

Psalm 29

The baptism of Jesus
Office of Readings for the baptism of Jesus
Morning Prayer Monday Week 1

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 ‘ōz; זַעַר], 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). YHWH is repeated 18 times; ‘voice’ is repeated 7 times. The title reads: ‘A psalm* of David’.

Overture

**¹Acclaim YHWH*,
O heavenly beings.
Acclaim the glory* and
might of YHWH.**

**²Acclaim the glory* of
YHWH’s name.**

**Prostrate yourself before
YHWH in his holy sanctu-
ary.**

The four imperatives add a special solemnity to this summoning of the gods to acknowledge YHWH (not Baal) as the High God.

The storm as a theophany

**³The voice of YHWH
above the waters!
the God of glory* thunders,
YHWH over the mighty
waters.**

Is the psalmist speaking of the waters that they thought of as being above the sky, or does he have in mind the waters of the Mediterranean? Compare the following:

YHWH thundered in the heavens,
the voice of the Most High resounded.

– Psalm 18:13

After it his voice roars; he thunders with his majestic voice and he does not restrain the lightning when his voice is heard. God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things that we cannot comprehend.

– Job 37:4-5

Compare the following:

Acknowledge God's power.
His majesty is over Israel.
His authority is above the clouds.

– Psalm 68:34

Sirion is another name for Mount Hermon in southern Lebanon, dominating the north of Galilee.

The Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, while the Amorites call it Senir.

– Deuteronomy 3:9

One hears the rumbling of an earthquake. Compare the following:

Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because YHWH 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; the 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

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. Compare the following:

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

⁴The voice of YHWH is powerful; the voice of YHWH is full of majesty.

⁵The voice of YHWH breaks the cedars; YHWH breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

⁶He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox.

⁷The voice of YHWH flashes forth flames of fire.

⁸The voice of YHWH shakes the wilderness.

YHWH shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

Conclusion

⁹The voice of YHWH causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare. In his temple all cry: 'Glory*!'

¹⁰YHWH sits enthroned over the flood; YHWH sits enthroned as king forever.

¹¹YHWH gives might to his people.

While the tempest rages, those assembled in the temple bow down and worship YHWH, whose glory is recognised in the numinous power of the storm.

The Hebrew word mabbûl [מַבּוּל] translated here as 'flood' is found only here and in the Genesis narrative of the flood. The fact that YHWH sits as king over the flood gives assurance that the flood, though powerful and even destructive, will not destroy the earth. We recall the following scene from Jesus' life:

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

The Book of Revelation uses the image of thunder to emphasise the power of God's Word:

He gave a great shout, like a lion roaring. And when he shouted, the seven thunders sounded.

– Revelation 10:3

I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who have been redeemed from the earth.

– Revelation 14:2-3

I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder peals, crying out,

'Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready'.

– Revelation 19:6-7

YHWH blesses* his people with peace*.

Peace comes after the storm.