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

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“The Voice of YHWH Causes Hinds to Calve” (Psalm 29:9)

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Introduction

Ps 29:3-9a extols the awesome power of YHWH as it is manifested in thunderstorms. It focuses on the effects of thunder, depicted as YHWH’s voice (יָדְוִל יָכֹל). One of the effects is described in v. 9: יָוֵית הַיֶּלֶשׁ יָאִילָה, commonly translated ‘the voice of the Lord causes hinds [that is, female deer] to calve’—meaning that it induces parturition—‘and strips forests bare’. This interpretation of the phrase יָוֵית הַיֶּלֶשׁ יָאִילָה in the first clause (v. 9a1) is confirmed by the parallelism in Job 39:1, יִדְרַע חַט בָּלָה יָוֵית הַיֶּלֶשׁ יָאִילָה. ‘Do you know the season when the mountain

Author’s note: This essay, a memento of our term on Psalms in 1968, is dedicated to Shalom Paul in recognition of his many contributions to biblical, his ancient Near Eastern scholarship through his publications, his inspiring teaching, his editorial roles, and particularly in appreciation of our warm friendship of over forty years.


2. As in, for example, Ps 18:14; Job 37:1-5, 40:9. For Ugaritic parallels, see the passages from UT 51 (= CAT/KTU 1.4) v 70 (8-9) and vii 29-24 and 1 Aqht (= CAT/KTU 1.19) line 46; translated by H. L. Ginsberg in ANET 133, 135, and 153; and by M. S. Smith and S. B. Parker in UNP 129, 136-37, and 69. For Akkadian parallels, see CAD R 332-33 §4. Additional parallels are cited by M. Weinfeld, “Divine Intervention in War in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East,” in History, Historiography, and Interpretation (ed. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983) 121-23.

3. NJPSV. Essentially the same translation is given in the KJV, Yehoash, NEB (first clause only), NASB, CEV, the Italian Bibbia di Gerusalemme (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1984), and as alternatives in the RSV and NIV. This translation of the first clause goes back to the Vulgate (“Psalmi juxta Hebraicum”): vox Domini obsetricans [= obstetricians] cervis. Among the medievals, the same interpretation is given by Ibn Ezra.
goats give birth? Can you mark the time when the hinds calve?’ In this study, I will explore this translation and its most common alternative as well as the medical phenomenon to which it refers and the meaning of יִלָּעֵר that it presumes.

**The Alternative Translation**

The most common alternative translation of v. 9a₁ is ‘the voice of the Lord makes the oaks to whirl’ (or ‘... shudder’ or ‘... twists the oaks’). This rendering is based primarily on the assumption that the clause is synonymously parallel to the following one, יִשְׁרָע עַל הַעֲלַמִים, which, assuming the most common meanings of these words, means ‘and strips forests bare’. In order for 9a₁ to refer to some physical effect on trees, יִשְׁרָע is given the sense ‘cause to writhe/twist’, and יִלָּעֵר is revocalized/emended to יִלְעָר or יִלְעָר 'oaks'. But because this ignores Job 39:1 and involves an anomalous form of the plural of יִלָּעֵר, which is normally יִלְעָר, many scholars prefer instead to preserve the parallelism by rendering v. 9a₂ ‘brings ewes to early birth’. To obtain this meaning, יִשְׁרָע is related to Arabic خَصَافَة, supposedly meaning ‘give birth quickly’, and יִלָּעֵר is either construed as

4. יִלָּעֵר is transitive in Job 39 ('give birth') and doubly transitive in Psalm 29 ('cause to give birth'). Although this is the only case in which the Polel form of יָלָעֵר/לָעֵר (see n. 7) is used in a doubly transitive sense, Polel is the Piel of hollow roots, and Piel is sometimes doubly transitive, as in the case of verbs such as וָלָעֵר, לָעֵר, לָעֵר, and יָלָעֵר. Theoretically, the psalmist had the option of using the Hiphil of יָלָעֵר/לָעֵר for the causative; perhaps he avoided it because he used it in a different sense twice in the preceding verse.

