

Significance of the similarities between psalms 104 and the hymn of aton

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What is the significance of the similarities between Psalms 104 and the Great Hymn to the Aten? The Great Hymn to the Aten has often been cited as being the first true example of monotheism in existence; it details Akhenaten worshipping the sun god known as Aten. This is unusual as it comes from a series of ancient Egyptian poems, a religion known for its polytheistic style. Psalms 104 is also unusual in its own way. Originally written in Hebrew, it has become incorporated into the Christian religion, which is monotheistic (here we can see some of the simplest similarities between the two poems become apparent). However, the unusual thing about Psalms 104 is that it attributes characteristics of the sun to the Christian God, something which is not found anywhere else in the Bible. In fact, it is actively forbidden in Ezekiel 8: 16-17: “ they worshipped the sun toward the east... Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here?”. So these two poems share a similarity in that they are both out of place within their own religion, and they both praise a god with characteristics of the sun. There are, however, many similarities to be found at the text level, too.

In Psalm 104, for example, we can see in line 12 that “ By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches”. This is a reference to God sending springs into the valleys, and the sunlight allowing the growth of the “ habitation”. The exact same inference is made in the Great Hymn to the Aten: “ The birds flutter in their marshes/Their wings uplifted in adoration to thee.”. Not only do birds have a place in the scheme of the sun god found in both poems, both lines infer that all creatures show gratitude to the god in question for his kindness. The only

difference is that one set of birds sing and the other have wings uplifted. This is not the only obvious similarity. In line 27 of Psalms 104 we find that “These [animals] wait all for thee. That thou may give them food in due season”. In the Great Hymn to the Aten, we find “Thou suppliest his necessities”. Both of the gods in question, then, are said to supply food to all the creatures of the earth, something that can be attributed to the sun itself. Not only this, but the creatures in question are both said to originate in both the sun gods; in the Great Hymn, Aten is “Giver of breath to animals, every one that he maketh”, and in Psalms 104, God “sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.” So here, the Christian God and Aten are both creators, feeders/healers, and examples of a god to be thanked.

It is difficult to say how these similarities benefit our society today. We could suggest from this that the monotheistic worship of a giving, all-powerful God is an ancient, timeless idea, and that we should always be thankful for what we have been given, something that does not necessarily happen in modern times. We could also suggest that common themes run through many religions, even that of Ancient Egypt, and we could use this as an example to help settle religious differences today. By pointing out the similarities between religions, we can often find a common thread. Aside from this, the similarities are of historical interest, and any knowledge gained from this can help expand our view of the world and how it came to exist in its current state today.