



## A Little Higher than Angels Psalm 29 and the Genre of Heavenly Praise

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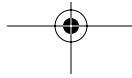
THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



Psalm 29, with its descriptions of YHWH's earth-shattering dominion over all aspects of nature, presents not only a theology but also, in calling upon heavenly beings to praise YHWH, an anthropology. The first part of the psalm consists of the call to prayer; the second contains the praise itself. The human speakers of the psalm address this call to heavenly beings; thus we must understand the psalm or parts of it to be sung by both earthly and heavenly worshipers. Other texts from the Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Jewish mystical traditions, and the rabbinic *Siddur* belong to the same genre as Ps 29, which we may call "heavenly worship" or even "joint human-angelic worship," because they either describe the worship of angels in heaven or provide the libretto for humans who join in heavenly worship. But Ps 29, along with a few other biblical psalms, takes this genre (and the implications of its anthropology) a step further, depicting Israelites as directing the angelic worship. To use later Jewish terminology: in Ps 29, Israel and the angels are in the same קהל, but the Israelites are the שליחי צבור.

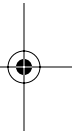
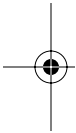
### TRANSLATION

The following translation breaks each poetic line into its components, which (following Benjamin Hrushovski and Robert Alter) I refer to as versets. Most biblical poetic lines contain two parallel versets, some three; in this poem, somewhat unusually, two lines contain four versets each (and one line seems to have only one verset, though, we shall see, the text may be defective there). In what follows, I place the beginning of each line further to the right, indenting each subsequent verset. I place the traditional verse numbers of the Masoretic Text (which do not always correspond to divisions between poetic lines) to the left for convenient reference.





- 1 A Psalm of David  
Ascribe to YHWH, O ye gods,
- 2 Ascribe to YHWH glory and praise!  
Ascribe to YHWH the glory of His name;  
Bow down to YHWH for His holy splendor!
- 3 YHWH's voice is over the water;  
The God of glory thunders,  
YHWH, over the cosmic waters.
- 4 YHWH's voice—powerfully—  
YHWH's voice—majestically—
- 5 YHWH's voice breaks the cedars;  
YHWH shatters the cedars of Lebanon.
- 6 He makes Lebanon dance like a calf,  
Sirion, like a young bull.
- 7 YHWH's voice splits flames of fire.
- 8 YHWH's voice makes the desert writhe;  
YHWH makes the wilderness of Qadesh dance.
- 9 YHWH's voice makes oaks dance about,  
And uproots forests.  
And in His palace they all say:
- 10 YHWH's Glory was enthroned at the flood,  
And YHWH will sit enthroned as king forever
- 11 May YHWH give strength to His people;  
May YHWH bless His people with peace



## COMMENTARY

*Verse 1.*

**Ascribe.** Hebrew, *havu*, a plural imperative from the verbal root *yhb*, “give.” In Hebrew, this verb appears only in the imperative (it is common in all its grammatical forms in Aramaic).

**O ye gods.** Hebrew, *benei 'eilim*—literally, “sons of the gods” or “members of the class known as gods.” (The Hebrew term *ben* can denote not only biological descent but membership in a class; thus the *benei nevi'im* in 1 Kgs 20:35; 2 Kgs 2:3, and Amos 7:14 are members of the prophetic guild, not literally sons of a particular prophet.) The term *benei 'eilim* refers to divine beings other than YHWH in Ps 87:9 (where the heavenly setting is quite clear) and in an ancient version of Deut 32:8 preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint, and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (where it refers to the lower-ranking gods whom



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YHWH assigned to nations other than Israel).<sup>1</sup> A similar term, *benei ha'elohim*, refers to some sort of heavenly beings in Gen 6:1–4 and Job 1:6. It is possible that biblical writers thought the *benei 'eilim* included beings such as Marduk, god of Babylon, and Ashur, god of Assyria. According to this conception, just as there were by convention seventy gods, so were there seventy nations; thus each god had his own nation to rule (Ashur was responsible for the Assyrians, for example, and Marduk for the Babylonians, though Deuteronomy does not deign to mention these minor gods by name).<sup>2</sup> But the high God YHWH kept one nation as his own property, and it was their responsibility to pray only to him. (For this concept in Deuteronomy, see also 29:25; cf. further Mic 4.5.) Most biblical texts do not deny the existence of these beings but insist that any power or responsibility they have comes from YHWH, who assigned them their jobs. Biblical texts never refer to the *benei 'eilim/ha'elohim* by their personal names, instead relegating them to this generalized class.<sup>3</sup> Some biblical and many post-biblical texts prefer not to apply any term that includes the word “god” to this class of beings, instead referring to divine beings

<sup>1</sup> The understanding of Deut 32.8 presented here is hardly new; it was already set forth in detail in the twelfth century by Nachmanides in his commentary to Lev 18.25, based on the MT. In light of the evidence from the Qumran scrolls and the Septuagint (LXX), his reading appears even stronger. See further A. Goshen-Gottstein, “Other Gods in Ramban’s Thought: Adapted Conceptions and Their Implications for Possible Connections to Other Religions,” in *‘Al Pi Ha-Be’er: Studies in Jewish Philosophy and in Halakhic Thought Presented to Gerald Blidstein* (ed. U. Ehrlich, H. Kreisel, and D. Lasker; Beersheba: Ben Gurion University Press, 2008), 28–32.

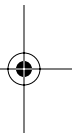
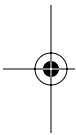
<sup>2</sup> I refer to the notion known from Ugaritic literature that there are seventy gods; see, for example, the reference to the seventy sons of Athirat in the Baal Cycle, CAT 1.4.6.46, available in Ugaritic with an English translation in M. Smith, “The Baal Cycle,” in *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (ed. S. Parker; SBLWAW; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 134. The correspondence of seventy lower-ranking heavenly beings with specific nations is spelled out in *b. Shabbat* 88b and *Sukkah* 55b.

<sup>3</sup> The Moabite deity Kemosh is mentioned by name twice, in Num 21:29 and Judg 11:24. In both cases, however, the god’s name is mentioned not by the biblical narrator but rather by Israelite characters addressing a foreign audience; they use the god’s name specifically for the benefit of those foreigners who might legitimately worship him. Ashur, the god of Assyria, may be mentioned by name in Isa 10:5, though the prophet may be referring to the nation as a whole rather than to its god.

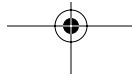


who work for YHWH as *mal'akhim* (“messengers,” “angels”). This is, in fact, how the Targum translates *benei 'eilim* here. Similarly, some biblical scribes were uncomfortable with any reference to such beings, with their implications of polytheism. Psalm 96:7 repeats the poetic line found here but substitutes the word “families of nations” for “divine beings,” thus calling upon the other nations, and not the gods who rule over them, to praise YHWH.<sup>4</sup> For the scribe or poet who wrote Ps 96, the first verse of our psalm may have seemed perilously close to polytheism. But for the author of Ps 29, the point of referring to the divine beings was to show that they, like humanity, pray to YHWH. It is perfectly possible to view Ps 29 as making a monotheistic point: there are other heavenly beings besides YHWH, but they, like human beings, are subservient to YHWH and pray to YHWH. Their existence is no more an affront to monotheistic faith than is the existence of human beings.<sup>5</sup>

**Glory.** Hebrew, *kavod*, a term that can refer also to YHWH’s physical manifestation, the divine presence. God’s “glory” (*kavod*) has a range of meanings in biblical texts. It can refer to a divine attribute, such as the honor due to God or the moral values God expresses. Sometimes biblical texts compare God’s *kavod* to other abstract qualities characteristic of the deity, such as righteousness, salvation, loyalty, or truth (see Isa 58:8; Ps 19:1; 57:10–12; 85:10–14; 96:7–8). On the other hand, the word *kavod* can also mean “body, substance, that which has weight.”<sup>6</sup> Consequently, one might suppose that YHWH’s



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- <sup>4</sup> Similarly, in the MT of Deut 32:8 a scribe has eliminated the term “divine beings” and replaced it with “Israelites,” a reading that makes little sense but leaves no possibility of a polytheistic misinterpretation of the verse. On the textual versions of this verse (and the related issue in Deut 32.43), see esp. the discussion in J. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 513–18.
- <sup>5</sup> On the other hand, it is also possible to read Ps 29 as a polytheistic text, which describes a pagan pantheon in which lower-ranking gods praise a higher-ranking one. In the context of the Tanakh, the monotheistic possibility is the contextually stronger reading. See further my discussion of Israelite monotheism in the appendix of B. D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 145–74.
- <sup>6</sup> On the term meaning “body,” “person,” or “self,” see H. L. Ginsberg, “Gleanings in First Isaiah,” in *Mordecai M. Kaplan Jubilee Volume* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1953), 46–47. See, e.g., Isa 17:4 and Ps 16:9.



