

Roll Of Thunder, Then We Cry

Psalm 29 January 15, 2025

Every year the south prepares for hurricane season. The plains for tornado season. California has fire season. Have you heard of superbolt season? Between November and February thunderstorms with what are called superbolts occur in a handful of hotspots around the globe.¹

An average lightning strike contains around 300 million volts of power. But superbolts are 1,000 times stronger² - so strong they cannot be replicated in a lab.³ They're extremely rare, making up less than a thousandth of a percent of all lightning strikes.

There are three regions in the world that experience the most superbolts: The North Atlantic, the Altiplano of Bolivia, and the Mediterranean Sea.

In Psalm 29, David describes the deafening, earth-shaking, power of a thunderstorm that rolls in from the Mediterranean, lighting the sky with superbolts. His point isn't to show us something natural. He draws our gaze to the supernatural. He wants us to see the matchless power of the Almighty God Who *created* the storms and towers over them in strength and majesty.

As His greatness passes by, roaring in magnitude and intensity, there's nothing for us to do but cry out "Glory!" In fact, in this song there are no requests, no mention of the things we need from the Lord. As one commentator notes, this song is pure praise.⁴ No confession, no supplication, no direct application. This is simply a portrait of the magnificent power of Jehovah - That all the peoples of the earth may know that *He* is God and there is no other!⁵

Psalm 29:1-2 - A Psalm Of David. ¹ Ascribe to the Lord, you 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 his holiness.

What right does David have to command angelic beings? Well, the truth is that humans *will* judge angels in eternity.⁶ But why would David tell call out orders to angels and other spiritual beings?

There's a good case to be made that this song is not only a portrait of the power of God, but is also an apologetic refutation of the paganism of the Canaanites. David uses a term in verse 1 - "heavenly beings." Your text may say "mighty ones." The words mean the "sons of god(s)." This was a term used in Canaanite religious texts to refer to their many false gods.⁷

¹ <https://www.washington.edu/news/2019/09/09/lightning-superbolts-form-over-oceans-from-november-to-february/>

² <https://news.agu.org/press-release/scientists-figured-out-what-causes-earths-strongest-lightning/>

³ <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/148933/superbolts-carry-super-power>

⁴ James Montgomery Boice *Psalms, Volume 1*

⁵ 1 Kings 8:60

⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:3

⁷ *Third Millennium Study Bible Notes On Psalm 29:1-30:12*

It seems that David was taking specific aim at Baal in this song. Baal was supposed to be the god of thunderstorms and of fertility. He was known as the “cloud rider.” But in Canaanite mythology, every year, in what historians call the “Baal Cycle,” another god named Yam would decide *he* wanted to be king of the gods. Yam was the god of chaos *and* the god of the sea. And so, Yam and Baal would fight each year for supremacy. A sort of divine storm season.

But here comes David to say, “You think you know something about power, you think you know something about deity, but you have no idea.” It is *Jehovah* and Jehovah alone Who deserves our praise. David is going to use his name 18 times in this song - over and over again. And here, David says ascribe to *Him* glory and strength and the glory due His name.

To ascribe doesn’t mean that we decide - as if God gets glory if He proves He’s worth it. No, ascribe means that we *acknowledge* what is already true.⁸ We acknowledge it and then we bow down in worship.⁹ And there’s a great little post script there that is so important - David calls on the host of heaven (and anyone who worships God) to do so in the splendor of *His* holiness.

Proper worship is not about *our* strength or *our* design or *our* approach. Biblical worship is done in *God’s* holiness. Peter wrote that since the God Who has called us is holy, we also must be holy in our conduct.¹⁰ We receive His robe of righteousness - we put on His garment of holiness - and worship in *that* splendor, not any robe of our own making.

Worthy worship does not flow from having fancy equipment or having the most talented person make the melody. It flows from a heart that understands what is true about the God of the Bible. Worthy worship is about personal understanding and acknowledgment and surrender.

Psalm 29:3-4 - ³The voice of the Lord is above the waters. The God of glory thunders—the Lord, above the vast water, ⁴the voice of the Lord in power, the voice of the Lord in splendor.

David looks out on the vast water of the Mediterranean sea where a storm has formed. In the distance, he hears the thunder starting to rumble. It’s the voice of the Lord. A voice we’ll hear seven times in the next seven verses.

God’s voice above the waters reminds us immediately of the creation account in Genesis 1, where with a few words the Lord created all that there is. But have you ever wondered why He did so with His *words*? Why not just do it with His thoughts? Does God just like talking to Himself?

Here also, as David pictures God coming in power, our attention is drawn to His voice. Why?

The God of the Bible is a God Who *speaks*. He *announces*. He *calls out* to us so that we might know Him and flee to Him and be saved by Him. He speaks so that He might draw our attention to His

⁸ CSB Study Bible Notes

⁹ Boice

¹⁰ 1 Peter 1:15-16

presence, His power, His work, so that He can share His splendor with us. That's what He wants to do. He speaks with a voice that is creative and salvific.

Psalm 29:5-6 - ⁵The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord shatters the cedars of Lebanon. ⁶He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion, like a young wild ox.

Having rolled in from the West, the Lord's thunderous voice now swings up to the far north of Israel in Lebanon and starts to shake the earth below.

In the Old Testament, the cedars of Lebanon are a figure of strength. Sirion is another name for the mighty Mount Hermon. It was the tallest mountain in the area.¹¹ Look what the voice of the Lord does to the strongest trees and the highest hills. Derek Kidner writes, "...everything that man finds impressive...[is] brought low." They immediately give way in surrender before the Lord.

Your voice isn't that powerful. With some practice you *might* be able to crack a thin piece of glass at the right frequency. But try using your voice to trim your tree in the backyard.

