

Introduction

When Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, what we call the Septuagint, they placed a note before this particular Psalm to inform that it is to be read on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. This last of the seven mandated celebrations on the Hebrew calendar is acknowledged by Jews even to this day as referring to the anticipated Messianic kingdom to come and specified in Ezekiel as something which will be carried over into the Millennial Reign of Christ.

In this Psalm God is characterized as a storm progressing over the whole of Israel and beyond which Jewish tradition interprets as an acknowledgement of God's redemption. Also take note of the seven-fold references to "The voice of God" as this kind of occurrence in Scripture of a sequence of seven is nearly always an important detail with much larger overtones. The question is not whether God speaks or not, but how the listener hears and reacts when He does.

A Psalm of David.

¹Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty,
Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

²Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name;
Worship the LORD in holy array.

Read verses 1-2

Q: What does "ascribe" mean?

A: In English it means to attribute something to its source, such as ascribing the authorship of a book to the writer. The Hebrew word as used in the Old Testament carries with it the parallel notion of being worthy of sacrifices and recognizing His sovereignty.

Q: Who are the "sons of the mighty"?

A: This phrase is found only one additional time in Psalm 89:6 and appears to reference His heavenly servants the angels. But because faithful followers are often referred to as His "sons", it seems equally appropriate as a meaning that can also be applied it to His earthly servants. Both must correctly worship God in holiness.

Q: What is being specifically attributed to God?

- (v.1) "...glory and strength."
- (v.2) "...the glory due to His name."

Q: What is the biblical definition of "glory"?

A: The basic meaning of the underlying Hebrew term is "to be heavy, weighty". The root is not often used in its literal sense but more often metaphorically such as "heavy with sin". Biblically it is spoke of as something palpable and at times visible but should be noted that the Messiah is specifically ascribed this quality, and also identifies the visible beauty and appearance of the vestments of the high priest. (Ex. 28:2, 40)

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In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the adornment of the survivors of Israel.

Isaiah 4:2

Q: How is this supposed to be visibly expressed according to v.2?

A: Not just “worship”, but “in holy array”

Q: What does that mean?

A: Another way this can be expressed is to “worship in holy attire” as was literally seen in the priesthood’s Temple service. Those vestments were designed according to God’s specifications to reflect His Word and ways.

Point: *This was not an endorsement to make church services as fancy and over-decorated as possible, but was meant as an earthly Old Testament representation of the beauty and splendor of God’s holiness. In the New Testament such attire is the deeds of a faithful follower.*

⁷“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” ⁸It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Revelation 19:7-8

Q: How does this opening significantly differ from the body of v.3-9?

A: It is the voice of man speaking to God rather than the voice of the Lord speaking to man.

Application: True **worship** takes shape in all its forms by being founded on the acknowledgment of God’s **sovereignty** and conducted in the character of His **holiness**.

Read verses 3-4

Q: What is special about the Hebrew word for “voice”?

A: First, it describes the literal, not metaphorical, sound vocal cords make. Second, when it comes to God speaking in the Bible (1 Sam. 2:10, 7:10; Job 26:14, 37:2, 40:9), it is often perceived as thunder as at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 20:1). This interpretation is also affirmed in this very verse: “The God of glory thunders”.

Q: Why does it twice repeat that God’s voice is “upon the waters” and “over many waters”?

A: In the ancient world the Mediterranean Sea was thought to be not just a huge distance to other nations bordering its far side, but endless in its expanse; it was seen as impossible to traverse at its widest span and perhaps never-ending. This is a dramatic poetical way of describing God’s ability to span the impossible and to overcome any earthly obstacle no matter how intimidating to man’s limited abilities.

³The voice of the LORD is upon
the waters;
The God of glory thunders,
The LORD is over many waters.
⁴The voice of the LORD is
powerful,
The voice of the LORD is
majestic.

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Q: What are the qualities assigned to “The voice of the LORD”?

- “upon the waters” – Overcomes even the greatest earthly obstacle.
- “thunders” – A powerful sound from heaven which is associated with a significant storm.
- “powerful” – God’s power is revealed when He speaks.
- “majestic” – He shows how truly great He is. In Scripture this is often associated with proper fear of the Lord due to His obviously surpassing greatness and splendor.

Application: God’s *glory* reigns over everything in both the *natural* and *spiritual* realms. The closest approximation of His *voice* in our realm is best described as *thunder*.

Read verses 5-7

⁵The voice of the LORD breaks
the cedars;
Yes, the LORD breaks in pieces
the cedars of Lebanon.
⁶He makes Lebanon skip like a
calf,
And Sirion like a young wild ox.
⁷The voice of the LORD hews out
flames of fire.

Q: What is the first quality assigned to “The voice of the LORD”?

A: “...breaks the cedars...in pieces the cedars of Lebanon”.

Q: What does that mean?

A: Trees are often a metaphor used in Scripture to represent a person or even entire people group. Lebanon was not only known for quality of its literal cedars, but it is metaphorically applied to represent the nature of their pride. This is an illustration of the power of God’s voice which can easily overcome the most stubborn and proud.

