

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Psalms		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	9		Mason Depew
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The Voice of the Lord Will Not be Denied

- I. Verses 1-2: These first two verses command the “heavenly beings” (ESV) to ascribe glory and strength to the Lord.
- A. The first natural question to ask is this: who are the heavenly beings? The Hebrew phrase is more literally translated, “sons of God” or “sons of gods.” This is not exactly the same as, but very similar to the infamously challenging phrase in Genesis 6:2 and Job 1:6. There are two chief interpretations which seem most plausible:
1. We should translate it as “sons of God” and view the phrase as referring to angels or demons depending on the context. This could fit all three of the main uses of this phrase in Scripture, and it is the only interpretation that seems to fit Job 1:6. This view is held by James M. Hamilton, Jr., in his commentary,¹ as well as many Jewish commentators.
 2. We should translate it as “sons of gods” and view the phrase as referring to pagan human kings who claim for themselves a divine or, at least, semi-divine status. There were many of these in the ancient world, and the Israelites were certainly well-aware of them. This view was John Calvin’s interpretation,² and is also the one I prefer. It seems unlikely to me that demons would be particularly disturbed by the Flood imagery in this psalm, since they were not themselves drowned in the Flood and would generally like nothing better than to see God destroy all his image-bearers. Furthermore, this second interpretation fits better with David’s frequent challenges to the wicked kings of the earth in his psalms.
 3. These two interpretations are not as far apart from each other as it might at first seem. Charles Spurgeon actually passed over the whole debate by combining both interpretations into a single phrase,³ and either way the point is that David is calling upon arrogant beings to humble themselves before the terrifying power of God’s thundering voice. Furthermore, there are many passages in Scripture which attribute

¹ “The flood imagery in the psalm, and the reference to the flood in 29:10, condition David’s audience to identify the “heavenly beings” (CSB, ESV) he addresses in 29:1 with the “sons of God” whose transgression immediately preceded the flood in Gen 6:2 (cf. 1 Pet 3:19-20; Jude 6).” - Hamilton, *Psalms*, 342.

² “But David only intended to humble the princes of this world, who, being intoxicated with pride, lift up their horns against God. This, accordingly, is the reason why he introduces God, with a terrific voice, subduing by thunders, hail-storms, tempests, and lightnings, these stubborn and stiff-necked giants, who if they are not struck with fear, refuse to stand in awe of any power in heaven. We see, therefore, why, passing by others, he directs his discourse particularly to the sons of the mighty. The reason is, because there is nothing more common with them than to abuse their lofty station by impious deeds, while they madly arrogate to themselves every divine prerogative.” - *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. IV, 476.

³ “Ye great ones of earth and heaven, kings and angels, join in rendering worship to the blessed and only Potentate...” - Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Vol II, 32.

the evil of arrogant kings to demonic forces.⁴ So perhaps the ambiguity in these passages is intentional, and we are meant to see that the prince of this world loves to wreak havoc and destruction in this world through its most powerful men.

B. David commands these “sons of gods” to proclaim the glory of the one true God. He is speaking with the authority of a prophet here, much like Daniel in Daniel 5:22-28 carries the full weight of God’s authority as he delivers the sentence of judgment to Belshazzar. As we will see shortly, the voice of the Lord for whom these prophets speak is not to be lightly waved away.

1. Notice especially, in verse 2, that David says “the glory *due* his name.” In other words, David’s audience *owes* the Lord their worship as tribute. It is not optional. It is God’s right to demand as the maker and ruler of all things, and he does, in fact, demand it.

C. “The splendor of his holiness” reminds us that God is far above and beyond all earthly rulers and authorities, because while they may impress you with their majesty, they are not *holy*. Their splendor is not so otherworldly, so pure and beyond understanding that a man like Isaiah would immediately despair of himself (Isaiah 6:5) or John would collapse like a dead man (Revelation 1:17). This is the true, absolute sovereign of the vast, unmeasurable universe.⁵

II. Verses 3-9 - David describes the overwhelming, unstoppable force of the Voice of the Lord in these verses. He uses exceptionally vivid imagery to impress upon us the terrifying force of God’s power. The common thread which seems clearly to tie all of these particular images together is a great thunderstorm.

