¹ *they give drink to every beast of the field;
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.*
¹² *Beside them the birds of the heavens dwell;
they sing among the branches.*
¹³ *From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.*

All of creation obeys the voice of the Lord.

Verses 10-13 speak of how God provides water for the beasts and the birds.

“From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.”

It is not enough to say that God is the one who set the natural laws in motion.

If we believe that “God’s works of providence are,
his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures,
and all their actions,”

then we must see the hand of God working powerfully in nature.

The beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens depend on the voice of the LORD
for their water.

We live in a land where water is plentiful.

But in the middle east, water is scarce.

When water flows, life is good!

ii. Grain, Wine and Oil for the Good of Man (v14-15)

¹⁴ *You cause the grass to grow for the livestock
and plants for man to cultivate,
that he may bring forth food from the earth*
¹⁵ *and wine to gladden the heart of man,
oil to make his face shine
and bread to strengthen man's heart.*

And the reason why life is good –

is because water brings forth grain, wine, and oil for the happiness of man.

“You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate,

that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man,
oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart." (v14-15)
Livestock, wine, oil, and bread—the four staples of the ancient Jewish economy,
and the four most important substances in Israelite worship.

Water brings life – because water enables agriculture – food production!
And then the basic staples of life are offered in return to God.
Wine gladdens the heart of man
Oil makes his face shine
Bread strengthens man's heart.

God gave man dominion over the creatures –
dominion not for his own selfish pleasure,
but so that he might lead and govern all things for God's glory.

As our Catechism says it:

Q. 10. How did God create man?

A. God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.

And man is to bring grain, wine, and oil – all the fruits of his labors –
to be used in the worship of God.

Economics, worship, indeed, all of daily life,
are brought together under the most holy, wise and powerful providence of God.
It is in this sense that all of life is an act of worship,
since the world we live in was created as a temple to God.

iii. Trees and Mountains for Birds and Beasts (v16-18)

¹⁶ *The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.*

¹⁷ *In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has her home in the fir trees.*

¹⁸ *The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the rock badgers.*

But then there are the wild areas – the wilderness.
These are the places beyond man's habitation.
And even there, the LORD reigns.

He ensures that the trees of the LORD are watered abundantly –

that the birds have their nests,
the wild goats have their high mountains.

b. The Heavens: Ordering the Seasons (v19-23)

¹⁹ *He made the moon to mark the seasons;^[a]*

the sun knows its time for setting.

²⁰ *You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the beasts of the forest creep about.*

²¹ *The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.*

²² *When the sun rises, they steal away
and lie down in their dens.*

²³ *Man goes out to his work
and to his labor until the evening.*

Then in verses 19-23, we consider the heavens once again.

Each verse deals with the sun, moon and stars – the changing times and seasons –
which order the lives of man and beast.

God made the darkness “when all the beasts of the forest creep about.”

This is the time that God has ordained for the young lions to seek their food.

At sunrise they slink away and lie down in their dens.

And man goes out to his work.

Man is designed to work during the day.

The beasts are designed for the night.

You may think that you are a night-owl –

but that’s simply because we have technologies
that turn the night into day!

Turn out all the lights!

See how much you get done!

c. The Seas: Frolicking Leviathan (v24-26)

²⁴ *O LORD, how manifold are your works!*

In wisdom have you made them all;

the earth is full of your creatures.

²⁵ *Here is the sea, great and wide,
which teems with creatures innumerable,
living things both small and great.*

²⁶ *There go the ships,
and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it.^[b]*

Verse 24 sums it all up by saying:

O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

Verses 25-26 then speak of the sea creatures,
including the great monster Leviathan.

Leviathan was a mythic sea monster from pagan mythology
that was supposed to have done battle with the gods.

Genesis 1 includes a reference to these sea monsters,
but they do not do battle with God:

they are viewed among the tame creatures that do God's bidding.

Psalms 104, by explicitly referring to Leviathan,

is continuing the apologetic thrust of Genesis 1.

Yahweh is bigger and stronger than the gods of the nations.

The gods of the nations had to fight against Leviathan.

Our God created Leviathan—"which you formed to play" in the sea.

The image is striking.

Imagine it.

This horrific sea monster of mythology is here portrayed as a frolicking fish,
just playing in the water.

d. Summary: God's Sovereign Provision (v27-30)

²⁷ *These all look to you,*

to give them their food in due season.

²⁸ *When you give it to them, they gather it up;*

when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

²⁹ *When you hide your face, they are dismayed;*

when you take away their breath, they die

and return to their dust.

³⁰ *When you send forth your Spirit,^[c] they are created,*

and you renew the face of the ground.

"These all look to you, to give them their food in due season." (v27)

The storks, the goats, the lions, the sea creatures, even Leviathan,
all look to God for their food.