Observation: God doesn’t merely knock them over, but by His power breaks these enormous trees into little pieces so they will be of no use at all.

Q: What is the meaning of “He makes Lebanon skip like a calf”?

A: Imagine the mountains and forests upon them jumping about like a nervous calf frightened because of the storm.

Q: Who or what is Sirion?

A: Deuteronomy 3:9 identifies this as the name Sidonians used for Mt. Hermon, the highest point in the land of Israel. Sidon is a major city-state and along with its neighbor Tyre most often represents Lebanon in Scripture. Mt. Hermon was the largest mountain in Israel and illustrates the power of God’s voice by making it move with little effort on His part.

Point: Those of us who have experienced an actual earthquake have witnessed how things which seem permanent and immovable are actually fragile and easily moved, even sometimes going up and down depending on the type of quake.

Q: What is the second quality of the Lord’s voice?

A: “...hews out flames of fire”.

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- The term “*hews out*” describes the work necessary to remove large rocks or trees.
- Instead of using a shovel or ax to hew the cedars of Lebanon, God uses fire. This was the result of lightning in the natural world so it may be a poetical way of addressing God’s supernatural power to judge and destroy.

Point: *The illustration of a very destructive earthly storm is but a shadow of that which God’s authority and sovereignty can and will accomplish.*

Application: *The Lord makes a complete **destruction** by not just **breaking** in pieces but consuming by **fire** the pieces which remains.*

Read verses 8-9

⁸The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
The LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

⁹The voice of the LORD makes the deer to calve
And strips the forests bare;
And in His temple everything says, “Glory!”

Q: How has the location changed?

A: Previously it was a mountain within Israel and its immediate neighbor to the north. Now it has expanded out to “*the wilderness*”.

Q: What is the wilderness of Kadesh?

A: Located between Israel and Egypt, it is the site of the first generation’s failure. (Num. 20) Located to the east of the mountains of Edom, it was considered to be a part of the great desert of what we now call Saudi Arabia.

Point: *Just as the “waters” of the Mediterranean previously mentioned were considered vast and endless to the west, so was this “wilderness” to the east. These combine to illustrate the absolute power and authority of God as not only overcoming all obstacles, but beyond human understanding.*

Q: What is the meaning of the illustrations for the next quality of God’s voice?

- “*...makes the deer to calve...*” refers to such a great reaction that it results in premature birth.
- “*...strips the forest bare*” means to completely remove all leaves and branches, making the further “birth” of trees impossible as they would have no fruit or seed to do so.

Notice that both touch on the idea of a future legacy as well as producing something in this world. Such are cut off forever.

Q: Why the abrupt transition to “His temple”?

A: This is speaking of the heavenly reaction to what the Lord’s voice has done, an acknowledgment that it is all the working of His glory.

Observation: *This is a repeated feature in the sequence of the book of Revelation where the earthly results of God’s working is praised and attributed to His glory even though such activities produce unprecedented destruction and judgment. That which occurs on earth is always a reflection of something greater taking place in heaven whose residents are first to recognize what has come about by God’s Word.*

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Application: God's **power** and **glory** overcomes the unfathomable **expanses** beyond just our own immediate **location**.

Read verses 10-11

¹⁰The LORD sat as King at the flood;
Yes, the LORD sits as King forever.
¹¹The LORD will give strength to His people;
The LORD will bless His people with peace.

Q: Why is this reference to the Flood in Noah's day appropriate for the theme of this Psalm?

A: It is the most powerful documented display to date of God's wrath of judgment illustrating His power and authority. His sovereignty was in force both before and after the event, as expressed by "sits as King forever".

Q: How does this serve to combine all the illustrations of the Lord's voice into an assurance we can apply personally?

A: All of this power can be applied to "give strength to His people".

Q: How will this take place in a stark contrast to the illustrations this Psalm gave of His voice?

A: Instead of complete destruction, it will be turned around to "bless His people with peace".

Application: As often demonstrated in Scripture, that which God performs serves to comfort and reinforce the **faith** of the heart **inclined** toward God simultaneously produces **judgment** in the **hardened** of heart.

Overall Application

The seven qualities of God's voice here provided:

- "The voice of the LORD is upon the **waters**." (v.3)
- "The voice of the LORD is **powerful**." (v.4)
- "The voice of the LORD is **majestic**." (v.4)
- "The voice of the LORD breaks the **cedars**." (v.5)
- "The voice of the LORD hews out flames of **fire**." (v.7)
- "The voice of the LORD shakes the **wilderness**." (v.8)
- "The voice of the LORD makes the deer to **calve**." (v.9)

All of these qualities address God's absolute power over everything and everyone in the **earthly** realm because there is no doubt His supremely in charge in the **heavenly** realm. This epiphany will either respectively come as total **destruction** or a **blessing** of peace to the **unsaved** vs. the **saved**.