

Giving Glory Where Glory is Due

Notes on Psalm 29 by Rabbi Glenn

Psalm 29 is regarded as a hymn, and these types of psalms are somewhat rare in the first three books of the Psalms. Most of them are in books 4 and 5. This one is very familiar to us, and much loved. We sing it from time to time at Shema, and it has the feeling of victory. It is an *enthronement psalm* - we revel in the greatness of Adonai, Creator of all things and the One whose will is sovereign in all the earth. The word 'worship' is based on the word 'worth'. The Lord God is infinitely worthy, and we ought to give Him the very best as we worship, not the leftovers.

There is meaningful repetition of phrases in this psalm, as well as rhyme and a distinct meter in the Hebrew text. The version of it that we sing is in the style of a march. I think John Philip Sousa would have approved, although this goes back a wee bit further (it is ascribed to David). Psalm 29 also spans the fullness of time. It looks ahead, but also looks back to the Genesis Flood.

The ascription reads: מְזִמּוֹר, לְדָוִד – A song, of David

Verses 1-2

הָבוּ לַיהוָה, בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים

Ascribe to the Lord, O sons of the mighty,

הָבוּ is from the verb יָהַב which means to *give*, or to *ascribe* (i.e., credit). All of creation is exhorted to 'give credit where credit is due'. And it begins with the host of heaven, the majestic angels – *b'nei elim* also translated, 'sons of God'. In certain contexts, it could refer to the royal family, and to Israel's nobility. But here it seems to be focused on worship of Adonai, as it is done in heaven.

הָבוּ לַיהוָה, כְּבוֹד וְעֹז

ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

We are praising Him, first of all, for His divine attributes. There are a few words that are translated 'glory'. The one used here, *kavod*, conveys the idea of honor or weightiness. It's the same verb used in the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20) with regard to honoring one's parents. 'Add weight' to them. In other words, how you speak of your parents should cause others to view them in a greater light. And if that is true of our earthly parents, how much more should we 'add weight' when we speak of our Heavenly Father?

הָבוּ לַיהוָה, כְּבוֹד שְׁמוֹ

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name;

The reference to His name isn't about the vowels and consonants. By use of the word *shemo* – His name, we mean His reputation, His renown. With our words we should spread His fame far and wide.

הִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לַיהוָה, בְּהַדְרַת-קֹדֶשׁ

worship the Lord in holy array.

There's that word 'worship'. The word *histachavu* is from *shachah* – to worship; to ascribe worth. The word *hadarah* usually refers to clothing – how one is attired; *adornment* and it doesn't just mean clothing, but beauty, ornateness, and it conveys majesty and honor. So how do we take this? It probably refers to the ornate and holy garments worn by Israel's High Priest.

But let's apply it to the present day. When you come to a worship service, how are you dressed? I'm sure we'd all love to just throw on our favorite comfortable jeans, but that wouldn't be worshiping the Lord *b'hadrat kodesh*. I'm not saying you have to wear your best suit or fancy dress when you come to services. Of course, God cares more about how our hearts and minds are clothed, but we shouldn't use that fact as an excuse to be casual when we come to His house. Dress a little better (maybe a lot better) than you would to go to work, or out to eat with a friend.

Verses 3-9a

קוֹל-יְהוָה

The voice of the Lord... (occurs 7 times in these verses)

Here is where we get a lot more repetition. The expression *qol Adonai* "the voice of the Lord" is significant. He created the universe by His spoken word. On each of the six (literal) days of Creation, God said, "Let there be..." and it was. Later, at Sinai and again at the Mount of Yeshua's Transfiguration He spoke *audibly* (what is referred to as a *Bat Kol* – "daughter of a voice").

But whether or not human beings hear it, His voice represents His authority – authority over all the earth! He speaks and the universe and everything in it obeys. He creates, and He destroys. He exalts, and He brings down. So let's look at what the voice of the Lord does in its 7 occurrences in this passage.

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord is over many waters.

This reflects God's authority over the vast oceans. It may also be a tacit reference to Genesis chapter one, where darkness was over the deep, then God spoke. But it certainly caused the ancient Israeli reading this to think of the massive storms that came to Israel from the west on the Mediterranean Sea. Those lightning bolts and thunderclaps are subject to Adonai's authority.

The voice of the Lord is powerful, the voice of the Lord is majestic. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; yes, the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox.

Of all the types of trees that grow in the Middle East, the cedars that grew in Lebanon were renowned for their size. Dr. Cohen's commentary suggests that the cedar was to other plants/trees what the lion is to all other animals. Solomon conscripted cedar wood from Lebanon in the construction of the First Temple. In Los Angeles, where I grew up, there was a large and famous hospital called Cedars of Lebanon (later, Cedars-Sinai), attesting to the fame of those trees.

David is saying that even these enormous trees, which dwarf all the others, is still subject to the will of Adonai. But this isn't really even about trees. It is about the pride of men, and prideful kings and kingdoms. God is able to bring them down at will, and since we know that arrogance is detestable to Him, we should take heed.

The reference to Lebanon and Siron skipping like animals is a somewhat humorous and yet stunning allusion to the power of God when He sends judgment. Sirion was the ancient name of the highest peak in Lebanon. We see the same thing in Psalm 114 in the Hallel: *The sea looked and fled; the Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like lambs, the hills like lambs.*

The voice of the Lord hews out flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

Again, this is descriptive of massive storms that sweep across the desert floor, coming down off the mountains. The allusion to Kadesh might be a reference to Numbers 20, when Israel was passing by Edom, and asked to be allowed safe passage, but was attacked by the descendants of Ishmael, and God's judgment on Edom later because of that (and other things).

The voice of the Lord makes the deer to calve and strips the forest bare;

Apparently it is a real thing that when there is a violent storm, pregnant animals will give birth prematurely because of extreme fear. But I look at this another way; to me this reflects another side of the authority and goodness of God, who not only sees and knows us, but cares for the wild animals in their giving birth out in the wilderness where no man sees it.

But because of the reference of stripping the forest bare (sending fire on it), it more likely has to do with the animals giving birth prematurely due to great storms sent by God for His reasons.

Verse 9b

and in His Temple everything says, "Glory!"

From the natural realm to the religious. There was no Temple in David's time. It would not be built until the days of Solomon's reign. I take this to be a reference to the Heavenly Temple, of which the earthly one was a copy. Isaiah may have had a glimpse of it (Isaiah ch. 6), and remember his reaction? Wow!

Verse 10

The Lord sat as King at the flood; yes, the Lord sits as King forever.

From before Creation, Adonai is King. He is, He was, and will forever be the Supreme Sovereign of the Universe. The Flood wiped out all life on earth, except for Noah and his family, and the representative pairs of animals brought safely through. The Flood was world-wide and catastrophic, and God sent it on the earth by His authority, His power, and His wisdom.

Verse 11

The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace.

The psalm ends on a beautiful and positive note. This almighty, fearsome Being, whom we cannot begin to fathom, and who is rightly to be feared, is the same God who loves His people Israel, and now also loves His people the Church. We are His people, and in His time, He will establish peace, in the Promised Land, and across the world: *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters covers the sea* (Habakkuk 2:14).

