

# Did mountains really rise according to Psalm 104:8?

Charles Taylor

Analysis of the Hebrew original, as well as Greek and some other translations of Psalm 104:8, and the context, confirm that this key verse is referring to earth movements (tectonic activity) at the close of, and soon after, the Flood when the mountains rose and the waters retreated.

When I first saw the well-known creationist film *The World That Perished* many years ago, I was amazed to find that the Bible they were using said that 'the mountains rose, the valleys sank'. Like a good Berean (Acts 17:11) I looked in my King James Bible, but it didn't say that. Instead, it said: 'They go up by the mountains; they go down by the valleys', referring to the 'waters' of two verses earlier.

## Psalm 104:8

Psalm 104, verse 8, is the verse which the film uses together with a depiction of the cataclysmic change. I also found that John Whitcomb had written:

*'Psalm 104:8 is actually saying that God supernaturally pushed up great mountain ranges in the continental areas to balance the new depths in the ocean basins. Thus global topography, as we see it today, was not shaped by an accumulation of infinitesimal changes through vast periods of time...'*<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the classic *The Genesis Flood* states:

*'The only way in which land could now appear again would be for a tremendous orogeny to take place. Mountains must rise and new basins must form to receive the great overburden of water imposed upon the earth. This process is described in Psalm 104:5-9.'*<sup>2</sup>

The authors set out the quotation elsewhere in the book in the form agreeing with the above statements: *'The mountains rose, the valleys sank down.'*<sup>3</sup>

All this sent me to the various translations of the Bible, and I found that not all translations agreed with the King James. The film appears to use the New American Standard Bible. So which translation is right?

## Translations

English Bibles can be divided into two groups. Agreeing with the King James are: the Revised Version (UK), the Good News Bible, the New English Bible, Jerusalem Bible, R.G. Moulton, the New International Version and the New King James Bible. Agreeing with the New American Standard are: the Amplified, Revised Berkeley, J.N. Darby's,<sup>4</sup> the Living Bible, Knox Version (1963), The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text: a new translation by the Jewish Publication Society, the Revised Standard Version, translator's marginal note of the KJV, and the New International Children's Version.

In the Hebrew original text of Psalm 104:8, there are no prepositions such as 'by', 'over' or 'into'. It simply says, 'rise mountains, sink valleys' (see Table 1).

Hebrew	יָעֲלוּ	הַרִימִים	יָרְדוּ	בְּקִעוֹת
Romanised	ya'alu	hariyim,	yerdu	bheqa'oth
English	rise	mountains,	sink	valleys

**Table 1.** Transliteration and translation of original Hebrew text, (reading left to right, although Hebrew is read right to left.)

The Greek Septuagint (LXX)<sup>5</sup> is similar (see Table 2). Greek is even clearer than the Hebrew, because in Greek the noun endings indicate whether they are subjects or objects of the verbs. In the LXX, the nouns 'mountains' and 'valleys' are both in the nominative (subject) case, and there are no prepositions, so it cannot possibly mean that something else rose above the mountains or below the valleys, or even went down into them. Thus the LXX translators understood the passage to refer to mountains rising and valleys sinking.

Of course, the passage is poetic, and so although the present tense is used, it is a 'historic present' and in prose is translated as a past tense: 'The mountains rose; the valleys sank'.

αναβαινουσιν	ορη	και	καταβαινουσι	πεδια
anabainousin	orē	kai	katabainousi	pedia
rise	mountains	and	sink	valleys

**Table 2.** Transliteration and translation of the Greek Septuagint text.

Table 3 shows translations from Luther's German translation of the Bible (older than the English King James), a popular German version of the nineteenth century by Hermann Menge, the French Protestant Bible (the *Version Synodale*), the Italian *Edizione Paoline*, as well as the Swedish Protestant Bible and the Spanish *Reina Valera* version.

Perhaps some of the early English translators, reacting against medieval miracle stories, did not wish to credit the Bible with such a miracle as that of rising mountains, and so added words to make 'common sense'.

**LUTHER'S GERMAN**

*Die Berge gingen hoch hervor*  
the mountains went high forth

*und die Taler setzten sich  
herunter. . .*  
and the valleys put  
themselves down

**MENGE'S GERMAN**

*Da stiegen Berge empor*  
there rose mountains upwards

*und Taler senkten sich .*  
and valleys sank  
themselves

**FRENCH PROTESTANT BIBLE**

*Les montagnes s'éleverent*  
the mountains raised themselves

*et les vallées s'abaissèrent*  
and the valleys lowered  
themselves

**ITALIAN EDIZIONE PAOLINE**

*emersero i monti*  
came forth the mountains

*si abbassarono le valli. . .*  
themselves lowered the valleys

**SWEDISH PROTESTANT**

*Berg höjde sig*  
mountains raised themselves

*coh dalar sankte sig*  
and valleys lowered themselves

**SPANISH REINA VALERA**

*suhieron los montes*  
rose the mountains

*descendieron los valles*  
descended the hills

**Table 3.** Some German, French, Italian, Swedish and Spanish translations, with word-for-word English equivalents.

**Context**

Actually, much of Psalm 104 seems to refer to creation itself: some have even pointed out parallels to the days of creation. However, verse 9 appears to be a reference to God's promise never to send a worldwide Flood again.<sup>6</sup> Many creationist writers thus see verse 8 as a possible reference to the closing stages of the Flood.

If there had been such tectonic activity at the close of, and soon after, the Flood the waters could truly be described as 'fleeing' from the surface of the Earth into newly deepened ocean basins, where God has 'set a bound that they may not pass over; that they turn not again to cover the earth' (verse 9).

In any case it must be obvious that, whether or not this verse is meant to give a hint about tectonic events at the close of, and soon after the Flood, it seems that some such activity must have taken place, or else the Earth would still be covered with the water of the Flood.<sup>7</sup>

And what about the context? Understanding the context is a help in translating. We notice that verse 7 of Psalm 104 has already told us that the waters 'fled', so why would they then go up again over the mountains? The flow of the narrative indicates that in verse 8 we have a new feature, in which our attention is drawn to the mountains and valleys themselves, but with the waters and their bounds still in mind. Then in verse 9

our attention is once more given to the waters, to which the mountains and valleys, and indeed the land in general, formed a barrier, so that the waters would never again flood the whole Earth. That seems the most reasonable understanding of the passage as a whole.

**References**

1. Whitcomb, J.C., 1973. *The World That Perished*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, p. 39.
2. Whitcomb, J.C. and Morris, H.M., 1961. *The Genesis Flood*, Presbyterian and Reformed, Philadelphia, p. 267.
3. Whitcomb and Morris, Ref. 2, p. 122.
4. J.N. Darby's version is the Bible frequently used by the Christian Brethren as their recourse to an accurate translation.
5. The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament produced about 250 BC. The New Testament often quotes the Old Testament from this Greek version.
6. If the Flood had only been local, as many 'progressive creationists' claim today, this would mean that God would have broken His promise again and again. Also, there would have been no point in building a huge Ark if they could have migrated instead.
7. If the Earth's surface features were flattened out, the ocean waters would cover the Earth to a depth of several kilometres. This would not equal the present height of the Himalayas, which have marine fossils in their upper layers. So how could all the mountains have been covered unless many of today's ranges had risen up at the close of, and soon after, the Flood? As regards the changed topography of Earth and a significant reduction in land area after the Flood, see Taylor, C.V., 1983. *The Oldest (Science) Book in the World*, obtainable from P.O. Box 231, West Gosford, New South Wales, 2250, Australia.

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