

Psalm 29
Psalm 29
Revelation 17

“The Voice of the LORD”

November 6, 2016

In Psalm 28 the Psalmist cried out, begging the LORD to *speak*.

Hear me.

Do not be silent.

And in Psalm 28 the Psalmist rejoices because the LORD *has* heard me –

He *is* my strength and my shield.

He *is* the saving refuge of his Anointed.

And in Psalm 28, David concludes with a prayer:

“Oh, save your people and bless your heritage! Be their shepherd and carry them forever.”

Psalm 29 then contains the blessing – the benediction requested in Psalm 28.

Psalm 29 follows the path of a thunderstorm from Lebanon in the north
to the wilderness of Kadesh in the south,
and then realizes that *that* is the answer!

Have you ever thought that the solution to your problems is found in the path of a thunderstorm?

Probably not!

We live in an age of barren, sterile interpretation.

We don't see the connections between scripture, nature, and history –

because we think that each of these subjects has their own interpretive method.

We interpret nature by means of careful scientific investigation.

We interpret history by means of careful study into what people said and did.

We interpret scripture by means of grammatical-historical analysis.

And we have carefully sealed off any overlap.

One of the reasons why I really enjoy reading the early church fathers

is because they lived in a world where they *expected* overlap!

They interpreted nature, history, and scripture all together.

Psalm 29 invites us to reconnect the broken fragments of our lives.

When you hear the Voice of the LORD in the thunder

you will never experience “nature” the same again!

When you hear the Voice of the LORD shaking the wilderness

you will never think of history the same again –

because the Voice of the LORD –

the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us –

has opened your ears so that you might hear the scriptures afresh!

Sing Psalm 29
Read Revelation 17

What on earth does Revelation 17 have to do with Psalm 29?!

The angel says to John,

“Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute
who is seated on many waters...”

And the angel explains the picture in verse 15 –

“The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated,
are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.”

In Revelation 17, the prostitute is seated “on many waters.”

In Psalm 29, the voice of the LORD is “over many waters.”

And in Psalm 29 the “many waters” comment

is followed by the LORD’s power revealed over the nations (Lebanon, Kadesh).

Over the last several weeks we have seen how book One of the Psalms

is all about a world in which the *king* sits on the throne –

but things are not yet the way they should be.

Revelation 17 describes the same world.

Yes, the Lamb is the Lord of lords and the King of kings –

but we do not yet see all things under his feet.

Or as we heard from Psalm 28 last week:

“The LORD is the saving strength of his people;
he is the saving refuge of his anointed.

Oh, save your people and bless your heritage!

Be their shepherd and carry them forever.”

That is what we long for!

We long for the day when we will hear the voice of a great multitude,
like the roar of many waters, crying out:

“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory.” (Rev 19:6)

The “many waters” of Revelation 17 appear again in Revelation 19.

After all, the many waters “are people and multitudes and nations and languages.”

It is not right that people and multitudes and nations and languages
should worship the beast!

It is not right that Babylon the great prostitute should sit over many waters.

The Voice of the LORD is over many waters!

And we long for the day when the Voice of the LORD
will be heard and exalted among the nations!

But right now?

Right now we see Babylon.

And no matter who wins the election on Tuesday,

Babylon will still be sitting over many waters on Wednesday.

What John is doing in Revelation 17-19

is very much what David is doing in Psalm 29.

After a whole series of Psalms that lay out the *problems* of this life

Psalm 25 – “I am lonely and afflicted”

Psalm 26 – “Vindicate me” from the lies of evil men

Psalm 27 – “evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh”

Psalm 28 – “Do not drag me off with the wicked...”

Psalm 29 reminds us that the LORD sits enthroned over the flood.

It’s not that *someday* everything will be all right.

It’s that *right now* the LORD is King.

Just like in the days of the Psalms, when David was king.

Because this is – once again –

A Psalm of David.

Psalm 29 uses repetition and rhythm to communicate the glory of God.

