

Psalms 104:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain:

Analysis

Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: This verse continues the royal imagery from verse 1, describing God's apparel and dwelling. "Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment" (oteh-or kasalmah, עֲטָה־אָוֶר כְּשַׁלְמָה) portrays God wrapped in light itself. Or (אוֹר) denotes physical light, but also symbolizes divine glory, holiness, and truth. God's essential nature is luminous—He is "the Father of lights" (James 1:17) who "dwells in the light which no man can approach unto" (1 Timothy 6:16).

The metaphor of light as clothing suggests that what we perceive as brilliant light—the most intense visible phenomenon—is merely the outer garment of God's glory, concealing infinitely greater radiance beneath. Just as human clothing both reveals (shape, movement) and conceals (nakedness), God's light-garment both reveals His presence and shields creatures from the consuming fullness of His glory.

"Who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain" (noteh shamayim ka-y'ri'ah, נָטוּה שָׁמָיִם כְּיַרְעָה) depicts God as a nomad pitching a tent. Yeri'ah (יַרְעָה) means a tent curtain or hanging—the fabric stretched to form shelter. Despite the heavens' vastness (the observable universe spans ~93 billion light-years), God spreads them out effortlessly, like someone hanging a curtain. This emphasizes both divine transcendence (God exceeds the cosmos He creates) and accessibility (the infinite God makes His dwelling accessible to creatures).

The imagery anticipates New Testament revelation: Christ is the true light entering the world (John 1:9, 8:12), and He "tabernacled" among us (John 1:14, using skenoo, "to tent").

Historical Context

Light imagery for deity was common in ancient Near Eastern religions—the Egyptian sun god Ra, Mesopotamian sun god Shamash, and Persian deity Ahura Mazda were all associated with light. However, Psalm 104 radically distinguishes Yahweh from these: He isn't identified with light (as a sun god) but transcends it, using light as mere clothing. The sun itself is His creation (v. 19), not His essence.

The tent/curtain metaphor reflects Israel's nomadic origins and wilderness experience. The Tabernacle was called the 'tent of meeting' where God's glory dwelt among His people (Exodus 40:34-38). The cosmos itself is portrayed as God's tent, suggesting the entire universe is His sanctuary where He meets His creatures.

Isaiah develops similar imagery: God 'sitteth upon the circle of the earth...that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in' (Isaiah 40:22). This suggests both divine transcendence (God exceeds creation) and immanence (God dwells within creation). The heavens are His tent, but He isn't confined by them (1 Kings 8:27).

Modern cosmology's discovery of cosmic expansion aligns remarkably with this ancient imagery. The universe is indeed 'stretching out' continuously, expanding from an initial singularity. While the psalmist couldn't have known physics, the metaphor Scripture employs proves scientifically apt—the heavens are indeed stretching like a fabric.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the metaphor of God 'covered with light' inform our understanding of theophanies (visible manifestations of God) throughout Scripture?
2. What does it mean that the vast cosmos is like a tent curtain to God, and how should this affect human pride or cosmic insignificance?
3. How do Jesus' claims to be 'the light of the world' connect to this psalm's imagery of God clothed in light?

Interlinear Text

עָלָה אַרְבָּה כְּשַׁלְמָתָה נוֹצֵחַ שְׁמַיִם
Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment who stretchest out the heavens
H5844 H216 H8008 H5186 H8064

כַּרְעֵץ:
like a curtain
H3407

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 40:22 (Parallel theme): It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:

Isaiah 45:12 (Parallel theme): I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded.

1 John 1:5 (Light): This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Daniel 7:9 (Parallel theme): I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.