*kavod* can simply refer to God's body.<sup>7</sup> Since the Israelites conceived of the divine body as stunningly bright or surrounded by an extraordinary radiance,<sup>8</sup> we would expect this body to be made of or surrounded by an intense fire. Hence, the *kavod* would refer to God's fiery presence. (For examples of *kavod* referring to God's body, see, e.g., Exod 33:18–23; 34:5; Lev 16:2,13; Num 9:15–22; 1 Kgs 8:11; Ezek 1:1, 27–28.)<sup>9</sup>

**Praise.** Hebrew, 'oz. Though usually translated as “strength,” this term can also mean “praise,” which is the preferable translation here. The worshipers do not add to YHWH's strength; rather, they offer him respect and recognition. This is the understanding of the Septuagint (which translates 'oz with the Greek word *timē*, meaning “worship, esteem”), of Radak and of Dahood.

Verse 2.

**For his Holy splendor.** Hebrew, *behadrat qodesh* (literally, “in the glory of holiness”). A difficult phrase, it appears in a similar poetic line in Ps 96:9; 1 Chr 16:29, and 2 Chr 20:21. The noun *hadrat* appears also in Prov 14:28. It is not clear whether the phrase refers to the god being

<sup>7</sup> Contrary to what many people today assume, biblical authors understood God to have a body, even if its precise form and nature were different in many ways from a human body. The notion of the non-corporeality of God became standard in Jewish thought only after Maimonides. To be sure, some biblical authors stressed that one could not see God and live (e.g., Ex 33:20), but this did not mean that God lacked a body, any more than saying that one cannot touch a high-voltage wire and live means that there is no such thing as a high voltage wire. Rather, God had an extraordinary body, and seeing it could cause death.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Ex 19:18, Ps 104:2. On passages such as these and their connections to the extraordinary divine light in Akkadian literature, see esp. M. Weinfeld, “God the Creator in Gen. 1 and the Prophecy of Second Isaiah,” *Tarbiz* 37 (1968): 105–32 (131–32) (Hebrew), and the comprehensive treatment in S. Z. Aster, “The Phenomenon of Divine Radiance in the Hebrew Bible and in Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Literatures: A Philological and Comparative Study,” (2 vol.; Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2006), xvi + 576.

<sup>9</sup> On *kabod* as God's body, see J. Morgenstern, “Biblical Theophanies,” *ZA* 25 (1911): 141–53; Weinfeld, “God the Creator,” 113–20; and Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 60–62, 68–76. On *kabod* as simply equivalent to God, see T. N. D. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies* (ConBOT 18; Lund: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1982), 107, and Aster, “Phenomenon,” 353–54.



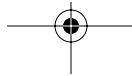
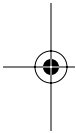
praised or the heavenly beings who are doing the praising. If the former, it may mean one should praise God *because of* his holy majesty—that is, in recognition of his holy splendor.<sup>10</sup> If the latter, it may refer to special sacred and majestic ornaments or clothing the heavenly beings wear when praising YHWH.<sup>11</sup> The more likely possibility is the former, in which case we might best translate this verset: “Bow down to YHWH to recognize His holy splendor,” or, “Bow down to YHWH for His holy splendor!”

The poetic structure of the first two verses is noteworthy in several respects. While most poetic lines in biblical Hebrew have two or three

<sup>10</sup> On the prefix *be-* with the meaning “because of, on account of,” see Gen 18:28; Lev 26:39; Num 16:26; Deut 9:4–5; Ps 5:8, 11; 6:8; 90:9; and 94:23; and see further BDB 90a-b §III 5.

<sup>11</sup> Some scholars (e.g., F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973], 152–53, n. 28; M. Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* [AB 16; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966], ad 29.2; H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Continental Commentary* [trans. H. Oswald; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], ad Ps 96:9) argue that the word *hdt* also appears once in Ugaritic, where it is parallel to the noun *hlm*, “dream.” Therefore, these scholars understand *behadrat qodesh* in Ps 29:2 and Ps 96:9 to mean “at his holy appearance.” Similarly, D. N. Freedman and C. F. Hyland, “Psalm 29: A Structural Analysis,” *HTR* 66 (1973): 237–56 (243–45), understands *qodesh* as “sanctuary” and translates *behadrat qodesh* “in the holy place of his appearance” or “theophanic holy place.” This argument is extremely dubious for several reasons. First, Y. Avishur, *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1994), 52–53, and P. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (WBC; n.p.; Thomas Nelson, 2004), ad 29:2, note that the word in question appears only once in Ugaritic and its meaning is not fully clear. Thus it is difficult to build a case on the basis of this one text. Second, “dream” is not quite the same as “theophany, manifestation,” and thus the Ugaritic poetic line does not quite support the reading that Cross and Kraus suggest. Finally, the Ugaritic text does not, in fact, read *hdt* but rather *(d\*)t*, which Cross and Kraus believe to be cognate to our Hebrew term, but which is understood by C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (AnOr 38; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), 338, to be a scribal error for *(d\*)* with a pronomial suffix *-h*, meaning “his dream vision.”

Another possible reading of *behadrat qodesh* is suggested by the LXX and the Peshitta, both of which seem to interpret the phrase as meaning “in the holy precincts,” in other words, in the Temple. But this reading may be influenced by the similar line in Ps 96:7–9, which quotes Ps 29:1–2, inserting an extra verse that mentions “His courtyards” to which one brings “an offering.” Thus LXX and Peshitta may have interpreted the difficult phrase in Ps 29 on the basis of the additional line in Ps 96. But there is no evidence in the text of Ps 29 itself to support this interpretation.



parts, these two verses present us with a four-part line. The first three versets all begin with the words *havu leyhwh* (**ascribe to YHWH**) followed by some noun phrase. The fourth, climactic, line varies the pattern, but it still parallels the previous three versets in several ways. First, this fourth verset begins with an imperative verb, *hishtaḥavu* that resembles the imperative *havu*, both because it begins with the *h* sound and because it ends with *-vu*. (In ancient Hebrew, the pronunciation was likely *habu* and *hishtaḥavu*, but the *-bu* and *-vu* endings share a similarity of sound in that both begin with labial consonants.) Second, the *ḥ* sound of the second-to-last syllable of *hishtaḥavu* recalls the *h* sound of *havu*. Thus the fourth verset presents a fine example of parallelism based on sound.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the last verset of a line in biblical poetry often provides specificity to something ambiguous in the first verset or versets. This is the case here: the fourth verset explains how one should accord praise to YHWH, to wit, by bowing down.<sup>13</sup>

*Verse 3.*

The three-part line in this verse provides examples of several classic features of the biblical poetic line. The second verset line clarifies the ambiguous term *qol* (which can mean not only “voice” but also “sound” and “thunder”) by telling us that **the God of Glory thunders**. The third verset includes parallelism of amplification: the first verset reads “waters,” which is intensified to “mighty waters” in the third verset.

**The cosmic waters.** The same phrase often appears in texts that allude to the fight between YHWH and the powers of chaos personified by the Sea; see Hab 3:15; Ps 77:20; 93:4; another such allusion occurs in Isa 17:13. The story to which this language alludes further recalls the Canaanite myth in which the god Baal attained power by defeating his peer Yam, the Sea.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> On the importance of phonological parallelism in biblical poetry, see A. Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 103–24.