“Ascribe to the LORD” – is repeated three times in the first two verses –
and then concluded with a parallel idea: “worship the LORD.”

“The voice of the LORD” is then repeated seven times in verses 3-9 –
first over the waters (repeated twice in verse 3),
then breaking the cedars (repeated twice in verse 5),
then over Lebanon (repeated twice in verses 5-6),
then shaking the wilderness (repeated twice in verse 8).

And then the conclusion repeats the theme of “the LORD sits enthroned” twice (v10-11).

In a Psalm that uses repetition so much, it is worth noting two other repetitions:

The first section, in verse 1, says to ascribe “glory and strength” to the LORD.

“Glory” will be the central theme of the middle section,

and strength will be the theme of the conclusion, -

as verse 11 says that the LORD will give strength to his people.

The beginning of the middle section – verse 3 –

speaks of the LORD as the “God of glory” –

and at the end of the middle section – verse 9 –

all in his temple cry “Glory!”

All of this repetition – and the way that it is done –
has led many to suggest that Psalm 29 is one of the oldest songs in the Psalter.

Certainly Psalm 29 interacts with the religious world of its day –
a religious world that sounds very strange to us.

So let me explain.

One of the leading gods of the Canaanites was Baal – the storm god.

Baal was the son of El (the high god).

Another deity – as powerful as Baal – was Yam (which means “sea”) the god of waters.

We know these stories from the “Baal Cycle” (from Ugarit – a northern Canaanite city).

The documents date from around the time of Moses,

and we know that these stories would have been circulating in David’s time

(after all, we still hear echoes of them a couple hundred years later,

during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel...).

In the Baal Cycle,

Baal defeats Yam – the Waters – and then is enthroned in his heavenly palace.

Being the “storm god” – the one who rides on the clouds of heaven –

Baal “thunders” from his heavenly throne.

Here’s one example from the Baal Cycle:

“Then Baal opened a slit in the clouds,

Baal sounded his holy voice,

Baal thundered from his lips...

The earth’s high palaces shook.” (Coogan, *Stories from Ancient Canaan*)

In fact, if you replaced “Yahweh” with “Baal” in Psalm 29,
it could fit Baal perfectly!

(And yes, you can find plenty of scholars who think that it was originally a song to Baal,
and that some Hebrew scribe simply replaced “Baal” with “Yahweh”!)

(The basic problem is that there is not a shred of evidence for this view!)

But what you *should* see is that Psalm 29 is responding to the Baal Cycle.

When Psalm 29 says that the “God of glory thunders” –

and identifies that God as *Yahweh* –

the Psalmist is saying that Yahweh is the God who thunders –

NOT Baal!

I like Robert Alter’s comment:

“The relation of this psalm, and a good many others, to the Syro-Palestinian tradition is roughly like that of *Paradise Lost* to the *Aeneid* and the *Iliad*.

[25 centuries earlier!]

Virgil and Homer gave Milton a model, and a repertory of devices and *topoi*, with which he could frame a cosmic epic

from his own monotheistic perspective,

but was not merely ‘transposing’ the pagan epic poets into English.” (p98)

In other words, Psalm 29 does not merely “replace” Baal with Yahweh.

There is an entirely different understanding of who God is.

Let me fast-forward 3000 years.

Rather than talk about Baal and Yahweh,

let's talk about a modern myth!

An Atheist will say, “In the beginning there was the Big Bang.”

And the Christian will say “In the beginning, God said, ‘Let there be light.’”

And *Bang* there was light!

In one sense, the Atheist and the Christian both say that it all began with a Bang!

But the Atheist has to try to explain that “Bang”

out of some pre-existing matter/energy/something!

There had to be *something* that went Bang!

Whereas the Christian believes that at that moment,

all things were called into being by the Voice of the LORD.

The Atheist has *no idea* where it all came from.

He must take it as an article of faith either that something came out of nothing,

or that something has always existed.

In other words, the Atheist view of the origin of the world

has precisely the same starting point as the Baal Cycle.

