

Psalm 29: The Power of Nature



Psalm 29 (28) (Mode 2. 5....31 / 4...32)

This is a psalm to the cosmic God of the storm. It may have been adapted from a Canaanite hymn to the storm god, Baal.

It is a psalm of considerable poetic beauty and intense power. In the Hebrew text there is a repetition of the 'z' sound in 'might' [Hebrew 'oz; עֹז], in verses one and eleven. One hears the onomatopoeic 'q' and 'k' for thunder throughout.

The numinous quality of a tempest reveals the sacred. Verse ten reassures us that God who reveals his power in the flood has also promised that the world will not be destroyed again in this way (see Genesis 9:15). The Lord is repeated 18 times; 'voice' is repeated 7 times.

Acclaim the Lord, you beings of heaven.

Acclaim the glory and might of the Lord.

Acclaim the Lord's glorious name.

Prostrate yourselves before the Lord in the holy temple.

The voice of our glorious God

thunders above the mighty waters!

The voice of the Lord, full of power.

The voice of the Lord, full of splendour.

The voice of the Lord
shatters the cedars of Lebanon.
It makes Lebanon leap like a calf,
Sirion [Mt Hermon] like a young wild ox.

The voice of the Lord flashes flames of fire.
The Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
The Lord's voice rends the oak tree,
and strips the forest bare.

‘Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently’(Exodus 19:18).

‘The sea looked and fled; Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs. Why is it, O sea, that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn back? O mountains, that you skip like rams? O hills, like lambs?’(Psalm 114:3-6).

The Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

It was from Kadesh that Moses sent out some men to spy out the land of Canaan (Numbers 13). According to legend the springs of Kadesh were God's response to Moses striking the rock (Numbers 20). It is probable that much of the time spent in the wilderness before crossing into Jordan was spent there.

'The mountains saw you, and writhed; a torrent of water swept by; the deep gave forth its voice.

(Habakkuk 3:10)

‘When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; the very deep trembled. The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered; your arrows flashed on every side’(Psalm 77:16-17).

Matthew uses similar imagery to highlight the earth shattering significance of Jesus’ death:
‘The earth shook, and the rocks were split.’

(Matthew 27:51)

In your temple, Lord,
all cry: 'Glory!'
For you rule over the mighty waters,
your rule is for ever.

mabbul [מַבּוּל] translated here as 'mighty waters' is found only here and in the Genesis narrative of the flood.

Give strength to your people, Lord.
Bless your people with peace.

‘A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him up, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, you of little faith?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm’(Matthew 8:24-26).