"When you give it to them, they gather it up;

when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

When you hide your face, they are dismayed;

when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.

When you send forth your Spirit,

they are created, and you renew the face of the ground." (28-30)

All things in God's creation temple serve *him*.

Do you believe that?

Our culture wants us to think that the regular forces of nature provide food.
Scientists have explored in great detail the natural processes.

And they have understood much about the ordinary method of God's providence.
But the psalmist reminds us that it is the hand of God that feeds all creatures.

Our Catechism asks:

Q. 11. What are God's works of providence?

A. God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.

And the psalmist reminds us that providence does not only include the good,
it also includes the bad.

*²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.*

We often speak of some special event as being "providential."

If we meet somebody unexpected who gives us a lead on a great new job,
we say, "that was providential!"

That's true—but it's no more providential
than the fact that your toilet backed up last week.

The story has been told of a young man

going to visit Princeton Seminary professor Samuel Miller.

Dr. Miller lived outside of town along a bumpy road,
and the young man was thrown from his horse as it stumbled into a ditch.

Unhurt, the young man made it to the Miller's house and said,

"Dr. Miller, I can tell you of the remarkable providence of God.

Though I was thrown from my horse along the road, I have hardly a scratch!"

Dr. Miller looked at the young man and said,

"I can tell you of an even more remarkable providence of God.

I have ridden that road now for thirty years,

and never have I been thrown by my horse!"

Some of the most remarkable providences are overlooked because they seem "normal."

Some people try to "discern the hand of God" in their lives.

They often sound quite pious, but in reality they are thoroughly secular.

One who believed in the providence of God

would understand that God's hand is in *everything*.

Such people often try to understand "the will of God for my life."

They come to a major life decision and try to discern the will of God.

This is a magical, superstitious practice,

no different from palm reading or crystal balls.
God's will is very simple:
 "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."
If you are facing a choice between two paths,
 do I marry this person or not?
 do I take this new job, or stay at my old one?
 do I eat at Olive Garden, or at Appleby's?
 if either choice would glorify God,
 then whichever one you choose will be God's will for you.

When you understand that God's providence works in *everything*,
 then it frees you up to do that which God puts in front of you to do.
By all means pray about your decisions!
 Ask God for wisdom to know how you may best serve him.
 Seek to understand the implications of your decisions before you make them.
 And then give glory to God and do the next thing!
 There's no possible way for you to miss out on the will of God for your life.
 Sure, you can make some really stupid choices!
But as we saw last week, it is from the hand of the Lord that both good and bad comes.
 When you make stupid choices,
 you repent of your folly, and learn wisdom.
 And that was God's means of teaching you wisdom,
 so that next time, you won't make such a stupid decision!

3. Conclusion: May God Be Praised and the Wicked Be No More (v31-35)

The Psalm concludes with a doxology:

³¹ *May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
 may the LORD rejoice in his works,*
³² *who looks on the earth and it trembles,
 who touches the mountains and they smoke!*
³³ *I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
 I will sing praise to my God while I have being.*
³⁴ *May my meditation be pleasing to him,
 for I rejoice in the LORD.*

The next line may seem out of place:

³⁵ *Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more!
Bless the LORD, O my soul!
Praise the LORD!*

In this Psalm of praise to God for his wonders of creation and providence,

why does the psalmist conclude with a prayer for the destruction of the wicked?
Because the doctrines of creation and providence are inseparable
from the doctrine of redemption.

When the psalmist thinks about creation and providence,
and how God rules over all things,
he cannot help but think about how that rule extends also to humanity.
If God is the one who gives life and death to all creatures,
then we must pray that he will bless his people, and destroy the wicked.

So Psalm 104 concludes with a prayer for the coming of the Messiah.
—a prayer for the coming of the new creation,
where God will indeed rejoice in his works,
because once the wicked are no more,
then the whole of the new creation will sing for joy before the Lord.

The creation temple has been marred by sin.
Humanity can no longer worship properly because their hearts have been twisted by sin.
There must be a new temple—a new creation—where God and man can meet.

This is what we saw from Paul last time in Ephesians 1:20-23.
Jesus has now been raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father,
“far above all rule and authority and power and dominion,
and above every name that is named,
not only in this age but also in the one to come.
And he put all things under his feet
and gave him as head over all things to the church,
which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

All that we have talked about with respect to creation and providence,
must be seen in the light of Christ.

It is your savior who rules and governs all things.
It is the one who died for you and lives and reigns at the right hand of God,
“as head over all things *to the church*,”
who now orders all things according to his purposes.

It is Jesus,
your brother,
who opens his hand to give you your daily bread.

It is your Father who cares for you,
and disciplines you to teach you his ways.

So that we can say with the apostle Paul,
that we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,
for those who are called according to his purpose.