After all, the Baal Cycle is not presented as divine revelation.

The Baal Cycle was man’s best effort at explaining the world as he has found it.

Three thousand years later, Atheists have a different explanation –

but it rests upon precisely the same foundation:

this story makes the best sense of what we have seen and experienced.

But into humanity’s “best guess” the Voice of the LORD speaks –

the same Voice that rebuked the Baal Cycle 3000 years ago

now rebukes the Atheist Cycle – and indeed,
every myth that refuses to ascribe all glory and strength to the LORD.

1. The Call to Worship – Ascribe Glory and Strength to the LORD (v1-2)

29 Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,

ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

² *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;*

worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.

Psalm 29 opens with a call for the “heavenly beings” to ascribe glory and strength to Yahweh.

“Heavenly beings” translates “sons of the gods” – or perhaps “sons of God” –

but the only other place where this exact phrase occurs is in Psalm 89:6

“For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD?

Who among the [sons of the gods] is like the LORD?”

So Psalm 29 is calling upon the ‘sons of the gods’ – the heavenly beings –
to worship Yahweh.

Who are these “heavenly beings”?

We often call them “angels” –

but that’s just one Greek word that is used to describe these beings!

The Psalms often speak of the “heavenly council” –

The book of Job speaks of the sons of God (slightly different phrase –

but probably the same meaning)

presenting themselves before the LORD.

And Satan is there.

I would suggest that Baal, and Zeus, and Thor, and Amon-Ra are all there.

I’m *not* saying that ancient mythology is true.

The stories that you read about the ancient gods are generally a pack of lies.

What I am saying is that the *beings* referred to by the *names* Baal, Zeus, etc.
are real beings.

(Indeed, it is possible that Herodotus is correct to say that all the various gods
of all the various nations in fact refer to the same beings –

so that the Greek Zeus *is* the Roman Jupiter *is* the Egyptian Amon-Ra.)

(Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 8:5-6 –

“For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth –

as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’ –

yet for us there is one God, the Father,

from whom are all things and for whom we exist,

and one Lord, Jesus Christ,

through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”)

There *are* “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).

And Psalm 29 calls on them to *ascribe to the LORD glory and strength*.

And particularly, *the glory of his name* (well-translated “glory *due* his name”)

Honestly, we don’t know very much about the “principalities and powers.”

I think that C. S. Lewis, in his *Space Trilogy*, does a great job of thinking about how these principalities and powers might relate to the modern age.

But what we do know is that Psalm 29 calls on them to worship the LORD.

That may sound strange.

Why is David telling the heavenly powers to worship God?

Well, *think about* the book of Job!

What *is* Satan doing in the heavenly assembly?

How come the *accuser of the brethren* is able to come and go as he pleases?!

It all goes back to what happened in Eden – the garden of God – the sanctuary that God had built to dwell with his people (Adam and Eve).

Adam had been told to *work and to guard* the garden sanctuary.

But Adam failed.

The Serpent entered the sanctuary –

and Adam and Eve listened to the *voice* of the Serpent.

And from that day forward, Satan ruled in place of Adam.

Satan was always a usurper – he had no *right* to Adam’s throne – but he ruled nonetheless!

Jesus says in Luke’s gospel, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” (10:18)

And in Matthew, Jesus says that you must first *bind the strong man* before plundering his house (Matthew 12:29).

And in Revelation John sees the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan “thrown down to the earth,”

and he hears a loud voice saying,

“Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come,

for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down,

who accuses them day and night before our God.” (Rev. 12:9-11)

This is what Jesus *has done*.

David, in Psalm 29, had said to the heavenly beings “Worship the LORD!”

Because David understood that this was his calling as the LORD's anointed!
Psalm 2 had said that the LORD's Anointed would rule the nations
with a rod of iron.
Psalm 8 had spoken of how God had placed all things "under the feet"
of the Son of Man (the son of Adam).
And the Davidic King is the one who inherits that Promise!
Psalm 24 had said that the man with a pure heart will ascend the hill of the LORD,
and *also* that the LORD of hosts *is* the King of glory.