<sup>13</sup> On the rhetoric of specification or disambiguation in later versets of Hebrew parallel lines, see J. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 1–58; and R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 3–25, 62–84; Berlin, *Dynamics*, 96–99.

<sup>14</sup> On the mythological implications of the phrase *mayim rabbim*, see H. G. May, “Some Cosmic Connotations of *Mayim Rabbim*, ‘Many Waters,’” *JBL* 74 (1955): 9–21.

*Verses 4–5.*

The first two versets of this four-part line introduce the subject and an adverbial phrase, but the verb is held in abeyance until the third verset, increasing tension in the listener, who is made to wait for the whole meaning.<sup>15</sup> As in the previous line, the parallelism displays elements of specification and intensification: Which cedars? The cedars of Lebanon! God not only breaks (*shoveir*—a *qal* verb) but shatters (*vay-shabbeir*—a *piel* verb) the cedars;<sup>16</sup> and not just any cedars, but the famous cedars of Lebanon. Because Lebanon’s mountains had more water than most areas in the Near East, its cedars were especially tall, strong, and majestic. They were renowned throughout the ancient Near East. Kings from as far away as Mesopotamia boasted about sending expeditions to procure cedars of Lebanon for their building projects.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Solomon uses them for building the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 5:20–23), and “the cedars of Lebanon” are a frequent figure in biblical texts for strength and loftiness (e.g., Judg 9:15; Isa 2:13; 10:34; Ps 92:12; 104:16).

*Verse 6.*

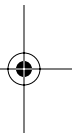
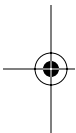
**Lebanon . . . Sirion.** Both words are references to mountains north of the Land of Israel. The Lebanon range is some fourteen miles (twenty-six km) east of the Mediterranean Sea. Sirion is known also as Mount Hermon, a peak on the southern extreme of the Anti-Lebanon mountain range, thirty-two miles (fifty-two km) east of the Mediterranean. The image of God making mountains jump like animals occurs also in Ps 18:8 and 114:4, as well as Nah 1:5. In Ugaritic literature, Baal’s voice (*qol*) causes earth and mountains to shake.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> On this sort of parallelism, a subtype of anaphora that has been called “staircase parallelism,” see W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984), 150–56 with bibliography.

<sup>16</sup> On variation of verbal construction in biblical parallelism, see Berlin, 36–40 and further references there.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., the claims about Naram-Sin and Sargon in B. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (2 vol.; Bethesda: CDL Press, 1993), 1:52, 100, as well as the fifth tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic. For an extensive list, see the references in *CAD* E, 274–75 §a1’.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, CTU 1.4.VII.29–35 (S. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* [SBLWAW 9; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997], 136–37).



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My translation follows the suggestion of H. L. Ginsberg, who argues that the letter *mem* at the end of the word *vayyarqideim* is what grammarians call “an enclitic *mem*,” or a *mem* that functions loosely to add emphasis to the phrase in which it is found, but which really has no particular grammatical function at all.<sup>19</sup> Ginsberg then puts the major pause in the line after the word “Sirion,” thus reading against the Masoretic cantillation. An alternate understanding found in many older translations follows the Masoretic punctuation by putting the pause after **calf** and reading the *mem* as a third-person plural accusative. According to that translation, our verse provides a classic example of parallelism of specification: **He makes them skip like a calf**—[specifically,] **Lebanon and Sirion like a young bull**.<sup>20</sup> Both translations are grammatically possible. In the translation following the Masoretic vocalization, however, the first verset is considerably shorter than its second verset in Hebrew, a situation that is unusual though not unheard of. Overall, Ginsberg’s suggestion is preferable: it yields the common parallel pair “Lebanon / Sirion,”<sup>21</sup> and it produces a parallel line with two versets of typical length.

<sup>19</sup> See H. L. Ginsberg, *Kitvei Ugarit* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1936), 130 (Hebrew). It was Ginsberg who first discovered the enclitic *mem* in Ugaritic in 1933 (see H. L. Ginsberg, “Additional Notes Concerning the Baal Epic,” *Tarbiz* 4 [1933]: 380–400 [388] [Hebrew]); he noted its presence in Ps 29:6 three years later. An especially helpful methodological treatment of the grammatical and textual issues relating to the enclitic *mem*, along with a discussion of our verse, is found in J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 31–33.

<sup>20</sup> The reader who follows this translation may initially think that the pronomial suffix “them” refers back to the cedars of Lebanon, and as the reader continues it becomes clear that it also refers to the mountains. Thus the reader receives two impressions, both of which are accurate: through the storm, God makes the cedars dance, and through an earthquake, God makes mountains dance as well. For other examples of this sort of dual reading (known as Janus parallelism), see Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 159; G. Rendsburg, “Janus Parallelism in Genesis 49:26,” *JBL* 99 (1980): 291–93; S. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job* (JSOTSup 223; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); S. Paul, “Polysemous Pivotal Punctuation: More Janus Double Entendres,” in *Texts, Temples, and Tradition: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (ed. V. A. Hurowitz, M. V. Fox, and A. Hurvitz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 369–74.

<sup>21</sup> As several scholars have noted (e.g., Ginsberg, *Kitvei*, 130; Avishur, *Studies*, 94–95), “Lebanon” and “Sirion” often occur parallel to each other in the first and second versets of biblical and Ugaritic literature, and sometimes in Akkadian as



Verses 7–8.

**Splits flames of fire.** NJPS and NRSV follow Ginsberg in understanding the Hebrew verb, *ḥoṣeiv* to mean “kindle, set on fire,” a meaning that is not well-attested for this verb in Hebrew.<sup>22</sup> But the normal meaning of this verb in Hebrew, “split apart,” makes sense here: God splits fire to produce forked lightning, which accompanies the thunder described in earlier verses.<sup>23</sup> On “flames of fire” referring to lightning that appears in a storm, see also Isa 29:6; 30:30; 66:15; Ps 83:15–16; 105:32.<sup>24</sup>

NJPS understands v. 7 as the first verset of a line that continues in v. 8. But the two versets in v. 8 are not as close a parallel to the single verset found in v. 7 as we generally find in this poem, since they deal with a separate issue (not the lightning and storm of v. 7 but an earthquake). Consequently, many scholars believe that a verset originally present here fell out in the process of transmission; the line may originally have read something like, “YHWH’s voice splits flames; YHWH has split flames of fire.”<sup>25</sup>

**The wilderness of Qadesh.** According to traditional commentators (e.g., Rashi, Ḥakham), these words refer to the area around Qadesh in the Sinai desert immediately south of the Land of Israel, through which Moses led the Israelites on their way to the Promised Land (see, e.g., Num 20:1 and 33:36). Ḥakham points out that by mentioning Sirion (Mount Hermon) at the northern edge of the Land of Israel and Qadesh on the southern edge, the poem intends to refer to the land as a whole.<sup>26</sup> The identification of the Qadesh of which our psalm speaks is not entirely clear, however. Other locations in or near the Land of Israel had the same place name or a very similar one. A town called

well. See Ezek 27:5; Song 4:8; CTU 1.4 VI: 18–21, in Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative*, 133.

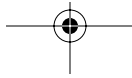
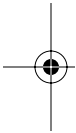
<sup>22</sup> Ginsberg, *Kitvei*, 131, n. 1, argues for this meaning based on an Arabic cognate (*ḥdb*); so too HALOT 1:342 (*ad ḥḥb*).

<sup>23</sup> See BDB 345a.

<sup>24</sup> On the connection with lightning, see, e.g., ibn Ezra, Isaiah of Trani, and Meiri.

<sup>25</sup> See Ginsberg, *Kitvei*, 131, who suggests קִוְּלֵהוּ הַחֶבֶב לְהַבּוֹת וַיַּחֲצֵב הוּא לְהַבּוֹת אֵשׁ. If this suggestion is correct, then *homoioleuton*, or the similarity of the end of the two versets, caused a scribe to skip accidentally from the middle of the original verse to the beginning of the next. See further the discussion (with additional suggestions) in Avishur, *Studies*, 95–97.