5. Luther, RSV/NRSV, GOODSPEED, MOFFATT, NIV, La sainte Bible/JB.

6. NJPSV and many others.

7. The lexicons differ on whether the senses ‘give birth’ and ‘writhe’ are both derived from the same root יָלָע or from two separate roots, יָלָע and לָעֵר. This question need not be resolved here.


9. For example, NJPSV note b–b.
“mountain goats” on the basis of Arabic or emended to רוחות* or רוחות*, an otherwise unattested feminine plural of יְשָׁבָה ‘ibex, mountain goat’, or to רוחות* ‘she-asses’. The main problem with these expedients is the poor Arabic evidence for khaṣafa meaning ‘give birth quickly’. So far as I can tell, the biblical scholars who have cited the Arabic verb have cited it only from Arabic dictionaries, not from firsthand examination of textual evidence. According to E. Lane, the main sense of the verb has to do with making a sound. He cites a second sense, “He hastened, made haste, or sped, [apparently so as to cause a slight sound to be heard,] in going, journeying, or pace.” The only usage he cites that is even remotely related to the sense alleged for Psalm 29 is a single passage in Al-Firuzabadi’s (1326-1414) lexicon, the Qamus, which quotes the phrase khaṣafat biwaladiha ‘she (a woman) cast forth her child from the womb’. But there is no evidence that this is a normal meaning in Arabic, and this example would hardly justify an inference that, minus the preposition and the object explicitly referring to a baby, the verb by itself normally means ‘give birth quickly’. It means simply ‘hasten’, with no implied reference to giving birth, and if we were to relate הָשָׁבָה in the psalm to this sense, we could just as easily take it to mean that the Lord causes hinds to run quickly. Lane also cites a nominal form of uncertain vocalization—khaṣfūn or the like—meaning a ‘young or

10. BHK: celeriter parere. Forms of רוחות and (רוחות are parallel in Prov 5:19 and Job 39:1; the latter verse reflects a plural רוחות even for females.


12. Lane (electronic text). The bracketed remark, explaining the connection between the two meanings, is also from Lane.

13. Note that G. R. Driver does not cite the abbreviated phrase at the end of Freytag’s definition, which indicates that this meaning requires the preposition and object.

14. To its credit, HALOT, although it interprets הָשָׁבָה (reading it as Piel) as ‘cause a premature birth’, is careful to define the Arabic verb only as ‘to hurry’.

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newborn gazelle', but this noun does not imply a rapidly-born gazelle; Lane does not suggest a connection between the noun and the example just cited. It would be sheer guessing to infer that ḫaṣafa or any of its derived stems has a denominative meaning of 'cause the birth of a young gazelle', especially because the example cited from the Qamus refers to human birth, and to the best of my knowledge, no one has suggested an inference of that sort.

All of this means that the evidence that Arabic ḫaṣafa means 'give birth rapidly' is exceedingly weak and provides a poor basis for interpreting יִשְׁרֵי in Ps 29:9 as synonymously parallel to לַעֲלָם. Given the evidence of Job 39:1 regarding the first clause in Ps 29:9 and the meager evidence for anything but the traditional explanation of the second clause, the verse most likely means what it is commonly thought to mean, 'the voice of the Lord causes hinds to calve and strips forests bare', and the two clauses are not synonymously parallel. As others have suggested, perhaps some intervening clauses were omitted from the text, as may also have happened in the case of v. 7, which has no parallel clause.

**Thunder Inducing Parturition or Miscarriage**

Some scholars have observed at least as early as the 17th century that the first clause of the verse, "The voice of the Lord causes hinds to calve," refers to the shock of loud thunder causing hinds to go into labor and that this phenomenon has been seen in nature. As Samuel Bochart commented in his *Hierozoicon* (1663):

> among the miraculous effects of thunder, this one has been observed by everyone, that even those wild beasts, whose birthgiving is very difficult, it (thunder) strikes with so much fear, that because of having heard it, they give birth immediately.  