A. Verse 3 leads us to picture how a thunderstorm violently roils the ocean’s waters. In particular it is likely that David wants his Israelite audience to imagine a great storm brewing over the Mediterranean Sea, off their own coastline.

B. It is worth noting that David maintains a distinction between the voice of the Lord and the thunder itself in 29:3. Even though they are closely linked, David does not confuse the voice of the Lord with the literal thunder, like a pagan at this time often would. The thunder is a sign and a reminder of God’s power, but verse 4 takes us briefly above the image of a literal thunderstorm to see that God’s power is still vastly greater than even the most terrifying thunder blast.

C. In verse 5, the storm reaches the coast north of Israel. We are to imagine a hurricane with such destructive force that it splinters even the oldest and strongest trees known to the Israelites, which were the cedars of Lebanon.

D. Verse 6 leads us to think of these great and beautiful old cedars being carried away like young animals skipping and jumping in the air. Compared to the force of this mighty storm, even the cedars of Lebanon are as light as a feather.

E. Verse 7 makes a reference to fire, which is surprising because, at first, it seems to run against the grain of the hurricane-like storm imagery in this psalm.

1. If we remember that earlier the voice of the Lord was associated with thunder, however, the most likely explanation is that David is here describing lightning.

⁴ Compare, for example, the four great empires of Daniel 7 portrayed as monstrous beasts, with the great red dragon, Satan himself, in Revelation 12:3. Ezekiel 29:3 describes Pharaoh as a great dragon lying in the Nile, blasphemously claiming, “My Nile is my own; I made it for myself.” Both the imagery of a dragon, as well as such an absurdly blasphemous claim to divine power have an undeniably satanic feel to them.

⁵ NASA recently released the first images from the James Webb telescope, and many people marveled at the grandeur of our universe. But the Master who made these galaxies is still more splendid in his holiness.

Lightning and fire both leave the same kind of sharp impression on your eyes after you close them, and lightning often causes fires in dry climates like California or like Israel, so it is not hard to imagine why David would poetically describe lightning as a flash of fire here.

2. The reference to fire also seems designed to make the connection in our minds to how often God elsewhere displays his holy wrath as a consuming fire. This is unmistakably an image we should associate with God's judgment against sin. Storms with thunder and lightning are our periodic natural reminders that this world will not remain forever, and no one can prevent the judgment that is coming, just as the strong cedars of Lebanon could not hold back this storm.⁶

III. Verses 8-9 describe God causing the wilderness and the forests to shake.

- A. I would actually prefer to use the English word "writhe," since I am convinced that the Hebrew word here is stronger than just "shaking." The idea is that the creation itself suffers under the wrath of God as pictured by this storm.⁷ This should remind us that the curse of the Fall does not just affect Adam's offspring, but all the world under his dominion, too. Therefore God's wrath must ultimately purge away all the rot of sin in this world.
- B. Verse 9 in the ESV is translated, "The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth." If you look at the translation note for that verse you will see, "makes the oaks to shake" is also possible. The reason these options are so different is that in David's time, Hebrew was written without vowels. It only had consonants. Most of the time that is not a problem at all for reading and translating Hebrew, but in some places there are significantly different options we have to choose from. In those cases, like here in Psalm 29:9, context is usually the most important factor for deciding between the possibilities, and here "makes the oaks to shake" (or "writhe") fits the flow of the psalm much better than "makes the deer give birth." The former is obviously more consistent with the pattern of hurricane-like imagery we have seen so far.
- C. The reference to the house of the Lord in verse 9 is fascinating and may seem to come out of the blue like the image of deer giving birth. Unlike with that line, however, there is no plausible alternative reading so we must try to understand how this reference to the Temple makes sense in this psalm.
 1. It is important to understand that, as G.K. Beale argues, Israel's Temple as a microcosm of the whole creation.⁸ The Israelites never believed Solomon's greatest accomplishment, could actually contain God. Solomon himself acknowledged this at the dedication of the Temple.⁹ The Temple was God's special meeting place with Israel, but he certainly was elsewhere with his people, even during the Babylonian Exile, when the Temple lay in ruins! Furthermore, there are many places in the psalms that envision the whole creation praising God, and they obviously couldn't do that with just one local Temple in Jerusalem.