<sup>26</sup> A. Ḥakham, *Sefer Tehillim*, (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1979), 157 (Hebrew).



Qedesh existed in the Galilee in the tribal allotment of Naftali, and another of the same name was in the Jezreel valley in the tribal allotment of Issachar. Further, a city called Qadesh was found on the Orontes River in Syria, southeast of Ugarit. Because Lebanon and Sirion (mentioned in v. 6) are north of the Land of Israel, some scholars suggest that Qadesh in v. 7 must also be to the north and thus refers to a wilderness in Syria near the city of Qadesh on the Orontes River; indeed, a Syrian wilderness of this name may be mentioned in an Ugaritic text.<sup>27</sup> In the context of recitation, different Israelites may have understood the phrase in different ways; an Israelite from the north might have heard a reference to a northern locale with this name, whereas a Judean from the south may have understood it to refer to an area in the south.

Verses 9–10.

**Makes oaks dance.** Both the verb and the accusative noun in this phrase are difficult. The Hebrew verb *yeholeil* (a *poleil* form of the root *hul / hil*) usually means “to give birth, to calve” and its subject is always a parent who begets a child. Contrary to many translations of our verse (KJV, NJPS), it nowhere means “to cause a mother to give birth.” Thus the translation “causes hinds to calve” found in NJPS is impossible, because it proposes that the calves giving birth are the object of the verb, when grammatically they should be the subject.<sup>28</sup> The related verb *hul / hil* in the *qal* construction means “to dance, to writhe,” and hence the *poleil* verb in our verse can also mean “to cause to writhe, to cause to dance.”<sup>29</sup> The noun “hinds” (*'ayyalot*) in MT is

<sup>27</sup> See CTU 1.23.65 (=Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative*, 214), which mentions *mḏbr qdš*. Ginsberg, *Kitvei*, 130; Dahood, *Psalms*, at this verse; and Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 154, n. 37, identify the *midbar qadesh* of Ps 29:8 with this site mentioned in Ugaritic literature, which is presumably the wilderness around the city of Qadesh in Syria. However, the phrase in the Ugaritic text may simply mean “the holy desert,” as T. Lewis translates it in Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative*, 214.

<sup>28</sup> When the verb *holeil* means “give birth,” the subject is always the parent (see Isa 51:2; Job 39:1; Prov 25:23). Sometimes God is the subject of this verb (see Deut 32:18 and Ps 90:2), but in those cases God is the parent (of the nation Israel and of mountains respectively). In Job 39:1, as in our verse, *holeil* is associated with hinds, but there the hinds giving birth are the implied subject of the infinitive construct form: “Can you mark the time when the hinds calve?”

<sup>29</sup> This meaning in the *poleil* is otherwise not attested, but this meaning is found in the passive form that corresponds to the active *poleil*, the *polal* verb *yeholalu* in Job 26:5, which means “they will be made to writhe.” See BDB 297b.

problematic. The imagery of a female deer giving birth does not fit the storm imagery of the psalm,<sup>30</sup> and, moreover, the verb in this verset cannot mean “to calve, to give birth” in any event (unless we were to translate “YHWH’s voice gives birth to hinds,” which is nonsense). Several scholars have suggested that we read *'eilot* (terebinth or turpentine trees) or *'allot* (oak trees) rather than *'ayyalot*, an emendation that alters the MT’s vowels but affects the consonants not at all (for *'eilot*) or only slightly (for *'allot*).<sup>31</sup> This produces a more normal parallelism, which displays intensification: the trees in the first verset in parallel to the forests in the second.<sup>32</sup>

**Uproots forests.** The verb *ḥsp* normally means “to strip,” yielding the translation “strips forests bare” found in NRSV, NJPS, and NJB. In this case, the verb “strip” refers to the bark of the trees, which the strong wind or the fires caused by lightning strip away. The ancient Syriac version of the Psalter, however, translates, “He uproots the trees.” This reading may preserve the picture the psalm intends: the wind knocks down trees and the lightning burns them, so that the forests themselves, and not just the individual trees, are left bare. This is also the understanding of ibn Ezra, who writes, “He uncovers the forest as the trees fall down”; the same reading is found in Radak.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Unless the thunder causes the hinds to go into premature labor; on this possibility, see J. Tigay, “‘The Voice of Yhwh Causes Hinds to Calve’ (Psalm 29:9),” in *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. C. Cohen, et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 399–411 (399–405).

<sup>31</sup> R. Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews: Translated from the Latin by G. Gregory with the Notes of Professor Michaelis and Others* (4th ed.; London: Thomas Tegg, 1839), 308, n.★, followed by RSV and NJB. The suggestion is mentioned and rejected by Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 345; and Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 243. For further bibliography, see Tigay, “Voice of Yhwh,” 400, n. 8.

<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, it must be admitted that MT’s noun, *'ayyalot* produces a fine phonological parallel with *ye 'arot* in the next verset; both nouns have a consonantal *yod*; the glottal stop of the *aleph* corresponds loosely to the guttural *ayin*, and the liquids *lamed* and *resh* correspond as well. On this sort of parallelism, see above, note ★★★. If we retain MT’s *'ayyalot*, we might translate, “YHWH’s voice makes hinds dance, and uproots forests.” In this case, the first verset might be re-read in light of the second so that it also hints at the idea of oaks or terebinth trees, and the phonological similarity reinforces the newly found semantic similarity as the audience hears the second verset. Of course, even if we read *'eilot* (which makes better sense), the phonological similarity remains, though it involves two consonants rather than one.



**And in His Temple they all say.** This is the beginning of a new, three-part line that continues in v. 10 of MT.

**Glory.** The human speakers of the poem called on the heavenly beings to give glory to God in vv. 1–2 and, according to MT, those beings comply quite literally in this verse: all who stand in God’s heavenly palace shout this word (*kavod*) out loud. Alternatively, it is possible that the word “Glory” should be vocalized *kevod*, and that it belongs to the beginning of the following verset, as my translation suggests.<sup>34</sup> In that case this word refers to the Presence of God, as it often does in priestly sections of the Pentateuch and in Ezekiel.

**All.** Other texts that describe heavenly praise stress that *all* the heavenly beings proclaim the chief deity’s praise. This is the case, for example, in *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian epic of Marduk the creator; *all* the gods who assemble in Marduk’s palace praise Marduk’s name.<sup>35</sup> Similar language appears in descriptions of heavenly praise in the traditional Jewish morning service, in the *Qedushah deyotzeir* in the first benediction before the Shema (in particular the word “all of them” [*kullam*], which is repeated for a total of eight times).

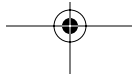
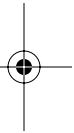
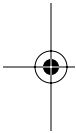
**At the Flood.** Or “over the flood.” The reference in all likelihood is not to the flood in Noah’s time but to the waters of chaos that God defeated at the beginning of time before creating the world. An Ugaritic text depicts Baal enthroned on the flood (*mdb*).<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in *Enuma Elish*, the high god Marduk stands on top of Tiamat, the goddess of the salt waters, immediately after he defeats her (4:104). Alterna-

<sup>33</sup> My thanks to Dr. Samuel Ethan Fox, Ellen Blumenthal, and Joan Katz for explaining this fine reading to me.

<sup>34</sup> This small emendation is suggested in Freedman and Hyland, “Psalm 29,” 253; and, as part of a more involved emendation, in B. Margulis, “Canaanite Origin of Psalm 29 Reconsidered,” *Biblica* 51 (1970): 332–48 (334).

<sup>35</sup> See *Enuma Elish* 6:165–66, as noted by T. Gaster, “Psalm 29,” *JQR* 37 (1946): 55–65 (62). The lines read: *usibūma ina puhrišunu inambu šimāte* [or, in some texts, *šimassu*] / *ina mēsi nagbašunu uzakkirūni šumšu* (“They sat down in their assembly and decreed his the fates [or: decreed his fate]; / In the rites **all of them** pronounced his name”). For this understanding of *nagbašunu*, see also S. N. Kramer and M. Weinfeld, “Prolegomena to a Comparative Study of the Book of Psalms and Sumerian Literature,” in *Early Jewish Liturgy from Psalms to the Prayers in Qumran and Rabbinic Literature* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2004), 27–28, and n. 10 there (Hebrew). My thanks to Dr. Wayne Horowitz and Dr. David Marcus for discussing this difficult line with me.