Others since Bochart have also mentioned that the phenomenon is an observed fact, but I have not found any that cite evidence for it. Dahood

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15. Mentioned earlier by Ehrlich, *Die Psalmen* (khisfun [sic]), and Chajes, רשא יִשְׁרֵי.
16. *Hierozoicon*, sive, bipertitum opus De animalibus Sacrae Scripturae (Hierozoicon, or Two Part Work on the Animals of Sacred Scripture [London, 1663]), col. 891, from the electronic text on the University of Pennsylvania Library web site (in the electronic text, col. 891 is found in image 281 of 681).
stated that there is no such evidence but that "this does not foreclose the possibility that the ancients may have had some such belief." 18

That the ancients did hold this belief is indicated by Pliny (cited by Gunkel): "Claps of thunder cause sheep to miscarry when solitary; the remedy is to herd them in flocks, so as to be cheered by company." 19 Loud noise causing miscarriage is also described in Midrash Tanhuma, which says that, when Joseph's brothers recognized Joseph, Judah shouted so loudly that all the parturient women in Egypt miscarried. 20

The possibility that exposure to loud noise ("noise stress") can induce labor or cause animals to abort their fetuses has been taken seriously enough by veterinary scientists that they have conducted research on the correlation between noise stress and miscarriage. The research is not motivated by interest in the ancient sources with which we are dealing here but by ecological and economic concerns about the effects of human noise, such as the noise of aircraft engines, on the environment and on animal breeding. The ecological motivation is concerned with preserving wildlife and the ecosystems to which the animals belong. Animal breeders are concerned with preventing miscarriage and have brought lawsuits against air

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20. תינכט לועה שמחה שמאיר, Tanhuma, Vayyiggas 5, near end (Warsaw ed.; repr. Jerusalem: Lewin-Epstein, 1964) 54b (see also Yalqu Shim'on 1150 near end). Hayyot here could refer to 'animals', but it more likely means 'parturient women'. It is understood this way by L. Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews (7 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968) 2:112 ("the women brought forth untimely births"), and this is supported by the variant text quoted in a piyyut of Yannai, which reads מטרובית instead of תינכט (J. Mann, The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue [Cincinnati, 1940; 2 vols.; repr. New York: Ktav, 1966–71] 1:85). For this meaning of מטרובית, see Jastrow 451–52; E. Ben-Yehuda, Thesaurus totius hebraicatis et veteris et recentioris (טודא לים ו นอกจากי העברית והရומנית); Berlin: Schoeneberg, 1915 [hereafter cited as B-Y]) 3:1529a; cf. y. Kil. 9.3, lower half of col. 32b. A number of medical studies have shown an association between excessive noise and preterm birth in humans, though not all studies have shown this result. See American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Environmental Health, "Noise: A Hazard for the Fetus and Newborn," Pediatrics 100 (1997) 724–27. As in the case of animals (see below), I have only found studies of continuous exposure to excessive noise—not single short, loud bursts of noise.

21. Other types of stress reported as inducing labor are the shock of bad news (1 Sam 4:19) and fright at a dog's bark (b. Šabb. 63b; b. B. Qam. 83a).
forces and others responsible for noises suspected of causing miscarriage in their animals.

As part of an environmental impact assessment of the effect of the Canadian gas pipeline from Alaska to Alberta, researchers studied the responses of caribou to overflights of aircraft (fixed-wing and helicopter) in the northern Yukon and in Alaska. One of the findings was “that unfamiliar noise stimuli increased the incidence of miscarriages and lowered the birth rates of caribou.” A case with legal consequences occurred in 1997, when the shock of noise caused by United States jet fighters flying in Japan led to the injury of 35 race horses. According to a press report, “23 injured themselves by bumping into ranch fences, 10 were wounded after they tumbled while running recklessly due to shock, and the remaining two suffered miscarriages.” The United States and Japanese governments, accepting responsibility, reimbursed the owners of the horses.

