

Psalms 115, 124, 146

The LORD who Made Heaven and Earth

Creation lies at the heart of Psalms 8, 19, 33, 104 and 148. But a few Psalms (e.g. 24, 100, 115, 121, 124, 134, 146) mention creation in an almost incidental but illuminating way. Here we consider just three, each with a different message.

1. Psalm 115: Only the Creator blesses

Only the Creator of the heavens and the earth is able to bestow real blessing: “May you be blessed by the LORD, who made heaven and earth!” (v. 15). This is the biggest possible blessing: the creation blessings of fruitfulness and dominion.

Look at the verses before and after v. 15. V. 14 promises children; v. 16 promises delegated authority on earth. This is the creation blessing which God bestowed on mankind when he created them (Genesis 1).

Ps. 115 draws our attention to the original creation blessing because of the challenges faced by the Jewish people in holding onto the promises of God. Ps. 115 was used by the Jews after their return from Babylonian exile. They were few in number – maybe not more than 50,000 and in poor condition. And they were being taunted by their Gentile neighbours: “Where is your God?”

So the Psalm retorts: “Our God is in heaven; he does whatever he pleases.” Heaven isn’t about being remote; it’s about authority: whatever happens in the lives of individual people and nations on the earth, it is his doing. Meanwhile, the gods of the nations are utterly useless: and so is everyone who trusts in them.

This is polemic. But it leaves a pastoral issue to be addressed – because circumstances appear to contradict the affirmations of faith. The nations were successful and the Jews were feeble, and susceptible to discouragement.

So the Psalm calls us to trust the LORD: three times it says, “Trust in the LORD...he is your help and shield.” This language that takes us back to Abram – surrounded by wealthy, successful pagans, discouraged by his own smallness and inability, and called to trust in the creation blessing of God. Melchizedek blessed Abram in words of which verse 15 is an echo: “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth.” And yet Abram remained childless. So when God said, “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great,” Abram replied, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless.” Circumstances seemed to contradict the Word of God. So God took him outside and showed him the stars in the night sky and affirmed, “Number the stars, if you are able to number them...So shall your offspring be.”

Abram stood at a crossroads: to trust in the LORD to bless him or to fall back onto the confidence of his pagan neighbours. He chose to believe the LORD, and he received the blessing that only the Creator of heaven and earth can bestow: numerous descendants, a land in which to live, and dominion.

Day by day we stand at the same crossroads – and face the same choice. Ps. 115 warns us that the world is ultimately futile and it reduces its followers to futility. We will trust only on the One who is God of the heavens and of the earth. Only the Creator is able to bless us.

2. Psalm 124: Only the Creator delivers

Only the Creator is able to deliver us: “Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.”

The title of the Psalm attributes it to David. And David’s problems (e.g. Saul, the Philistines, Absalom) were very real. David describes this with graphic metaphors:

- a monster with insatiable appetite that rises up to swallow its victims alive;
- a fire that burns with fierce heat;
- the raging waters of a swollen river that overwhelm and sweep;
- a fowler’s snare that traps a bird.

Monsters and torrents suggests forces of more than natural significance: in the OT world these were thought of as the forces of chaos which tried to assert themselves against God and his order. In Ps. 124 the problems are not just “life’s trials”, but the great causes of distress: sin, Satan, moral guilt, spiritual death.

But this is not what the Psalm focuses on. Instead its focus is on the LORD: “Our help is in the name of the LORD, the One who made heaven and earth.” This throws our reflections on life’s great problems into a “counterfactual mode” – “Had it not been the LORD who was for us when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive”; but the fact is that the LORD is for us, so who can be against us; who can ultimately harm us?

Our helper is the Creator of heaven and earth. His power is uncreated. All other powers are created powers. No creature can prevail over the Creator.

But the NT tells us more than the Psalm. The NT reveals the mystery that the Creator entered his creation by assuming a human nature, and that the incarnate Creator allowed his creatures to do their worst to his human nature, because it was by this act of meekness and humiliation that the Creator delivered his creatures from enmity and futility (Col. 1:15-20).

Colossians 1 says of Jesus Christ, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him...For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:15-20).

So when sin would swallow us up and sweep us before it; when Satan would try and terrify us and bring into bondage again; when guilt dismays us, we reply, “Our help is in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, creator of heaven and earth” –

because not sin, not Satan, not guilt, not death – not anything in the whole of creation shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

3. Psalm 146: Only the Creator gives hope

Only the Creator is able to give us hope: “O how happy is the person whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them...” And what hope it is!

- The execution of justice on behalf of the oppressed;
- Feeding of the hungry and setting of prisoners free;
- Opening the eyes of the blind and raising up of those who are bowed down;
- Watching over strangers with care and relieving the needs of widows and orphans.

These are the things that the Gospels show Jesus doing, thereby declaring that in him the Kingdom of God has come. So the hope promised in Ps. 146 is the great hope of the Messianic Age in which Jesus reigns.

Like much of the OT (especially the Psalms and the Prophets) Ps. 146 casts a backward look at the Exodus. The closing words – “The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations” – are taken from the closing words of the Song of the Sea (Ex. 15:18). The Red Sea crossing was the baptism, the new birth and the re-creation of a people.

But the final five songs in the book of Psalms also look forward to the renewal of all things. Ps. 146 opens this theme by directing our hope to the Creator of the heavens and the earth and the Re-creator of his people.

Ps. 146 acknowledges that there are options. Everyone needs hope, and if we don't find our hope in the Kingdom of God, then we will inevitably try and find it in men. So the Psalm talks about princes – the great men – the movers and the shakers of the age. But princes are only men – and there is no permanent hope in them because they die, and their plans, hopes and promises perish with them.

How different God is. Mankind's breath is a sign of his mortality. God's breath is the sign of his power (Ps. 33:6). God's creative breath is truly efficacious – his creative Word and his creative Spirit are the grounds of real hope. God, whose creativity is limitless, offers us the hope of the new creation in Jesus Christ.

But will we put all our hope only in him?

This is the last time the Psalter uses the declaration “O how happy!” The first time is in Ps. 1, which contrasts the happy man whose delight was in the Torah of the LORD with the wicked who perish. Ps. 146 focuses on trust: in whom is your hope: mere mortal man or the Creator of heaven and earth? “In the book of Psalms and in the Bible as a whole, wickedness is essentially a matter of trust.”