<sup>36</sup> Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 147–48, and n. 4 there.



tively, we might translate, **since [the time of] the Flood**, in other words, “from time immemorial,” which would provide a precise anti-thetical parallelism to “forever” in the next verset.<sup>37</sup>

**Will sit enthroned as king forever.** The MT reads *wayyeishev*, which must be translated “the LORD sat as king forever,” but the text probably should be punctuated *wěyeishev*, which is best translated with a present tense or a future tense.<sup>38</sup> This proclamation by the divine beings parallels Ugaritic and Babylonian literature, in which the high god defeats the watery forces of chaos and the other gods proclaim the new ruler’s sovereignty.<sup>39</sup> In the Ugaritic Baal epic, the gods shout, “Yamm is dead! Let Baal reign!” (*ym lmt . . . b ‘lm ymlk*).<sup>40</sup> In *Enuma Elish*, we read: “When the gods who were Marduk’s fathers saw what came from his mouth [i.e., his effective commands], they were joyful and shouted, ‘Marduk is king!’”<sup>41</sup>

*Verse 11.*

The tone and topic abruptly shift in this final verse: rather than praise of YHWH as creator and master of the powerful forces of nature, we find here a prayer on behalf of the nation Israel. Because of these differences, H. L. Ginsberg argued that this verse was not originally

<sup>37</sup> So Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, 92 and 97 [§10.1 and 10.11] (who notes that M. G. Kline pointed out this meaning of the preposition *l-* in Ps 29:10); Dahood; Freedman and Hyland, “Psalm 29,” 253–54, both of whom suggest that the prepositional *lamed* can mean “from.” Against this suggestion, see the convincing treatments of D. Pardee, “The Preposition in Ugaritic,” *UF* 7 (1975): 329–78 and *UF* 8 (1976): 215–322 (280–86), and Z. Zevit, “The So-Called Interchangeability of the Prepositions *b*, *l*, and *m(n)* in Northwest Semitic,” *JANES* 7 (1975): 103–12. However, C. Cohen, “*Hashem Lammabbul Yashav* (Psalm 29.10)—A New Interpretation,” *Leshoneinu* 53 (1989): 198–201 (Hebrew), suggests that our verse’s *lammabbul yashav* is a precise equivalent of the Akkadian phrase *lām abūbi*, meaning “before the flood, from time immemorial.” His reasoning leads in a much more convincing way to the translation suggested by Dahood, Freedman, and Hyland.

<sup>38</sup> On the variation between prefix and suffix forms in biblical parallelism, see Berlin, *Dynamics*, 35–36, and references there.

<sup>39</sup> Gaster, “Psalm 29,” 63.

<sup>40</sup> KTU 1.2.IV.32 (=Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative*, 105). Another close parallel to our verse occurs in KTU 12.5.1–6 (Parker, 160), where the narrator, having just informed us that Baal killed the helpers or sons of Yamm, immediately tells us that Baal sat (*yṯb*) on his royal throne (*ksi mlkh*).

<sup>41</sup> *Enuma Elish* 4.27–28.



part of the psalm but was added later. On the other hand, psalms of praise often end with a plea on behalf of Israel or Israel's leaders (see Ps 14:7; 25:22; 28:9; as well as 1 Sam 2:10b). Since our verse, in fact, conforms to a pattern typical in psalms of praise, it probably was part of the psalm to begin with.<sup>42</sup>

**Grant strength.** Hebrew, 'oz . . . *yittein*. These words produce an elaborate and subtle inclusio with verse 1. There, the word 'oz appeared with the meaning "praise." Here 'oz appears again, but with a different meaning: "strength." Further, the word *havu* ("give, grant, ascribe") is a rare synonym for the more common verb *natan*, whose prefix form *yittein* appears in our verse. Thus this inclusio playfully combines several sorts of parallelism, so that the audience perceives the union of similar sounds and dissimilar meanings ('oz/'oz), alongside a single meaning with different sounds (*havu/yittein*).<sup>43</sup> Similarly, the previous poetic line reuses vocabulary that appears in the second poetic line of the poem: the word *kabod* appears meaning "glory" in v. 2 and (according to the reading suggested in the previous note) at the beginning of the line found in v. 10 meaning "God's presence." Thus the poem's beginning and ending lines display an *a-b—b-a* pattern. This circumstance further suggests that v. 11 is an integral part of the poem and not just a later addition.<sup>44</sup>

#### INTERPRETATION

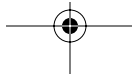
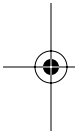
##### *A Canaanite Psalm in the Bible?*

We have seen an impressive number of features in this psalm that recall Canaanite poetry. These include elements associated with the god

<sup>42</sup> See Ginsberg, *Kitvei*, 130, who already notes the frequency of these national entreaties at the ends of psalms of praise but regards all of them as additions; and the opposite point of view in Gaster, "Psalm 29," 63–64, who, however, weakens his own argument by including an invalid pseudo-parallel with *Enuma Elish* 6.135, which is not a plea at the end of a poem but an element of praise in the body of a poem. Freedman and Hyland, "Psalm 29," 254, n. 30, point out that "other passages in Hebrew poetry associate the storm theophany with YHWH's coming to redeem his people: Exodus 15, Judges 5, Hab. 3, Pss 68, 89." Thus the presence of the verse is hardly surprising in this poem about YHWH's self-revelation through a storm.

<sup>43</sup> On the complex interaction of various sorts of parallelism (lexical, phonological, etc.) such as we see here, see Berlin, *Dynamics*, 80–83. On inclusio as a form of distant parallelism, see her discussion on 132.

<sup>44</sup> Avishur, *Studies*, 75, points out this two-part inclusio and its significance.





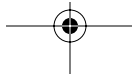
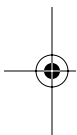
Baal, such as storm and earthquake imagery, and the motif of the high god sitting as king on his throne after defeating the watery forces of chaos. In addition, the psalm's geographical references may be located in Canaanite areas north of the Land of Israel, since it mentions the Lebanon mountains, the Anti-Lebanon mountains, and (perhaps) the Qadesh region near the Orontes River in Syria. The poem may include the enclitic *mem*, a grammatical feature found in Ugaritic. Finally, the highly repetitive parallelism of the psalm's poetry is particularly reminiscent of Ugaritic poetry; in particular, note the four-part lines in vv. 1–2 and 4–5, as well as what has been called “climactic parallelism” or “staircase parallelism,” in which an opening term is repeated several times in two or three versets before the sentence is finally finished in the final verset (again, see vv. 1–2 and 4–5).<sup>45</sup>

These many Canaanite features and connections led two scholars, T. H. Gaster and H. L. Ginsberg, in the 1930s to propose that Ps 29 was originally a Canaanite hymn to the god Baal. According to Gaster and Ginsberg, Israelite authors took this older Canaanite hymn, eliminated the name Baal, and replaced it with the name YHWH, thus converting the Canaanite hymn into an Israelite one.<sup>46</sup> This thesis has found widespread acceptance among biblical scholars.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> On this sort of parallelism, see Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 150–56, and references there. This phenomenon occurs often in Ugaritic poetry; see CTU 1.16.54–57 (Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative*, 42), CTU 1.7.2–3, 3–5, 6–8, 9–11, 11–13, and 13–15 (Parker, 51–52), and CTU 1.2.iv.8–9 (Parker, 103). Note further that several of these examples are precisely similar to the syntax of vv. 1–2 and 4–5 in our psalm, since the initial repeated term is a verb whose object is held in abeyance until the final line.

