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The Power of the LORD'S Voice (Psalm 29)

The key phrase in this Psalm is the “voice of the LORD.” This suggests that the events described here are the actual speaking of God. The Psalm can be divided into three parts. In the first section the psalmist calls on the angelic beings to render their praise to Yahweh (Psalm 29:1-2). The main unit presents the circumstances which elicit this summon to praise Yahweh, it being the revelation of His power on earth through the thunder of His voice (Psalm 29:3-9). The Psalm concludes with words of Assurance to Yahweh's people that He is the sovereign King who comes to bless them, thus they need not fear the terrible manifestations of His power (Psalm 29:10-12).

Let us take a close look at the text itself. We note first of all the subjects addressed in the Psalm are designated “sons of the mighty” (v. 1). This phrase has been interpreted in three different ways:

- (I) Powerful nobles, or mighty celestial beings.
- (II) Beings belonging to the class of super-humans, heavenly powers, or the nations who had forgotten their true parentage, and ranged themselves under the protection of deified heroes or invented gods, and are now invited to remember themselves and return to the Lord.
- (III) Angels who are called sons of God in Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7. We agree with Kirkpatrick that the “sons of the mighty” are angels who surround Yahweh's throne. They are summoned to praise Yahweh for the manifestation of His power on earth which is described as “the voice of the LORD.”

Psalm 29 employs the phrase “the voice of the LORD” seven times, to depict the sovereign deeds of Yahweh:

- (I) The voice of the Lord is upon many waters (v.3).
- (II) The voice of the LORD is powerful (v. 4a).
- (III) The voice of the LORD is majesty (v.4b).
- (IV) The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars (vv. 5-6). The cedar of Lebanon was considered the noblest and strongest tree of the forest. Its stem is well-known to be hard and is considered incorruptible. To say that the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon is to express awesome power of Yahweh. Here, as in Psalm 46, Yahweh is portrayed as the One who controls nature.
- (V) The voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire (v. 7). Here, “flames of fire” describes the lightning which shoots out of the thunderous clouds.
- (VI) The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness (v. 8a).
- (VII) The voice of the LORD makes the deer calve (v. 9a).

Modern Western Society tend to raise nature to a level that would have appalled a pious Israelite. The unseen forces of nature are conventionally dubbed “Mother Nature.” When the weather is comfortable, and it does not disrupt our activities we acclaim “Mother Nature” for her good graces to us. If the reverse is true, then she is derided. But this is not the case with the pious Jews. For them, nature is always subservient to the living God. As Kirkpatrick right says, “The devout Israelite's view of nature was profoundly religious. He did not contemplate its wonder and beauty and variety simply for their sake. All spoke to him of God's power and glory and beneficence or supplied him with emblems and figures for the delineation of God's attributes and working. Thus the thunder was to him the Voice of God, and all the terrible phenomena of the storm were an expression of the majesty of the Eternal Sovereign of the Universe (see Exodus 19:16; 20:18; Psalm 18:7ff., Isaiah 30:27ff., Habakkuk 3:1-15).” Indeed, the voice of the LORD is powerful.

By God's Grace and for His glory,

Pr. Francis