The son of David is tasked with a *cosmic* task!
He is called to restore order *not just on earth* – but also in the heavens!
Because of the Serpent – because of the sin of Adam –
the proper order of creation has been overthrown.

And when Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father,
he made war on the devil and his angels –
and he threw them down from heaven,
so that they might no longer accuse his brothers.

And Jesus stood at the threshold of the heavenly temple and said,
"Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the gods,
Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness!"

And since that day, Satan has not dared to show his face in the heavenly assembly.
All things have been placed under the feet of the Son of Man (the Son of Adam).

And therefore we now hear the Voice of Jesus:

2. The Voice of the LORD (v3-9)
a. Its Power in Nature and History (v3-4)

³ *The voice of the LORD is over the waters;*
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over many waters.

⁴ *The voice of the LORD is powerful;*
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

In the Baal Cycle, Yam, the god of waters attacked Baal.
There is no hint of danger here.
Yahweh's rule is not threatened!
The voice of the LORD is *over* the waters.

Verses 3-9 portray the voice of the LORD as a thunderstorm –
a thunderstorm that moves from north to south
As it moves across the land
the voice of the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon in the north,
and shakes the wilderness of Kadesh in the south.

What do you hear in the thunder?
Have you embraced the modern Atheistic view of thunder?
Is it simply a shockwave?
Psalm 29 calls you to hear the voice of the LORD in the thunder.

And when you hear the voice of the LORD in the thunder,
you not only hear the power of God in nature,
but also the power of God in history.

The Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 and the Song of Deborah in Judges 5
both use the imagery of a great storm
in speaking of how God comes in judgment against his enemies.

After all, the waters in the OT not only connect to the Baal cycle,
but the prophets regularly speak of the waters as the nations of the earth
(which is why Revelation 17 uses it that way).

And, in Revelation, what sounds do you hear at the end of the “sevens”?
Thunder.

You need to hear the voice of the LORD in the thunder.
Every time it thunders, God is saying that judgment is coming.
Now, as we’ve seen in these Psalms, that’s *not* a bad thing!
It is a very *good* thing that judgment is coming!
Because it is only when judgment comes that God will vindicate his people!

That is why when Jesus came he had to be baptized.
Jesus told John that it was *fitting* for him to fulfill all righteousness.
What are the pictures of baptism used in the NT?
The Flood (1 Peter 3)
The Red Sea (1 Cor 10)
Both are called “baptism” in the NT.
Why?
Because before Jesus could be enthroned above the waters of judgment,
he first had to pass *through* the waters of judgment.

After all, at the Jordan River, the Father said, “This is my beloved Son” –

thereby rendering his verdict regarding Jesus,
and, in Jesus, all those who hope in him!

b. Breaking the Cedars of Lebanon (v5-6)

⁵ *The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.*

⁶ *He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.*

The cedars of Lebanon were famous for providing the finest timber in all the world.
All ancient palaces and temples sought after the cedar of Lebanon.
But the voice of the LORD splits the cedars of Lebanon –
he breaks apart all that exalts itself against him.

Today we might say “the voice of the LORD is a solar flare – a geomagnetic storm –
that fries the electrical grid!”
(because quite frankly, the electrical grid – and the computer technology that goes with it,
is probably the closest parallel to the temples of the ancient world!)

Likewise, he makes the mountains of Lebanon and Sirion skip like calves.

I know, you don’t think of “mountains” skipping!

But that’s how powerful the voice of the LORD is!

When the LORD speaks,

even a mountain will jump like a skittish calf in a thunderstorm!

This is the same picture that Jesus uses when he says that faith can move mountains.

How does faith move mountains?

It’s *not* because of any sort of inherent power of *faith*.

It’s because of the power of God’s *voice*.

c. Shaking the Wilderness of Kadesh (v7-8)

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.*

In verses 7-8, we are no longer *hearing* the voice.

We are *seeing* the voice as it “flashes forth flames of fire.”