<sup>46</sup> Gaster first suggested this thesis, rather in passing, in T. H. Gaster, “Earliest Known Miracle Play?” *Folk-Lore* 44 (1933): 379–90 (382, n. 13). Ginsberg presented the thesis in full form in Ginsberg, *Kitvei*, 129–31, and in H. L. Ginsberg, “A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter,” in *Atti del XIX Congresso Internazionale Degli Orientalisti, Roma, 23–29 Settembre 1935* (Rome: Tipografia del Senato, G. Bardi, 1938), 472–76. Later, Gaster also defended the thesis in more detail in “Psalm 29.”

<sup>47</sup> The literature is voluminous. See the commentaries of Kraus and Dahood, as well as F. C. Fensham, “Psalm 29 and Ugarit,” in *Studies on the Psalms*, ed. P. A. H. de Boer (Potchefstroom: Pro Rege, 1963), 84–99; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 151–57; Freedman and Hyland, “Psalm 29,” 237. For a complete review of the literature, see Avishur, *Studies*, 39–44.



This thesis is not persuasive, however, as several other scholars, in particular Yitzhak Avishur, have shown.<sup>48</sup> All the features that Ps 29 shares with Canaanite literature it also shares with other biblical texts. These features, it follows, belong to the traditions of Northwest Semitic poetry, on which both the biblical authors and the Ugaritic bards drew. For example, many biblical texts associate storm and earthquake imagery with YHWH: see Exod 19; Deut 4–5 and 33:2–4; Judges 5:4–5; Hab 3:3–6; and Ps 18:8–16 and 68:8–11. It is true that this imagery recalls similar imagery associated with the god Baal in Canaanite literature and also with certain gods (especially Marduk) in Akkadian literature.<sup>49</sup> The Israelites may have borrowed this sort of imagery from their Canaanite and Mesopotamian neighbors and ancestors, but its presence in Ps 29 does not show the psalm itself to be Canaanite in origin; the motifs in question are as typically Israelite as they are Canaanite. The same may be said for the references to the victory over the forces of watery chaos, which, we have seen, are quite widespread in the Hebrew Bible. Similarly, Ginsberg himself later proved that the enclitic *mem* appears not only in Ugaritic but in many biblical passages besides Ps 29.<sup>50</sup> Thus, this feature, too, is typically Hebrew and cannot

<sup>48</sup> See Avishur's comprehensive treatment of all the evidence mounted on behalf of the thesis that Ps 29 was originally a Canaanite hymn to Baal: Avishur, *Studies*, 44–61. See also Margulis, "Canaanite," and the brief but balanced discussion in Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 243–45.

<sup>49</sup> See the comprehensive discussion of Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 147–77 (emphasizing the Canaanite background of these motifs); S. E. Loewenstamm, "The Trembling of Nature during the Theophany," in *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literatures* (AOAT 204; Kevelaer/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon & Bercker Neukirchener Verlag, 1980), 172–89 (stressing the Mesopotamian parallels); J. Jeremias, *Theophanie: Die Geschichte einer alttestamentlichen Gattung* (2d ed.; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977), 73–90, 174 (stressing both).

<sup>50</sup> See H. L. Ginsberg, "Some Emendations in Isaiah," *JBL* 69 (1950): 51–60 (54 and 57, n. 4) (as well as in passing in Ginsberg, *Kitvei*, 20, 29, 63, 74); and, following Ginsberg's lead, H. Hummel, "Enclitic *Mem* in Early Northwest Semitic, Especially Hebrew," *JBL* 76 (1957): 85–107 (who provides a convenient review of the enclitic *mem* in other Semitic languages, 85–91). In adducing cases of this use of *mem* at the end of a word, these modern scholars were preceded by the medieval grammarian Jonah ibn Janach, as noted by Moshe Held and Chaim Cohen; see C. Cohen, "The Enclitic-*Mem* in Biblical Hebrew: Its Existence and Initial Discovery," in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume—Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East, Qumran, and Post-Biblical*



be used to demonstrate the Canaanite origin of the psalm. Climactic or staircase parallelism also occurs elsewhere in the Bible; see Ps 57:9; 77:17; 93:3; 94:1 and 3; 96:10; Song 4:8–9 (in several of these, as in the Ugaritic examples mentioned in the previous paragraph, the repetition involves an initial verb whose object is held in abeyance until the final verset). This sort of repetitive parallelism is highly characteristic of Ugaritic poetry,<sup>51</sup> but it is also quite common in the earliest biblical poetry (Judg 5:3b, 10b, 12a, 23a, 27, 30aβ–b; Exod 15:6, 11, 16b; Num 24:3–4, 15; cf. repetition involving the second half of a verset in Judg 5:4b, 23b).<sup>52</sup> The frequency of this sort of parallelism in Ps 29 may suggest that our psalm is a fairly old Israelite text, but its origin in that case is Israelite all the same.

We may further note that the genre of Ps 29, heavenly praise, is typical of biblical and post-biblical Jewish literature and appears occasionally in Mesopotamian literature but is unknown in Ugaritic literature. This suggests that the poem is not of Canaanite origin.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, while many poetic features found in the Book of Psalms have parallels in Ugaritic poetry, it is important to recall that the extensive discoveries from Ugarit include no poems that can be termed “psalms” according to their genre.<sup>54</sup> Ugaritic poetry is more typically epic in nature, and the few short non-narrative poems we have do not match the formal structures known from the biblical psalms. (Mesopotamian literature, on the other hand, includes many shorter poems whose structural elements are identical to those found in Psalms.) If Ps 29 is a Canaanite psalm, it is the only one known to us.

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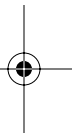
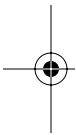
*Judaism* (ed. C. Cohen, A. Hurvitz, and S. Paul; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 234–37 (who notes that Held first pointed out ibn Janā<sup>2</sup>'s reference to him). Hummel may have adduced a few too many examples to be fully convincing, but the existence of this phenomenon in biblical Hebrew is persuasively defended by Cohen, “Enclitic-Mem,” 238–60.

<sup>51</sup> See the examples and the readable discussion of repetition in Ugaritic poetry in W. F. Albright, *Yhwh and the Gods of Canaan: An Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 6–10.

<sup>52</sup> On the frequency of these repeated elements in the oldest biblical poems, see the still-useful discussion in Albright, *Yhwh and the Gods*, 10–28.

<sup>53</sup> My thanks to Dr. Shoshana Waskow-Slater for helping me to see this point.

<sup>54</sup> On this crucial point, see S. Mowinckel, “Psalm Criticism Between 1900 and 1935,” *VT* 5 (1955): 13–33, and Avishur, *Studies*, 20–21, 35–36.



*Psalm 29 and the Genre of Heavenly Praise*

19

Finally, it is significant that Ps 29 does not only recall Baal imagery from ancient Canaan but El language as well. Verse 10 emphasizes that YHWH will rule as king forever. This line recalls the term *mlk ʿlm* in Ugaritic, which is an epithet of El, the high god whose reign preceded and perhaps overlaps with that of Baal.<sup>55</sup> Thus our psalm is, in fact, rather distinctive in comparison to Ugaritic literature, because it combines traditional phrasing that the Canaanites associated with two different deities. This mixing of Baal and El language when referring to YHWH is typical of Israelite religion.<sup>56</sup> The presence of elements of both traditions in the psalm suggests that its origins lie in Israel and not in Canaan, even as its imagery, language, and poetic style are drawn from a set of conventions widely shared in the ancient Near East.

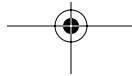
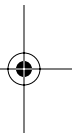
Only one element of the thesis that Ps 29 was originally a Canaanite hymn remains intriguing: the presence of place-names located in Syria rather than in the Land of Israel. Even this element is not fully clear, however, since place names identical or similar to Qadesh are found not only north of the Land of Israel, but also south of it and (in two places) within it. Further, the foothills of the Lebanon range and of Sirion (Mount Hermon) were within the range settled by Israelites. These features, then, cannot on their own show the poem to be of non-Israelite origin.

