

Our God Is An Awesome God

Psalm 29

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Introduction: 1) One day David went for a walk in the beautiful outdoors of Israel. Whether he was a boy, a teen or the king we cannot be sure. As he looked toward the north he noticed thunder clouds were rolling in from the west out of the Mediterranean Sea. They began to build and grow in intensity, and then started moving south, continuing to grow in size and power. Suddenly he found himself in the midst of an incredible display of lightning, thunder and rain. The energy of the storm was breathtaking and David was once again reminded who he was and who God is. Quickly he grabbed a writing utensil and began to write a song to the Lord, the words of what could be summarized by a popular tune by Michael W. Smith.

“Our God is an awesome God,
He reigns from Heaven above,
With wisdom, pow’r and love,
Our God is an awesome God.”

Indeed there is a further line in the song that reads:

“There’s thunder in His footsteps
And lightning in His fists.”

2) Psalm 29 is a magnificent hymn that James Boice calls “pure praise and pure poetry” (p. 254). Indeed it is a psalm that praises the God of creation who is truly the sovereign Lord over all things. There are a number of literary and poetic features that tie this much neglected psalm together.

- The name Lord (Yahweh/Jehovah) occurs 18 times.
- The phrase “the voice of the Lord” occurs 7 times.
- The psalm utilizes the words of ancient Canaanite poetry, possibly as a polemic against the worship of Baal who was believed to be “lord of the storms.”
- The poem clearly divides into 3 sections (1-2, 3-9, 10-11) with a movement from heaven to earth, as well as from West to East and then North to South.
- As a whole this psalm celebrates the God who is King, the God who is omnipotent, the God who is the Lord above the storm. There is no prayer or petition, no lament or confession, only a challenge to acknowledge with the mind and worship with the heart our God who is an awesome God!

I. Worship the Lord for His Glory. 29:1-2

The psalm begins with a 2 verse prologue of praise built around the verbs “give” (or “ascribe”) and “worship.” 3 truths are highlighted explaining why and how we should worship the Lord for His glory.

1) **Acknowledge His power.** **29:1**

“Give, ascribe, to the Lord glory and strength, O you mighty ones” The word “ascribe” is used 3 times in rapid succession.

“Mighty ones” is *beni elim*, literally “sons of gods.” It is a poetic expression denoting the angels in heaven. Those who sang at the dawn of creation (Job 38:7) are called upon to lead the way in acknowledging the worth and omnipotence of the God who is the sovereign Lord. Tell God there is no one like Him. It honors Him and instructs you.

2) **Honor His name.** **29:2**

For the 3rd time we see the word “give or ascribe.” For the 2nd time we see the word “glory.” We are to give honor to the “glory of Jehovah’s name.” The name of Jehovah occurs 18 times in Psalm 29 and is a constant theme in the Psalms. It speaks of His nature and character, who He is and all that He is as God.

Psalm 8:1 tells us “His name is majestic.” Psalm 9:10 tells us “those who know your name will trust in you.” Prov. 18:10 tells us “the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.” And Philippians 2:9 tells us “there is a name that is above every name...”, the glorious name of Jesus.

3) **Praise His holiness.** **29:2**

The verb changes from “ascribe” to “worship” though the meaning is basically the same or closely related. If “ascribe” speaks more to the mind, “worship” (meaning “to bow down”) speaks to the heart and will. The former understanding leads to the latter response. We bow down to Jehovah praising Him in the beauty (NIV, “splendor”) of holiness. It is unclear whether it is His holiness that is in view or our holiness with which we are to come before Him. Craigie likes the translation, “Worship the Lord in holy attire (vol. 1, 242). However the flow of the text I believe points again to the character and nature of God. Angels (and we) are to bow down in worship, adoration and praise because the awesome God of power and salvation is also an awesome God of beautiful or splendid holiness. No god is like this God. He is utterly unique and distinct. He is the God who is “Holy and true” (Rev. 3:7), the God who says “be holy, because I am holy” (Levt. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7; 1 Pet. 1:16). And why? Because as Hab. 1:13 affirms, “His eyes are too pure to look on evil and He cannot tolerate wrong.”

Transition: We should worship the Lord for His glory.

II. **Worship the Lord for His Sovereignty.** **29:3-9**

- The Bible teaches us about the awesome power of the Word of God. In Genesis 1 He speaks Creation into existence. He says the word and it happens.
- In John 1:1 we are informed that the Word, the *Logos*, is a person, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is through Him, the Word, that God created all things (John 1:3) and it is through Him that God sustains all things (Col. 1:17).
- Here in verses 3-9 the voice of that Word echoes forth in sovereign and awesome majesty.

1) **He is sovereign over the waters.** **29:3-4**

- God's glory and sovereignty rest over all His creation. David begins by reflecting on how God's voice is heard in the claps of thunder. God is over all the waters, the waters that are below and above. Yet something of His glory is uniquely experienced at the awesome sound of thunder in the thunderstorm.
- Note the beautiful Hebrew parallelism in verse 3-4 in an ab/ab structure, with the 2nd line reinforcing and intensifying the first.
 - waters → many (*NIV*, "mighty") waters
 - thunders → powerful and full of majesty
- God's voice is thunderous, powerful and majestic over all the water. Sea and sky: He controls it all. Tsunamis and hurricanes are not the doings of demons, nature or mere chance. No, great Jehovah controls them all.