We are *feeling* the voice as it shakes the wilderness with an earthquake.

The voice of the LORD, after all, is not only something you hear!

When God speaks, you *see* the effects – you *feel* the aftershocks.

When God speaks, things happen!

The central section of Psalm 29 (verses 3-9) started with water.

It will end with fire.

Indeed, verse 9 points to how

d. Prompting the Cry in the Temple: “Glory” (v9)

⁹ *The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth
and strips the forests bare,*

When God speaks, things happen.
When God speaks, creation obeys.

and in his temple all cry, “Glory!”

When the voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh –
when the voice of the LORD scares the deer into giving birth,
and strips the forest bare,
what does that mean?

Jerome says this well:

“The desert was the church that, at first, had no children.
By the preaching of Christ, this wilderness ‘was shaken’
and ‘came to labor and gave birth,
and there was born in a single day an entire nation.’
She who before was called the ‘wilderness of Cades,’ the desert of holiness –
inasmuch as she had been barren of virtues –
begins ‘to bring forth deer’ and send out in throngs holy people...
While they are running throughout the world proclaiming the gospel of Christ,
‘in his temple all say ‘Glory’ to God!’” (p218)

Why do I say that the desert is about the church?

Jerome rightly notes that “Kadesh” also means “holiness”
(and in verse 2, the sons of the gods were called to
“worship in the splendor of holiness”).

Remember where we started:

David had called all the sons of the gods – all the heavenly beings –
to ascribe glory and strength to the LORD –
to worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.

As we have seen, Jesus is the Son of David who brings about the heavenly worship.
But now, here at the end of the Psalm the focus turns to earth.
The LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh –
which could also be called “the wilderness of holiness.”

And when the voice of the LORD shakes both the heavens and the earth
(Hebrews 12:26-29) –

then in his temple, all cry, ‘Glory!’

“After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,
‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
for his judgments are true and just;
for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality,
and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” (Rev. 19:1-2)

When the Son of David sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty
then will come to pass the promise of the LORD’s Benediction in verses 10-11:

3. The LORD’s Benediction – Strength and Peace for His People (v10-11)

¹⁰ *The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.*

There are only two passages in Scripture that use this word for “flood.”
Genesis 6-10 and Psalm 29.
So this is not just talking about ordinary “floods” –
this is talking about the *great flood* of Noah.

The same God who brought judgment on all the earth in the days of Noah
is the same God who speaks in the thunder today –
and who will bring judgment at the final day.

The LORD sits enthroned as king forever.

And what happens when the LORD sits enthroned as king?

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

Psalm 29 began with the people “ascribing” (or giving) glory and strength to God.
Psalm 29 ends with God giving strength to his people.

In verses 1-2, it was a unique “to give” (properly translated “to ascribe”).

Here in verse 11, this is the ordinary word “to give.”

After all, we don’t *give* glory and strength to God!

We ascribe it – we declare it – we recognize him for *his* glory and strength!

But he *gives* strength to his people.

What is a benediction? A blessing?

We are a skeptical people.
We don't think that words have inherent power.

We have forgotten what happened when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us –
that Word that was in the beginning with God – that Word that *was* God.

In the benediction, when I pronounce God name upon you,
I am not *praying* that God would do this –
nor am I saying what I *hope* God will do.
I am declaring the blessing of Almighty God.

And as Isaac rightly observed to Esau,
there is only *one* blessing.
When Isaac had blessed Jacob,
Esau objected that Jacob was the younger brother –
and he pled with Isaac for another blessing.
But Isaac said “I have blessed him *and he will be blessed.*”

Even so there is *only one blessing*.
It is the blessing – the benediction – that the Father has pronounced on his Son,
in which all the blessings of heaven and earth come together.
You can use different words to express the meaning of it –
there are at least a dozen blessings in Scripture alone.

But the heart of that blessing is what John tells us in Revelation 21:3
“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.
He will dwell with them, and they will be his people,
and God himself will be with them as their God.”