

Psalms 29:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters.

Analysis

The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters. The psalm transitions from call to worship (v.1-2) to demonstration of why God deserves such worship—His powerful voice revealed in nature. The phrase "voice of the LORD" appears seven times (v.3-9), symbolizing completeness and perfection.

"The voice of the LORD" (הַלְלוּ יְהוָה/qol Yahweh) is the psalm's keynote phrase. Qol means voice, sound, thunder. In Genesis 1, God spoke creation into existence: "And God said...and it was so." His voice has creative power—what He speaks happens. Psalm 33:6 declares: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." The storm's thunder is God's voice—not nature acting independently but divine speech expressing power.

"Is upon the waters" (מִן-הַמְּיַם-עַל/al-hammayim) locates God's voice over the sea. Mayim means waters, seas. Ancient Near Eastern cultures feared the sea's chaotic power. Creation myths depicted primordial combat between order and chaos, often personified as sea-monsters. Genesis 1:2 describes pre-creation chaos as "darkness was upon the face of the deep." But God's voice brings order from chaos—He commands waters to their place, sets boundaries, calms storms. Jesus demonstrated this divine prerogative: "He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still" (Mark 4:39). His disciples asked: "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41). The answer: He is God incarnate, whose voice commands creation.

"The God of glory thundereth" (הָרָעִים הָכָבֹד אֵל /El-hakavod hir'im) interprets the thunder theologically. El (God) emphasizes might and power. Kavod (glory) describes God's weighty presence. Ra'am means to thunder—God causes the thunder. Ancient peoples attributed thunder to various deities. This psalm asserts: Yahweh thunders. The storm isn't natural phenomenon alone but theophany—God's self-revelation. Exodus 19:16-19 describes Sinai theophany: "thunders and lightnings...the voice of the trumpet...the LORD came down upon mount Sinai...God answered him by a voice." Thunder is God's voice expressing majesty and power.

"The LORD is upon many waters" (כְּבִים מְאַיִם עַל־יְהוָה /Yahweh al-mayim rabbim) reinforces divine sovereignty over water's chaos. Rabbim means many, great, mighty—vast waters, mighty seas. Some see this as God enthroned above the heavens ("waters above the firmament," Genesis 1:7). Others see the approaching storm over Mediterranean ("many waters" often means sea). Either way, God reigns supreme over all water—sea below, rain above, rivers throughout. His voice commands them all.

Historical Context

Psalm 29's geographical and meteorological details suggest eyewitness account of Mediterranean storm. Winter storms (November-March) brought rain crucial for agriculture. Approaching storm clouds gathered over Mediterranean ("many waters"), moved inland bringing thunder, lightning, and torrential rain. These storms could be violent—thunder echoing through mountains, lightning splitting cedars, flash floods in wadis.

Canaanite mythology attributed storms to Baal, the storm god. Ugaritic texts (15th-12th century BCE) describe Baal's palace in the clouds, his voice as thunder, his weapon as lightning. Worshipers believed Baal brought fertility through rain. This psalm confronts such theology: Yahweh, not Baal, controls storms. His voice thunders. His power brings rain. Elijah's contest on Carmel (1 Kings 18) demonstrated this dramatically—Baal's prophets cried all day without response; Elijah prayed once and God sent fire and rain.

For Israel, hearing thunder as God's voice wasn't merely metaphorical but theological reality. God spoke audibly at Sinai (Exodus 19-20), giving Torah amid thunder and lightning. When God spoke from heaven confirming Jesus, some said "it thundered" (John 12:29). Revelation portrays God's voice "as the sound of many waters" (Revelation 14:2) and depicts seven thunders speaking (Revelation 10:3-4).

Creation's response to God's voice appears throughout Scripture. At Jesus's crucifixion, "there was darkness over all the earth" and earthquake (Luke 23:44-45). At His resurrection, an angel descended with earthquake (Matthew 28:2). At Pentecost, "there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind" (Acts 2:2). Creation responds to Creator's voice.

Church history contains numerous accounts of believers sensing God's presence and power in storms. Some viewed storms as judgment; others as displays of majesty. John Wesley wrote in his journal of storms at sea, recognizing God's sovereignty. Jonathan Edwards preached on God's sovereignty over nature. C.S. Lewis described experiencing divine transcendence through thunderstorms.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does it mean that thunder is 'the voice of the LORD,' and how does this differ from merely viewing storms as natural phenomena?
2. How does God's power over chaotic waters demonstrate His sovereignty, and what implications does this have for our trust when facing life's chaos?
3. In what ways did Jesus demonstrate the divine authority over nature described in this psalm, confirming His deity?
4. How should believers respond when experiencing powerful natural phenomena—storms, earthquakes, tsunamis—that reveal God's awesome power?

5. What is the relationship between God's creative word in Genesis 1 and His powerful voice in Psalm 29, and how does this inform our understanding of divine speech?

Interlinear Text

הָרָעַ יְמִינָה	פָּקַדְתִּיךְ	וְלֹא
The voice	of the LORD	H5921
H6963	H3068	
עַל	מִימָיו	אֵל
	is upon the waters	the God
	H4325	H410
וְלֹא	פָּקַדְתִּיךְ	וְלֹא
of glory	thundereth	H3519
		H7481
עַל	מִימָיו	כָּבִים:
of the LORD	is upon the waters	is upon many
H5921	H4325	H7227
H3068		

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 9:33 (References Lord): And Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and spread abroad his hands unto the LORD: and the thunders and hail ceased, and the rain was not poured upon the earth.

Exodus 9:28 (References Lord): Intreat the LORD (for it is enough) that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer.

Revelation 11:19 (References God): And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

Revelation 4:5 (References God): And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

Revelation 19:6 (References God): And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Revelation 16:18 (Parallel theme): And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.

Exodus 19:16 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.

1 Samuel 7:10 (References Lord): And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.

Revelation 8:5 (Parallel theme): And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

Psalms 104:3 (Parallel theme): Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind: