

Abstract

The aim of the present study is to investigate Psalm 104 as a whole and to determine its biblical-theological contribution to Israelite thinking of creation. Its methods are comparative-historical, semantic, literary, and biblical theological. I argue that the psalmist uses not only images that are reminiscent of the sun-god and storm-god of the ancient Near East but also images that reflect an ancient garden or park. Thus, the thesis of this study is that Psalm 104 portrays creation as a garden and YHWH as the royal gardener who creates it and oversees its care.

This study consists of three parts. First, a consideration of the gardens of Mesopotamia, Persia, and Egypt distinguishes some salient elements of ancient gardens, and reveals how the Egyptian Hymn to Aten utilized the images of the Amarna gardens in order to portray creation order. Second, the general use of garden imagery in the Old Testament is established, by means of a study of the semantic field of the Hebrew term גַּן “garden,” and an examination of the gardens of the Old Testament, such as the Garden of Eden, royal gardens, and garden symbolism in the temple. Third, Psalm 104 is analyzed from several perspectives. Attention is given to its ancient Near Eastern counterparts—the sun-god in the Egyptian Hymn to Aten and the storm-god in West-Semitic traditions. Also, conversation with Old Testament parallels—Genesis 1 and the Garden of Eden are considered. Finally, this study takes a literary approach that examines the structural and rhetorical aspects of the psalm, revealing how the psalm utilizes the imagery of a garden to portray creation.

As ancient gardens were built and maintained in order to reflect creation with a diversity of plants and animals, the provision of water, and ecological order, the psalm portrays creation by using images that allude to an ancient garden. The psalmist of Psalm 104 uses the images of an ancient garden and also those reflected in the Garden of Eden to portray creation as a garden and YHWH as the cosmic gardener who creates and also sustains it.