



## Psalm 29 - The Voice of God in a Great Storm

A Psalm of David.

### Introduction

This is a hymn of praise to God for his awesome power, where a thunderstorm serves as a visible emblem of God's majestic voice. It was once common to think that this psalm was based on a Canaanite or Phœnician original, but the evidence for this is poor. It seems reasonable, however, to suppose that the setting of the psalm in a thunderstorm deliberately sets Yahweh over Baal, the storm-god widely worshipped in Syria-Palestine. Biblical authors do not present the phenomena of nature in themselves as problems; they are God's creation, serve his purposes, and demonstrate his power, wisdom, glory, faithfulness, and even love.

This psalm is notable in its emphasis on the name 'The Lord', i.e. Yahweh, using it some 18 times in these 11 verses. This is the name taken by the covenant God of Israel, rendered by the Jews with the replacement word Lord out of reverence to the holy name.

### Psalm 29:1-2 - Call to Ascribe Glory to the Lord

The psalm begins by urging the heavenly beings or angels, literally 'sons of God,' to ascribe to the Lord glory and strength, i.e. to acknowledge that these are true of God, and that he deserves admiration for them. The Hebrew expression <<*in holy splendour*>> can be taken in more than one way; with 'for the splendour of God's holiness' one of the favoured expressions.

- <sup>1</sup> Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

## Psalm 29:1

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings. The term heavenly beings is often translated as ‘the sons of God’ and is used elsewhere to denote angels: <<*the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. Then the Lord said, ‘My spirit shall not abide in mortals for ever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred and twenty years.’ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days – and also afterwards – when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown*>> (Genesis 6:2-4), and: <<*Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them*>> (Job 1:6 ESV). In this context the phrase may be used as a technical term for the divine assembly of heavenly beings who surround the throne of God.

Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. All of creation, whether on earth or in heaven, needs to recognise the might and power of the Creator God.

- <sup>2</sup> Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name;  
worship the Lord in holy splendour.

## Psalm 29:2

Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name. His name being Yahweh, this is a call to recognise the character and nature of the covenant God of Israel. God’s name is due all glory; therefore it is right to call men and angels to worship him. This, in essence, is what the angel told John: <<*Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow-servant with you and your comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’*>> (Revelation 19:10).

Worship the Lord in holy splendour. The idea is that man should bow in humble recognition of the greatness, the beauty, and the surpassing holiness of God.

## Psalm 29:3-9 - The Voice of the Lord in a Thunderstorm

In these verses there are six descriptions of the voice of the Lord, of which the thunderstorm is an emblem. The reader should imagine a magnificent storm coming eastward from the Mediterranean Sea, making landfall to the north in the mountains of Lebanon, and heading south to sweep through Israel, from Sirion, i.e. Mount Hermon: <<*the Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, while the Amorites call it Senir*>> (Deuteronomy 3:9) in the northern end to Kadesh at the southern end. The faithful, worshipping in the temple in Jerusalem, see the awesome power of the storm and from it know that the voice of the Lord is even more powerful, and even more full of majesty; hence their responsive cry, Glory!

- <sup>3</sup> The voice of the Lord is over the waters;  
the God of glory thunders,  
the Lord, over mighty waters.
- <sup>4</sup> The voice of the Lord is powerful;  
the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.

#### Psalm 29:3-4

The voice of the Lord is over the waters. The mighty ones mentioned in the first verse of this psalm may have a high regard for their own power, but it is nothing compared to the power of God. His authoritative voice proclaims his dominion over the waters. This is the first of seven descriptions of the voice of the Lord in this psalm. Each one emphasises the idea of the strength and authority of God expressed through his voice. The strength and authority of God's voice is also connected to his Word. If the voice of God has such power, then the words uttered with that voice have the same strength and authority.

The God of glory thunders. The association of thunder and the voice of the Lord suggests this psalm was prompted by David witnessing a great storm, hearing the power of thunder, and associating it with the voice of God: <<'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine'>> (John 12:27-30).

Exodus 9:28 also associates the voice of God with thunder, as it does when Israel heard from God at Mount Sinai in Exodus Chapter 19. Two passages from Job also clearly make this connection: <<After it his voice roars; he thunders with his majestic voice and he does not restrain the lightnings when his voice is heard. God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things that we cannot comprehend>> (Job 37:4-5), and God asked Job: <<Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?>> (Job 40:9).

The Lord, over mighty waters. Generally, the ancient Hebrews were not a seafaring people and they saw the open sea as a dangerous and foreboding place. Yet David knew that the powerful voice of God, full of majesty, set him over mighty waters.

The ancient Canaanites recognised deities over the sea, i.e. the god Yam, and the god of fertility and thunder, which was Baal. Here, David recognised that Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, was the real master over many waters and

the God of glory who thunders. Jesus, too, demonstrated his command over nature: <<One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.' So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A gale swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?''>> (Luke 8:22-25)

Scientists calculate that a typical thunderstorm, not even the kind of great or major storm described here by David, releases around 10,000,000 kilowatt-hours of energy, the equivalent of a 20-kiloton nuclear warhead. Storms still are examples of the massive power of God.