The Lord's voice shatters the cedars of Lebanon. The words suggest that these trees standing 60 feet tall and 30 feet wide are broken in pieces again and again at the sound of the Lord's voice.¹²

Psalm 29:7-9a - ⁷The voice of the Lord flashes flames of fire. ⁸The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. ⁹The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth and strips the woodlands bare.

The thunderstorm has swept down from the mountains right above Israel. The lightning flashes and the thunder rolls.

All this imagery of shaking and fire speaks to us of the power of God's judgment, especially His ultimate judgment which will come on the whole world. It is a judgment that cannot be escaped. We've seen His voice and presence and power over the seas, over the mountains, over the forests, now over the wilderness. A weatherman could track this storm moving from west to north then all the way to the remote south below Israel in Kadesh.

There is no place outside of God's presence. There's no boundary to His dominion. In the original *Lion King*, Mufasa shows his son the edges of their kingdom. "Everything the light touches is ours." Simba says, "What about that shadowy place over there?" *That's* beyond our borders. You must never go there.

Not so with the Lord. No place and no *person* is beyond His reach. His voice, with all its power and all its care calls out to you right now and to family, to your friends, your unsaved neighbors, prodigal sons, sworn enemies, and all the lost of this world.

¹¹ *CSB Study Bible Notes*

¹² *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*

As this storm passes in terrible judgment we see something unexpected in the aftermath: His voice makes the deer give birth.

This is a challenge to Canaanite paganism. Baal is not the god of fertility. It is *Jehovah* Who gives life. At the same time, we are reminded that in wrath God remembers mercy. From judgment new life is born. God will judge, He will destroy, but He is a Deliverer. He is a life-giver. His desire is to make all things new - for His mercy to revive and sustain and create beauty from the ashes.

Psalms 29:9b - In his temple all cry, "Glory!"

Scholars tend to agree that the temple here is referring to the house of worship in Jerusalem rather than the heavenly temple, but both sanctuaries take up the same shout: Glory to God! Seeing His power, His greatness, there is nothing else to say but to lift high His honor, splendor, and majesty.

We Christians have the privilege of joining with the heavenly host in worship. To give God His due. Kidner writes, "[This] climax...[is] a response of humility, joy, and understand which reveals that...the storm is not an outbreak of meaningless or hostile forces, but the voice of the Lord, heard in all His works. The Hebrew goes even further, in that all is literally 'all of it.' Everything in the temple."¹³

Psalms 29:10-11 - ¹⁰The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned, King forever. ¹¹The Lord gives his people strength; the Lord blesses his people with peace.

Every year, Baal and Yam fought it out over who would be king. Then Baal had to struggle with other gods. One source writes: "His kingship is limited, attained by difficult single combat and with the help of other gods, and his overcoming of his enemies is not permanent."¹⁴

Jehovah sits enthroned *King forever*. He sat enthroned over *the* flood. The word David uses here is only used elsewhere to refer to the Genesis flood.¹⁵ The greatest storm the earth has ever known. The storm of judgment *no one* could escape from.

Well, not *no one*. Eight souls were saved because they received God's *grace*. *By* faith, they obeyed God and were safe in the storm. Because this is a God not only of power but of generosity.

David presents the kindness and charity of this Almighty King in the closing verses. Twice we see Him on His throne, and twice we see Him *giving* freely to His people.

First, He gives His people strength. The same term that was ascribed to the Lord at the beginning, now God turns and offers it to us. The kind of strength only He has. What did Jesus say in Matthew?

¹³ Derek Kidner *Psalms 1-72*

¹⁴ Mark Smith *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*

¹⁵ *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*

He said when we walk by faith God shares with us the kind of strength where we can say to a mountain, “be lifted up and thrown into the sea” and it will be done.

The mountain-shaking God brings us into His work and equips us to do what He does. His design is for us to be *strong*. That doesn’t mean we never suffer or struggle or hurt or doubt, but God’s design for you is not perpetual weakness, not constant frailty. God’s design and desire for you is strength. Strength of mind. Strength of heart. Strength of conviction. To make you like a tree that is *not* splintered by the storms of life, but one rooted in rock, whose leaf does not wither, whose boughs are laden with fruit season after season. Do you feel weak tonight? The answer is to discover what God does, has done, and still plans to do for you. The answer is for you to be strengthened with power in your inner being through His Spirit.¹⁶

But not only do we see the enthroned God giving us *strength*, we then see Him giving us *peace*. Yam was the god of chaos, Jehovah is the God of peace. Peace with God. Peace in your heart. Peace in your relationships as far as it depends on you. Peace of mind, knowing the God of the flood is *your* God of grace, Who will see you through and bring *you* to glory with Him one day.

Jesus, our King, renewed this promise of peace to us in John 14:

John 14:27 - ²⁷“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don’t let your heart be troubled or fearful.

This is the God we serve. The God of majesty and power, of grace and peace. A God Whose voice fills the earth. His Word commands and demands, reveals, creates, judges, and destroys. Today, His voice *calls*. It calls us to know Him and then to know Him more. To walk with Him and worship Him and abide in Him so He can bring life to us.

It’s good for us to catch a glimpse of the Lord’s awesome power. But whenever He reveals His power, He also shows His goodness.

Moses once asked to see the glory of God. On the mountain, God descended in a great cloud as He had before at Sinai, where the Lord answered Moses in thunder, and the mountain shook. As God’s glory passed by Moses, His voice thundered with this message:

Exodus 34:6 - The Lord—the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth.

That was the message God wanted to convey through the power of His glory. It’s the same message for us today. And so, as we ponder the greatness and power of the One true God, we join with what we read in Job 37:

Job 37:2 - ²Just listen to his thunderous voice and the rumbling that comes from his mouth.

¹⁶ Ephesians 3:16