

Psalms 29 — The Voice That Breaks the Cedars — Seven Thunders, the God of Glory, and the King Enthroned Over the Flood

Psalm 29: a hymn of David. Heaven's host is summoned to worship; the sevenfold voice of the LORD sweeps as a great thunderstorm from the sea over the cedars of Lebanon to the wilderness of Kadesh; and the LORD sits enthroned as King over the flood, giving strength and peace to his people. Traditionally ascribed to David, c. 1000 BC; among the oldest poetry in the Psalter.

Open the Psalter almost anywhere and you find a human voice reaching up — pleading, weeping, thanking, arguing with God. Psalm 29 is different. Here the human voice nearly disappears, and what fills the poem instead is *thunder*. This is a storm rendered as theology: eleven verses that put you outside in the weather, on a Judean hillside, watching a black wall of cloud roll in off the Mediterranean, hearing the first far rumble over the water, then the crack directly overhead that splits an old cedar, then the long roll dying away into the desert. And every peal of it, the psalm insists, is a *word*. Seven times it names the sound: *the voice of the LORD*.

Hebrew Word Studies

kavod (H3519) (כָּבוֹד) — **glory, weight, honor, the visible splendor of God vv. 1, 2, 3, 9.** The word runs like a golden thread from the first verse to the last movement. *Kavod* comes from a root meaning *heavy* — glory in Hebrew is not a glow but a *weight*, a substance you can feel press on you. To give God glory (vv. 1–2) is to acknowledge his weight, to let him count for what he actually is. Then verse 3 names him "the God of glory" who "thundereth," so that the thunder becomes the audible weight of God rolling across the sky. And verse 9 lands the whole storm inside the temple, where "every one speak of his glory" — the wild *kavod* of the tempest gathered up into the ordered *kavod* of worship. This is the same weighty word that "filled the tabernacle" (Ex. 40:34) and the same glory Moses asked to see and was answered, "there shall no man see me, and live" (Ex. 33:20). The Doctrine and Covenants gives the Latter-day gloss the psalm is reaching for: "The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth" (D&C 93:36) — and "the light of Christ... proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space" (D&C 88:12). Psalm 29 heard that light as thunder. We are meant to feel the *weight* of it and give it back.

qol YHWH (H6963) (קוֹל יְהוָה) — **the voice of the LORD; sound, thunder, the spoken utterance of God vv. 3, 4, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9.** This is the spine of the psalm — *qol*, "voice," struck seven times over, each time bolted to the covenant name YHWH. *Qol* is an ordinary Hebrew word for any sound: a footstep, a trumpet, a shout, and here, thunder. And that is exactly the scandal the psalm is pressing: the most terrifying force in the natural world, the peal that makes armies flinch, is to the LORD merely his *voice* — the same thing you and I use to say good morning. Not his hand, not his weapon; his voice, and it breaks cedars. The sevenfold count is deliberate: seven is the number of completeness, so the poem is saying the LORD's voice governs the *whole* of creation, coast to desert, top to bottom. The Bible's whole theology of the divine word stands behind this: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made" (Ps. 33:6); God *said*, and it was so (Gen. 1). The Doctrine and Covenants makes the same voice cosmic — "the light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed" proceeds from God, and "the voice of the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear" (D&C 88:13; 88:66; cf. 133:22). Psalm 29 heard that governing voice one afternoon in a thunderstorm and had the wit to write down what it was.

hadar (H1927) (הָדָר) — **majesty, splendor, honor — the visible magnificence of a king v. 2.** "Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness." The word rendered "beauty" is *hadar* — but it is a royal, weighty beauty, the splendor that surrounds a throne, the majesty a king wears the way lesser men wear clothes. It is the same quality the psalm assigns to the voice itself in verse 4, "full of majesty," so that the loveliness of the sanctuary and the grandeur of the storm turn out to be one splendor seen two ways. *Hadar* clothes God elsewhere as a garment: "thou art clothed with honour and majesty" (Ps. 104:1); "honour and majesty are before him" (Ps. 96:6). The phrase "beauty of holiness" became a fixed marker of temple worship — sacred space where the splendor of God is met not with terror but with reverence, "in the beauty of holiness." For Latter-day Saints the instinct is immediate: the house of the Lord is where the raw *hadar* of the thunderstorm is answered with ordered, robed, holy praise. The psalm's genius is to put the wild storm and the quiet sanctuary side by side and show they magnify the same King.

mabbul (H3999) (מַבּוּל) — **flood, deluge — specifically the great Flood of Noah v. 10.** This is one of the most freighted single words in the psalm. *Mabbul* is not the ordinary Hebrew word for a river in spate or a flash flood; it is the technical, almost proper-noun term for *the Flood* — the deluge of Genesis 6–9, the un-creating of the world by water. Outside this verse, every appearance of *mabbul* in the Old Testament is in the Noah account (Gen. 6–11). So when Psalm 29:10 says "The LORD

sitteth upon the *mabbul*," it is reaching back to the one moment when chaos was fully unchained — and it sets God *enthroned over it*, King forever. The verse does two things at once. It declares the LORD's mastery over the very worst the waters ever did, so that the storm of verses 3–9, terrifying as it is, is nothing but weather beneath a settled throne. And it quietly recalls that even the Flood ended in covenant and peace — the bow in the cloud, the promise never again (Gen. 9:11–13) — which is exactly the movement of this psalm, from tempest to *shalom*. The Lord who sat above Noah's flood and brought the world through it to peace is the same Lord who, at the end of this psalm, blesses his people with peace. The word chosen is the word that proves he has already ruled the worst.

From the Chapter's Architecture

Notice the arc the three movements trace: from a call for glory given up to God in heaven (v. 1), through the display of that glory as overwhelming power on earth (vv. 3–9), to that same strength given down to God's people as peace (v. 11). The word "strength" opens and closes the psalm — ascribed to him at the start, dispensed by him at the end. And the whole violent middle is held safely between worship and peace, which is the psalm's deepest claim about power: in the LORD's hands, even the storm is on its way to blessing.