- <sup>5</sup> The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;  
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

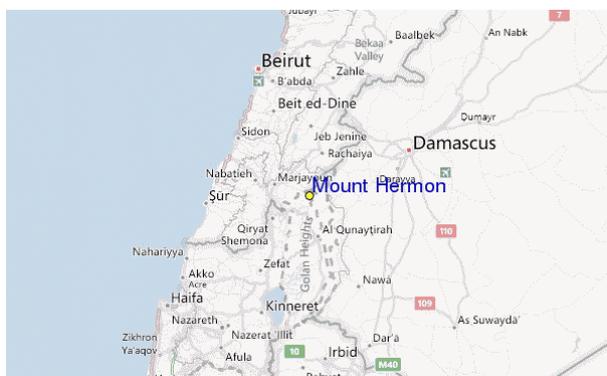
#### Psalm 29:5

The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon. The cedars of Lebanon were well-known for their size and strength. Yet the Lord's voice is so strong that splinters these mighty trees and sends their wood in flight. Again, one can imagine a mighty thunderbolt striking and shattering a strong cedar tree. David saw this and thought: 'The voice of the Lord is like this, although even more powerful!'

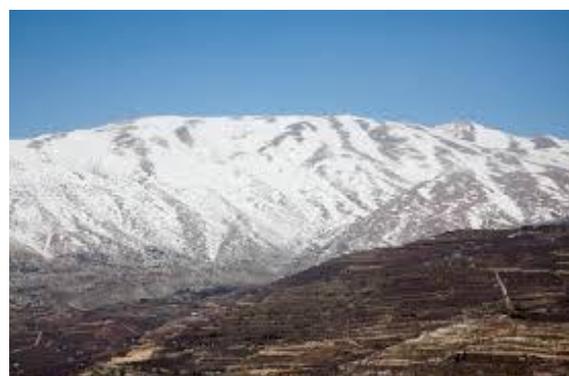
- <sup>6</sup> He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,  
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

#### Psalm 29:6

Sirion is the Sidonian name for Mount Hermon.



Location of Mount Hermon



Mount Hermon - a ski resort

In the King James translation a young wild ox is described as a young unicorn.

7 The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire.

8 The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness;  
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

### Psalm 29:7-8

The voice of the Lord flashes, shakes the wilderness. David could see the effect of lightning bolts, and understood that they were an illustration of the power and effect of God's word.

Just as Sirion was to the far north of the Promised Land, the wilderness of Kadesh was towards its southern most boundary: <<*Your southern boundary shall begin from the end of the Dead Sea on the east; your boundary shall turn south of the ascent of Akrabbim, and cross to Zin, and its outer limit shall be south of Kadesh-barnea; then it shall go on to Hazar-addar, and cross to Azmon*>> (Numbers 34:3b-4).

9 The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl,  
and strips the forest bare;  
and in his temple all say, 'Glory!'

### Psalm 29:9

In his temple all say, 'Glory!' David thought of how thunder and lightning attract attention and give a sense of awe. This sense of glory is even more appropriately given to the Lord, at his temple: <<*O Lord, I love the house in which you dwell, and the place where your glory abides*>> (Psalm 26:8). There, the people of God do not tremble in fear of the storm, but in awe of their great God, to whom they say, 'Glory!'

It is also worthwhile for each believer to ask himself or herself if they are among those who say, 'Glory!' if the Word of God, the voice of God, still feels like thunder to them. If not, and for many this would be an honest assessment, they should humbly come to God and confess that his voice, his Word, sounds more like the drop of a paper clip than a thunderbolt, and ask for a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit to make a cold heart warm once again, and dull hearing sharp once more.

### Psalm 29:10-11 - The Lord Enthroned

The temple (v.9) is the place where God sits enthroned as King forever, especially over his people; worship is coming into his majestic presence.

10 The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;  
the Lord sits enthroned as king for ever.

#### Psalm 29:10

The Lord sits enthroned over the flood. David saw the storm bring a deluge of rain, and it made him think of the Genesis account of the Flood, remembering it as a remarkable demonstration of the power and authority of the voice of God. David's reflection on the flood is a reminder of what a staggering expression it was of God's power and justice.

The word for flood here, Hebrew *mabbul*, is used elsewhere only of Noah's flood in Genesis 6:17; this shows that God's power, unlike that of the storm, makes distinctions between the faithful and the unfaithful; hence the prayer that God will give strength to his people (v.1), and bless his people with peace, which requires that they be true to him always.

The Lord sits enthroned as king for ever. The flood was a radical expression of God's authority; yet his authority did not end with those many generations ago. The Lord God continues to sit as king for ever. God promised David that one of his descendants, the Messiah, would be a king forever: <<*Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever*>> (2 Samuel 7:16), <<*But King Solomon shall be blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the Lord for ever*>> (1 Kings 2:45).

11 May the Lord give strength to his people!  
May the Lord bless his people with peace!

#### Psalm 29:11

May the Lord give strength to his people! As David considered the earth-shattering strength and authority of God, he recognised that God brought that same strength to his people.

May the Lord bless his people with peace! The power of God may come as a destructive storm upon creation and those who rebel against God. Yet God's people can be confident that he will bless them with peace, and the strength of God comes to them as a comfort, not a storm: <<*Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, until the destroying storms pass by*>> (Psalm 57:1).