

PSALMS

Chapter 29

¹ Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. ² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his ^a holiness. ³ The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. ⁴ The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. ⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. ⁶ He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion ^b like a young wild ox. ⁷ The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning. ⁸ The voice of the LORD shakes the desert; the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh. ⁹ The voice of the LORD twists the oaks ^c and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, “Glory!” ¹⁰ The LORD sits ^d enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever. ¹¹ The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace.

Ps 29 A hymn in praise of the King of creation, whose majesty and power are trumpeted by the thunderbolts of the rainstorm—as the storm rose above the Mediterranean (“the mighty waters,” v. 3), swept across the Lebanon range (see vv. 5–6) and rolled over the wilds of Kadesh (northern Kadesh, on the upper reaches of the Orontes River, v. 8). The glory of the Lord is not only visible in the creation (19:1–6; 104 and often elsewhere); it is also audible in creation’s most awesome voice. This hymn to Yahweh (“the LORD”) served also as a testimony and protest against the worship of the Canaanite god Baal, who was thought to be the divine power present in the thunderstorm. Its climactic word (that “in his temple all cry, ‘Glory!’”) suggests that in its present location it was intended to serve as a conclusion to the small collection, Ps 23–28 (see introductions to Ps 26; 28). In its structure, a two-verse introduction and a two-verse conclusion enclose a seven-verse stanza. In both the introduction and the conclusion the name Yahweh (“the LORD”) is sounded four times; in the body of the psalm it is heard ten times. “The voice of the LORD” is repeated seven times—the seven thunders of God. (The numbers four, seven and ten often signified completeness in OT number symbolism.) (CSB)

Luther: “A prophecy of the Gospel, that it shall resound with power in all the world.... He established the flood, Baptism, in which the old Adam is drowned and the new man arises” (*PIML*, p 38). (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–2, ascribe glory to the Lord; vv 3–4, the Lord’s voice; vv 5–6, Lebanon’s response; vv 7–8, the Lord’s voice; v 9, others respond; vv 10–11, the Lord enthroned. (TLSB)

Psalm 29 is quite different from the psalms which surround it. In the midst of psalms of trouble it stands as an interlude of praise just as Psalms 8 and 19 do. (PBC)

29:1–2 A summons to all beings in the divine realm (see note on v. 1) to worship the Lord—adapted from a conventional call to praise in the liturgy of the temple (see 96:7–9; 1Ch 16:28–29). (CSB)

29:1 *mighty ones*. Lit. “sons of god(s).” Perhaps reference is to the angelic host (see 103:20; 148:2; Job 1:6 and NIV text note; 2:1 and NIV text note; Isa 6:2), or possibly to all those foolishly thought to be gods—as in Ps 97 (see v. 7), which has several thematic links with this psalm. The Lord alone must be acknowledged as the divine King. (CSB)

29:2 *name*. See note on 5:11. (CSB)

in the splendor of his holiness. A rather literal translation of a difficult Hebrew phrase (see NIV text note). It is uncertain if it describes God himself or the sanctuary or the (priestly) garb the worshipers are to wear when they approach God. The use of an almost identical Hebrew phrase in 110:3 (translated “in holy majesty”) gives support for the last alternative; thus “in holy garments of splendor.” (CSB)

As the priests in the tabernacle wore special vestments for worship, the angels are adorned with holiness. (TLSB)

29:3–9 Praise of the Lord, whose voice the crashing thunder is (see 68:4, 33). The sound and fury of creation’s awesome displays of power proclaim the glory of Israel’s God. (CSB)

Luther: “People think: If I could hear God speaking in His own Person, I would run so fast to hear Him that my feet would bleed. . . . If in former times someone had said: I know of a place in the world where God speaks, and when you arrive there, you hear God Himself talking; and if I had come there, had seen a poor preacher baptize and preach, and people had said: This is the place; there God is speaking through the preacher: he is teaching God’s Word—then I no doubt would have said: Ha! I have taken pains to come here, and I see only a minister! We should like to have God speak with us in His majesty; but I advise you: Do not go there. So experience certainly teaches. If He were to speak in His majesty, you would see what a running would begin, as there at Mount Sinai, where, after all, only the angels spoke; yet the mountain smoked and trembled. But now you have the Word of God in church, in books, in your home; and this is as certainly God’s Word as if God Himself were speaking” (*WLS* § 4719). (TLSB)