In the end, this psalm provides a banner example of the closeness of Canaanite and Israelite literary cultures, but we cannot conclude that the psalm was originally composed by the former for the god Baal. The extreme frequency of the elements that recall the high god of the Canaanites is probably deliberate: the poem may use a great deal of this imagery in order to demonstrate that YHWH, and not Baal, is the lord of nature.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> See Avishur, *Studies*, 104.

<sup>56</sup> See the classic treatment in Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 1–75, 145–94. Many historical explanations for the combination of El and Baal motifs in the Israelite portrayal of YHWH exist, all of them speculative (see, e.g., P. D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000], 24–27; R. Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* [2 vols.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994], 1.49–52, 76–78; M. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2001], 135–48), but the fact of this melding is clear throughout the Bible.

<sup>57</sup> For this reading of the psalm, see also the commentary of Craigie (who takes the polemical interpretation rather too far), as well as J. Kugel, *The Great Poems of*



*Heavenly Worship*

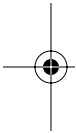
In the first two verses of the psalm, the people reciting the psalm call on heavenly beings to praise YHWH. What follows, apparently, is the text that the angels sing. Because vv. 1–2 are linked to vv. 10–11 by several repeated vocabulary items (see comments to v. 11), one might argue that the last two verses are spoken by the human worshipers and not the heavenly ones. On the other hand, the last few words of v. 9 tell us that all the heavenly beings declare “Glory!” (*kavod*) or, according to the slight emendation suggested in the comment to vv. 9–10, “The Presence (*kevod*) of the LORD sat enthroned over the Flood . . .” This may suggest that the end of the psalm is also part of the text that the heavenly beings recite, and only the first two verses and the words “and in his Temple they all say” are recited by the human beings alone.

The theme of heavenly worship appears in a large number of biblical and post-biblical texts. The other biblical texts include Ps 89:6–8; 96:4; 97:7; 103:20–22; and 148:1–3; Isa 6:3; perhaps Ezek 3:12; and Job 38:7. The post-biblical texts include most famously the *Qedushah* in rabbinic liturgy (itself based on two of the verses just cited, Isa 6:3 and Ezek 3:12), which appears several times in rabbinical literature (in the repetition of the *Amidah* prayer, in the first blessing before the Shema in the rabbinic morning service [the *Qedushah Deyotzeir*], and in a concatenation of biblical verses recited at the end of the daily morning service and on Saturday evenings [known as *Qedushah Desidra*]). The theme of heavenly verses also appears in early Jewish mystical texts from *heichalot* literature, and the *Shirei Olot Hashabbat* from the Dead Sea Scrolls, which the Qumran community believed were songs the angels sang in heaven as priests carried out the Sabbath sacrifices in Jerusalem. Many of these texts share several elements that appear in Ps 29:

- Repetition based on the numbers three and seven. In our psalm, this includes the three calls to prayer (ascribe to the LORD) in vv. 1–2, and the seven-fold repetition of the words, *qol* YHWH (“the voice of the LORD”) in vv. 3–9. Cf. Ps 103:20–22 (where the call to prayer, *barechu*, appears three times); Ps 148.1–6 (where the call to prayer, *halelu*, appears seven times), and the threefold repetition, “holy, holy, holy”

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*the Bible: A Reader's Companion with New Translations* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 72–73.



in Isa 6:3 and hence also in the rabbinic *Qedushah* prayers.<sup>58</sup> Similar numerical patterns appear in *heichalot* texts that describe heavenly worship and in the Qumran angelic prayers (*Shirei Olot Hashabbat*),<sup>59</sup> and in the heavenly praise of Marduk in *Enuma Elish*.<sup>60</sup>

- The use of the terms *qadosh* (holy), *kavod* (glory or divine presence), and *melech* (king) in close proximity to each other, especially at the outset or conclusion of the text. Some texts use only two of the three; in our psalm, *qadosh* and *kavod* appear in the first two lines of the psalm, while *kavod* and *melech* appear in the concluding verses of the psalm. This phenomenon appears also in Isa 6:3; in Ezek 3:12; at the outset of many of the Qumran angelic prayers for the Sabbath;<sup>61</sup> in one of the descriptions of angelic prayer in the Qumran *Hodayot*;<sup>62</sup> in the description of heavenly praise in the Wisdom of Ben Sira 42:16–20 (in the Hebrew original of Ben Sira from Masada); in all versions of the *Qedushah* prayers; and in the lines leading to

<sup>58</sup> On these patterns in biblical instances of heavenly prayer, see B. Nitzan, *Tefillat Qumran Veshiratah* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1996), 211–12 (Hebrew).

<sup>59</sup> In the angelic liturgy of Qumran (*Shirei Olot Hashabbat*) one finds, especially for the sixth, seventh, and eighth Sabbaths, groups of seven or three (e.g., seven angelic princes, seven praises, forty-nine blessings, three blessings recited by each prince, etc.). See Nitzan, *Tefillat Qumran*, 221 (and especially the impressive example from 4Q403 i i 7–9, which she cites on 223), and R. Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford/Portland, Or.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 186–88. These numbers also appear in heavenly prayer in the Books of Enoch; see Elior, *The Three Temples*, 191. On the prominence of seven in *heichalot* prayers, see Elior, *The Three Temples*, 259–60.

<sup>60</sup> Three major gods pronounce Marduk's three names (*Enuma Elish* 6.157, as noted by Kramer and Weinfeld, "Prolegomena," 27–28); altogether, the gods pronounce his fifty names (tablets 6–7), which is an intensification of the theme of seven, in that  $50 = 7 \times 7 + 1$ .

<sup>61</sup> E.g., the opening lines of the songs for the first Sabbath (4Q400 i i 1ff.); the sixth Sabbath (preserved in Masada ShirShabb i 10–11); and the seventh Sabbath (4Q403 i i 30ff.); as well as other sections of these songs, such as 4Q400 i ii 1–5.

<sup>62</sup> 1QH 19.13–15, according to the newer numbering system (e.g., C. Newsom, H. Stegemann, and E. Schuller, *Qumran Cave 1.III: 1QHodayot a, with Incorporation of 4QHodayot a-f and 1QHodayot b* [DJD XL; Oxford: Clarendon, 2009]); this corresponds to 1QH 1.10–12 in the earliest edition: E. Sukenik, *Otsar hamegilot ha-genezot: shebide ha-Universitah ha-Ivrit* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik and the Hebrew University, 1954).



and immediately following the poem *'El Baruch Gedol De'ah* in the morning service's first blessing, which leads directly into *Qedushah Deyotzeir*.

- Several of these texts, including our psalm, focus on imagery and themes connected with creation; see Job 38:7; Ps 89:6–8; and Ps 148:5, as well as *Qedushah Deyotzeir* in the first blessing before the Shema in the rabbinic morning service, and the poems that precede it on weekdays (*'El baruch*) and the Sabbaths (*'El 'Adon*).<sup>63</sup>
- Many of these texts are highly repetitive in nature, using the same set of nouns or adjectives over and over. This is the case in Ps 29 and even more so in the Qumran angelic prayers for the Sabbath and in *heichalot* texts.<sup>64</sup>
- An emphasis on the heavenly beings reciting the praise together (*kullam*) and in unison (*yahad*).<sup>65</sup> This occurs in v. 9 of our psalm, as well as in other cases of angelic worship: in Job 38:7; in Second Temple period texts (in the description of heavenly praise in the Wisdom of Ben Sira 42:17–24;<sup>66</sup> in the references to heavenly worship in the *Hodayot* from Qumran;<sup>67</sup> and in 1 Enoch 47:2 and 61:10–11); in rabbinic liturgy (in the *Qedushah Deyotzeir* and in the *Qedushah* of the Musaf Amidah according to the Eastern, Yemenite and Italian rites [*yahad kullam lekha qedushah yeshaleishu*]),<sup>68</sup> in the Babylonian epic *Enu-*

<sup>63</sup> Note further the multiple verbal resonances that link two of these texts, *'El 'Adon* from the rabbinic liturgy and 11QPs<sup>a</sup> 26.9–15, on which see M. Weinfeld, “Traces of *Kedushat Yozer* and *Pesukei De-Zimra* in the Qumran Literature and in Ben-Sira,” *Tarbiz* 45 (1976): 15–26 (18–19) (Hebrew).