⁶ Consider how 2 Peter 3:5-7 connects Noah's Flood, as a judgment by water, with the coming judgment by fire.

⁷ The anguish of the forests and the deserts here in Psalm 29 comes across as very similar to the anguish of the whole creation which Paul describes in Romans 8:22.

⁸ He argues extensively for this point in his book, *Temple and the Church's Mission*.

⁹ See 1 Kings 8:27, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!"

2. It is interesting to note that the frame and structure of the Temple was built almost entirely out of cedar.¹⁰ This makes me wonder whether Solomon made such heavy use of cedar partly because his father associated cedar with God's Temple here in Psalm 29.
 3. The point of mentioning the Temple here, then, is for us to picture the whole creation responding in awe of God's overwhelming and unstoppable power by worshiping him. This is, after all, what David commanded in verses 1-2.
- IV. Verses 10-11 climactically depict God as the ruler over the storm who uses that power for the benefit of his own people.
- A. Verse 10 brings the thunderstorm imagery we have seen to a dramatic crescendo. Now David is not just talking about a great hurricane, but the greatest of all storms in history: Noah's Flood. The word for flood in verse 10 is used thirteen times in the whole Old Testament. Twelve of them are in Genesis 6-11, all about Noah's Flood. The only other use of this word in the whole of Scripture is here in Psalm 29:10, so there can be little doubt that David wants us to remember the greatest example of God's wrath poured out on the earth in history. Looking back at the imagery so far, it all fits very well, too. The Flood most certainly did splinter trees and cause the creation great anguish. David has gradually built us up to vividly picture the grandest possible judgment with water.
 - B. The image of the Lord sitting enthroned upon the Flood compels us to consider how in this ultimate example of chaos and overturning all things, God still reigns absolutely sovereign and perfectly stable. He transcends it; the Flood does not affect him, even as he effects the Flood.
 - C. Having considered all this and knowing that God indeed does reign over his cataclysmic wrath, David ends the psalm with a benediction for believers. Although it may seem jarring after the overwhelming pictures of God's wrath we have seen up until now in this psalm, it is here because God has always saved his people through judgment. Not outside of or despite his judgment, but through his judgment at the same time he wipes away those sinners who are not his elect.
 1. In the Old Testament, believers would have said this is because God has put his name on his people. He cannot let them perish without bringing disgrace on himself, and so the psalmists frequently cry out to God for the sake of his own name. God put his own glorious name from verse 2 on them, so they have solid grounds to believe he will keep his promises and deliver them. That he will be present with them not as a judge, but as their Father.¹¹

We see the same pattern of God's name and presence in baptism.¹² In baptism, our Triune God puts the threefold name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit upon us and promises he will be present as a savior. Peter even says that baptism corresponds to Noah's Flood, because just as God was with Noah and his family in the midst of the end of the world as they knew it, he seals his promise to us that he will be present and preserve us through the final judgment of fire to come.¹³ The same unstoppable, earth-shattering voice that decrees judgment against sin has decreed salvation to you in your baptism.

¹⁰ See 1 Kings 6:18, "The cedar within the house was carved in the form of gourds and open flowers. All was cedar; no stone was seen."

¹¹ For example, 2 Chronicles 6:5-6 says, "Since the day that I brought my people out of the land of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel in which to build a house, that my name might be there, and I chose no man as prince over my people Israel; but I have chosen Jerusalem that my name may be there, and I have chosen David to be over my people Israel."

¹² In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commands the disciples to baptize all nations and promises that he will be with them always, to the end of the age.

¹³ 1 Peter 3:20-22.