2) **He is sovereign over the mountains.** **29:5-7**

- The storm building in the Mediterranean has moved east to the northern region of Israel, to the mountains of Lebanon and Sirion, the ancient Sidonian name for Mt. Hermon.
- These great mountains with their magnificent cedars are twigs and small animals for entertainment in the presence of the Lord.
- He speaks and the great trees break, they snap in two ("break" and "splinter"). He speaks with thunder, and the mountains shake, they skip and tremble like a new born calf or like a young wild ox. These mighty mountains, rising to an attitude of 10,000 feet, are mere play things for great Jehovah.
- With thunder comes lightning and verse 7 draws our attention to this incredible and fascinating display of God's power. The pagan Canaanites were nature worshipers who believed the mountains were where the God's lived. Jehovah has no respect for these puny gods and impotent deities. He shakes their house with thunder and banishes their darkness with "flames of fire" (*ESV, HCSB*), with "flashes of lightning" (*NIV*).
- God is not in nature, He is over nature. Enjoy it but do not worship it or turn it into some idol. Great as it is, it is nothing when compared to the God who made it and controls it.

3) **He is sovereign over the wilderness.** **29:8-9**

The storm now moves south across the land of promise, the land of Israel. Moving from the majestic mountains and across the fertile region of the Galilee, the storm reaches even to the desert region in the far south as it shakes (2X) the Wilderness of Kadesh. Here images of the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness would be called up. Yes, God is in control there too!

The first part of verse 9 presents an interpretive challenge. The *NKJV, HCSB, ESV* and *NASV* have, "The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth," lit. "makes the deer calve." In contrast the *NIV* has "The voice of the Lord twists

the oaks,” the translation being influenced no doubt by the next line which reads, “and strips the forest bare.” Of course both ideas are true, but the context, I believe, would support the *NIV* at this point. The thunderous voice of Yahweh “twists the oaks and strips the forest bare.” This storm knocks down everything in its path so awesome is the God who sends and controls it. In the face of such a display of sovereign power what can we say? What can we do? The last part of verse 9 provides the answer: “We gather together in the place of worship (“His temple”) and we shout with the angels in verses 1-2, “Glory.” Praise initiated in heaven among the voices of angels now is heard on earth in the voices of men and women, boys and girls. Glory here means “praise, worship, adoration”; mind and heart are joined in humble recognition of the greatness and sovereignty of our God. As the chorus by Chris Tomlin proclaims, “The splendor of the King, Clothed in majesty, Let all the earth rejoice. All the earth rejoice. He wraps Himself in light. And darkness tries to hide, And trembles at His voice, trembles at His voice. How great is our God, sing with me How great is our God, and all will see how great, How great, is our God.”

Transition: Worship the Lord for His glory. Worship the Lord for His sovereignty.

III. Worship the Lord For His Majesty 29:10-11

As David considered the incredible display of God’s might and majesty in the storm, his mind made a beeline to another majestic display of God’s might: the Genesis Flood. If ever there as an event that put on full display the majestic power of God over nature and in judgment it is the flood. The flood, like the storm, shouts a clear and incontestable message: Jehovah is King.

1) Our Lord is the King is His position 29:10

Verse 10 literally reads, “Jehovah on the flood sits and sits Jehovah King forever.” A number of translations provide the word “enthroned” (e.g. *NKJV*, *NIV*, *ESV*, *HCSB*) to capture the idea of His sitting as King. The word “flood” appears only here and in the flood narratives, of Gen. 6-11. Here is the ultimate and supreme example of Yahweh’s glory, sovereignty and majesty over the waters, yea, over all. His majesty in power and judgment by means of a universal flood testifies to His position as King. Truly He is, as Rev. 19:16 proclaims, “King of kings and Lords of lords.”

2) Our Lord is the King by His promise 29:11

The God who has the strength to bring the flood of Genesis is a God who can give me strength for the day, for each and every moment. The phrase His people is crucial. It is to His people and only His people that He promises strength. As He strengthened Noah and his family for the task of building the Ark and surviving the flood, so He will strengthen us when the waters rise, the storms come, and we can only flee to Him for strength. Through Christ I can do all

things (Phil. 4:13). Through Christ, the Word, the very voice of God, the Lord will give us strength.

3) **Our Lord is the King with His peace** **29:11**

- The last phrase of vs. 11 parallels the first, but with a different and complementary emphasis. The phrase His people appears again. “Give strength” finds a companion in bless with peace (shalom). The storm has passed, the Lord is King overall, completely and majestically in control. Peace, shalom, wellness of life in all its aspects is the experience of God’s people.
- There is a quietness and rest for the people of God even in the storm. Why?
 - Romans 5:1, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”
 - Philippians 4:7, “and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”
- Franz Delitzsch says, “This closing word with peace is like a rainbow arch over the psalm” (Kidner, 127). This is no surprise.
 The God of glory is a God of grace.
 The God of majesty is a God of mercy.
 The God of power is a God of peace.
 Our God is an awesome God.

Conclusion: Isaac Watts, a wonderful Puritan who never married, lived from 1674-1748. He has been called the “Father of English Hymnody” and penned some 750 hymns. A pastor and capable theologian, He gave us “Joy to the World,” “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” “Alas! And Did my Savior Bleed,” and “I Sing the Mighty Power of God,” a fitting commentary and complement to Psalm 29.

I sing the might pow’r of God, That made the mountains rise;
 That spread the flowing seas abroad, And built the lofty skies.
 I sing the wisdom that ordained The sun to rule the day;
 The moon shines full at His command, And all the stars obey.

I sing the goodness of the Lord, That filled the earth with food;
 He formed the creatures with His word, And then pronounced them good.
 Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed, Wher-e’er I turn my eye:
 If I survey the ground I tread, Or gaze upon the sky!
 There’s not a plant or flow’r below, But makes Thy glories know;
 And clouds arise, and tempests blow, By order from Thy throne;
 While all that borrows life from Thee Is ever in Thy care,
 And everywhere that man can be, Thou, God, art present there.