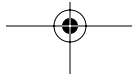
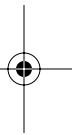
<sup>64</sup> On the repetitive style of the *heichalot* texts, see M. D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Maaseh Merkavah* (TSAJ 28; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 193.

<sup>65</sup> See M. Weinfeld, “The Heavenly Praise in Unison,” in *Meqor Hajjim: Festschrift für Georg Molin zu seinem 75. Geburtstag* (ed. I. Seybold; Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 427–37, and, more briefly, Kramer and Weinfeld, “Prolegomena,” 30, as well as Nitzan, *Tefillat Qumran*, 210–11.

<sup>66</sup> See the Hebrew original of Ben Sira 42.24 from Masada, where the Hebrew of v. 24 reads *kullam . . . zeh le'ummat zeh*. (In addition to *kullam*, note *le'ummat zeh*, to which cf. the *Qedushah*). See further Weinfeld, “Heavenly Praise,” 428.

<sup>67</sup> 1 QH 11:23–24; 19:14, 17 (= 1QH 11:23–24; 11.11, 13 in Sukenik).

<sup>68</sup> This introduction to the *Qedushah*, known as *Keter* from its first word, served as the introduction to all *Qedushahs* of any Amidah in Seder Rav Amram; see



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*ma Elish* (as noted in the comment to v. 9), and in ancient Mesopotamian descriptions of the lower-ranking gods' worship.<sup>69</sup>

It is clear that there existed in ancient times a set of conventions for texts that describe heavenly worship or provide the liturgy for it. Though most well known from post-biblical texts, this genre also occurs in the Bible. Psalm 29 is the earliest example of the genre in Hebrew, and one of the best or most complete (that is, it includes all the typical features, whereas most texts include only a few of them).<sup>70</sup> In some of these texts (especially in the *Qedushah* of the 'Amidah prayer, and in some of the Hodayot from Qumran), human worshipers join in with the heavenly worshipers, and thus these texts create a sense of community among human and heavenly beings, allowing human beings to identify with those closest to God.<sup>71</sup> How does this convention function in Ps 29?

Among the many texts relating to heavenly worship, Ps 29 stands out in some respects. The human worshipers reciting it do not merely describe heavenly worship (as do people reciting the first blessing before the Shema),<sup>72</sup> nor do they imitate heavenly worship (as people

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I. Elbogen and J. Heinemann, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (trans. R. P. Scheindlin; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1993), 57. Only the Ashkenazi rite uses a different introduction to the Musaf *Qedushah*.

<sup>69</sup> Reference to heavenly prayer also occurs in the LXX of Deut 32.43, but none of the typical elements of the heavenly prayer genre enumerated in the list above occurs there.

<sup>70</sup> Contra the claim of I. Gruenwald, "Angelic Songs, the Qedusha and the Problem of the Origin of the Hekhalot Literature," in *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism: Studies in Apocalypticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988), 167, who claims that the Dead Sea Scrolls provide "the earliest literary proof of the existence of the notion that there was some cooperation or correspondence between heavenly and earthly beings in saying words of praise and sanctification to God."

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Nitzan, *Tefillat Qumran*, 237, who discusses the purposes of *Shirei 'Olot Hashabbat*; much of her summary could apply to the genre as a whole, both in Qumran and elsewhere.

<sup>72</sup> A crucial difference between the *Qedushah* in the first blessing before the Shema (*Qedushah De[shen]*) and the one in the Amidah is that the former merely narrates what the angels do, whereas in the latter worshipers imitate the angels (see *Shulhan 'Aruch 'Orah Hayyim* 59:3, which says of *Qedusha De[shen]*). It is only

reciting the *Qedushah* in the *Amidah* prayer) or even join together with the angels to praise God (as someone reciting some of the *Hodayot* from Qumran did).<sup>73</sup> Further, they are not using the song for magical purposes or to induce an ascent into heaven, as was the case with some early Jewish mystical texts that describe *Qedushah*-like versions of heavenly prayer recited by human beings.<sup>74</sup> Rather, as in Pss 103 and 148, the human worshipers tell the angels to burst out in prayer. In the *Qedushah* of the '*Amidah*, a Jewish congregation briefly joins in with the heavenly congregation, praying along with the angels.<sup>75</sup> But in Ps 29 (and, more briefly, in Pss 103 and 148) the Jewish congregation serves as the cantor for the heavenly one. Thus our psalm has an extraordinary view of humanity. At least at times, humans are not "a little lower than angels" (as Ps 8:6 would have it) but a little higher: for a few moments, the angels follow the human beings' directions in prayer.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, if the angels recite the final verse, then the psalm ends

a narrative [*'einah 'ella' sippur devarim*]). For this reason the *Qedushah* in the '*Amidah* may only be said in the presence of a *minyán*, whereas halachic practice as it crystallizes in the late Middle Ages permits individuals to recite *Qedushah Deyohel* in private. Many earlier halachic authorities, especially those of a mystical bent, forbade individuals from saying even *Qedushah Deyohel*, due to its intrinsic holiness and power, whereas halachists who were not mystics permitted the recitation of *Qedushah Deyohel* more readily. On this debate and its roots in the halachists' attitudes toward mystical tradition, see R. Langer, *To Worship God Properly: Tensions between Liturgical Custom and Halakhah in Judaism* (HUCM 22; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1998), 188–244 (208–11, 214–16, 224).

<sup>73</sup> On this theme in the *Hodayot* texts, see Weinfeld, "Heavenly Praise," 429–31. See also Elior, *Three Temples*, 36, 58–60. According to Nitzan and some other scholars, the Qumran community itself recited the *Shirei 'Olot HaShabbat* together with the angels; see 219 and 228–29.

<sup>74</sup> This is the case in early Jewish mystical texts and also in some descriptions of heavenly prayer in the Pseudepigrapha. See Gruenwald, "Angelic Songs," 152–54. In the *heichalot* and *merkavah* texts especially, the human's recitation of these texts had the goal of inducing a mystical ascent to heaven; see, e.g., Swartz, *Mystical Prayer*, 222–23.

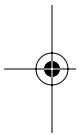
<sup>75</sup> Note that in the public recitation of the *Qedushah*, the worshiper raises up on tiptoes while reciting the three lines with the core vocabulary of the genre ("Holy, holy, holy," "Blessed is the glory," and "May he reign as king"), as if to move physically closer to the heavenly congregation in order to join it. See Weinfeld, "Heavenly Praise," 432.

<sup>76</sup> The rabbis convert the situation of the *Qedushah* to the one we find in Ps 29,

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with the heavenly beings praying on behalf of the nation Israel!<sup>77</sup> Psalm 29 presents a map of the world's creatures in which humans and angels are essentially at the same level. The main ontological divide in the universe is not between heavenly beings (including YHWH and the *benei 'eilim*), on the one hand, and human beings, on the other; rather, it is between YHWH, on the one hand, and other heavenly beings and humans, on the other. While its poetic images stress YHWH's absolute power over nature, the psalm's use of the conventions of heavenly worship intimate an extraordinarily exalted view of humanity.




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claiming that the heavenly host does not recite the *Qedushah* until Israel has done so; see *b. Hullin* 91b (where *kokhebei boqer* refers to Israel; see *Sifrei Ha'azinu* 306, end [ed. Finkelstein 343] and *Gen. Rab.* 65.21 [ed. Theodore-Albeck 2:739]). A similar motif appears in early Jewish mysticism; see *Heichalot Rabbati* 8.4.

<sup>77</sup> For another text in which the heavenly beings pray on Israel's behalf, see 1 Enoch 39.12–13 and the discussion in M. Mach, "Holy Ones and Angels: God and the Heavenly Liturgy," in *Massu'ot: Studies in Qabbalah and Jewish Thought in Memory Of Professor Efraim Gottlieb* (ed. M. Oron and A. Goldreich; Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1994), 307 (Hebrew).