It was important for the people of Israel to know that the Lord controls the rain and the storms, for they were often tempted to worship Baal, who was the Canaanite god of rain and storms and fertility. (PBC)

29:3 VOICE OF THE LORD – Exalts the glory of God’s voice. He who called the universe into being speaks, and it is done (cf Jn 1:1). (TLSB)

OVER THE WATERS – Cf Gn 1:2. (TLSB)

THUNDERS – Human beings cannot adequately describe the power and wonder of God’s voice. Here it is compared to thunder, a comparison repeated in Jn 12:29. (TLSB)

29:5 cedars of Lebanon. The mightiest of trees (see Isa 2:13 and note (CSB)

Lebanon was famous for its tall, strong cedar trees. Canaanite worship honored such trees. With a word, the Lord breaks the trees. (TLSB)

Even inanimate things that people stand in awe of will be humbled so that “the LORD alone will be exalted.”) – Seldom has this been felt more keenly by man than when he has stood before a shattered tree of the forest, cast down and blasted to bits, as the mighty cedars sometimes were. (Leupold)

29:6 LEBANON – Mountain range and surrounding region in Syria, north of Israel. (TLSB)

skip. See 114:4 and note (Or “leaped”; the mountains and hills quaked at God’s approach.). (CSB)

The formidable mountains are likened to calves that flee from loud noises. (TLSB)

For that matter, it was not only the trees of the forest that trembled as he had often observed; it was the very range of “Lebanon” itself and its mightiest peak “Sirion.” (Leupold)

SIRION – Hermon, the tallest mountain in Syria (Dt 3:9). (TLSB)

29:7 FLASHES – God’s voice, already compared to thunder, is depicted as lightning bolts. (TLSB)

29:8 KADESH – Likely refers to the desert that surrounds Mount Sinai. God’s voice is heard far to the north and far to the south of Israel. (TLSB)

29:9 VOICE OF THE LORD SHAKES THE DESERT – ESV has MAKES THE DEER GIVE BIRTH – Possibly the sound of God’s voice frightens the deer, causing them to give birth early. However, the consonants in “deer” are the same as those in “oaks”; this reading continues the idea that God’s voice shakes the trees. (TLSB)

temple. A primary thematic link with Ps 23–28. Reference may be to the temple in Jerusalem or to God’s heavenly temple, where he sits enthroned (see

2:4; 11:4; 113:5; Isa 6:1; 40:22) as the Lord of all creation. But perhaps it is the creation itself that here is named God's temple (see note on 24:2). Then the "all" (those who cry "Glory!") is absolutely all—all creation shouts his praise (cf. 150:6). (CSB)

Glory! See note on 26:8 (The presence of God's glory signaled the presence of God himself. His glory dwelling in the tabernacle, and later the temple, assured Israel of the Lord's holy, yet gracious, presence among them. Jn 1:14 announces that same presence in the Word become flesh who "made his dwelling among us."). (CSB)

The angels praise God (vv 1–2). Likewise, nature declares His glory. If heaven and earth praise God, His people should also declare His glory. (TLSB)

29:10–11 The Lord's absolute and everlasting rule is committed to his people's complete salvation and unmixed blessedness—the crowning comfort in a world where threatening tides seem to make everything uncertain. (CSB)

29:10 *enthroned over the flood.* As the One who by his word brought the ordered creation out of the formless "deep" (Ge 1:2, 6–10); or the reference may be to the Noahic flood (see Ge 6:17). (CSB)

God is greater than the greatest natural powers. Here David remembers the great flood (Gn 6–8), through which God saved Noah and his family. (TLSB)

The conclusion aims to emphasize the thought that behind all such elemental forces as the ones just described stands the Lord, always in full and perfect control. (Leupold)

29:11 BLESSES HIS PEOPLE – The same Lord, whose control of the forces of nature is absolute, wields this control for the good of his people. He will grant them the strength whenever they need it. (Leupold)

Ps 29 God's power is a terrifying thing. The sound of His voice brings forth creation, shakes the mountains and trees, and unleashes the great flood that destroyed the earth. We sinners might be destroyed by the power of His holy, powerful voice. Yet "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). God came to us in Jesus to speak His love and grace. In Baptism, flood and voice combine to cleanse us (this psalm was traditionally used at Baptisms). Hearing His gracious voice, we join heaven and earth in praise. • O Word of God, You became flesh to be our Savior. Let us hear Your powerful voice. Amen. (TLSB)