However, whether noise-induced stress is an actual or direct cause of miscarriages is vigorously debated. In the case of the race-horse incident mentioned above, the Fifth Air Force Legal Office in Japan holds that “the noise from the over flight did not [by itself] actually cause the miscarriages. . . . The horses spooked and ran into fences or otherwise injured themselves, which caused the miscarriages.” It is true that the Air Force has a vested interest in this issue, because it often needs to conduct flight training over areas occupied by wild and domestic animals. But impartial reviews of the scientific literature have concluded that results of research so far have been inconclusive and suggest that, if noise does induce labor or abortion, it does so infrequently and is often only a partial or indirect cause. Nevertheless, one study did suggest that the stress of loud noise

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24. E-mail of June 1, 2006, from Col. Stevi Ann Shapiro, United States Air Force, Chief, Outreach Division, Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs.

25. R. Kramer, “Lärmbedingte Schandensfälle unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Aborten beim Rind” [Noise induced lesions with special reference to abortions...
can cause abortion, and it explained the mechanism. Ten late-pregnancy cows were exposed to noise from 59 airplane overflights over a period of 21 days. Blood samples taken before, during, and after exposure to the noise showed an increase in corticosteroids one to four hours afterward. The estrogen and progesterone levels in 8 of the cows were unchanged; they remained pregnant and subsequently gave birth normally. But 2 cows (after rising estrogen and falling progesterone levels) aborted. The researchers concluded that "the results suggest that repeated stressor effects can lead, by way of hyperfunction of the [pituitary anterior lobe-adrenal cortex system] and its effects on the placenta, to sporadic cases of abortion or premature birth."26

Repeated exposure to thunder can hardly be what Psalm 29 and the other ancient sources have in mind. Unless miscarriages occurred very soon after thunder, it is unlikely that a cause-and-effect relationship would have been suspected. Possibly, the ancients noticed instances of miscarriage following thunder that, unknown to them, were the last of several exposures to thunder or—again, unknown to them—were the result of injury sustained while running wildly due to panic over thunder. In any case, what is instructive is not necessarily the results of the scientific research but the assumption that led to its being carried out. The conduct of the research testifies that even in modern times there have been enough instances of the perceived correlation of loud noise and miscarriage to require scientific investigation.27 For scientists, "coincidence is no proof of causality," but in the popular mind it often is. The evidence from Pliny, Bochart, a midrashic passage (in the case of humans), and modern scientific research reflects the age-old popular assumption underlying Psalm 29 that loud, thunder-like noises do cause miscarriages.

26. Ibid.

27. The same can be said of the press report about the Japanese race horses cited above: the fact that the horse breeders and the wire service held that the aircraft noise caused the miscarriages reflects the same popular assumption that loud noise does cause miscarriages.
The Meaning of יָרָה

The interpretation of Ps 29:9 as reflecting the belief that thunder can cause animals to abort or deliver early presupposes that in vv. 3–9 יָרָה means the ‘voice of YHWH’ and refers to thunder. Each verse can reasonably be understood as describing the effects of thunder.

Verse 3 explicitly juxtaposes יָרָה with thunder (דַּעַת), v. 4 characterizes יָרָה as power and majesty (בֶּטֶן [בֵּטֶן 현], יָרָה [יָרָה 현]), and v. 5 credits יָרָה (in this case the associated heavy wind, heavy rain, or lightning) with breaking cedars. While v. 6 does not explicitly refer to יָרָה, thunder is implicit in the context; similarly, other biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts say that thunder (depicted as the voice of a god) causes mountains and plains to quake. Verse 7 apparently refers to thunder causing lightning, and v. 8 refers to יָרָה causing the wilderness of Kadesh to quake; this also is a clear allusion to thunder. Verse 9a refers to יָרָה causing animals to give birth prematurely or to abort, and 9a2, by describing יָרָה as defoliating trees or breaking off their branches, is certainly referring to the strong wind and heavy rain of a thunderstorm.


30. See the comment on v. 6. Cf. Adad ša ana rigmišu . . . ʾiššu šēru ‘Adad, at whose roar . . . the plain shakes’ (KUB 4 26 A 10ff. and parallels cited in CAD H 55a, 5/3, 204a, and Q 213b).
Nevertheless, some scholars have argued that in Ps 29:3-9 הבָּשׁ is not part of a construct phrase meaning ‘the voice of YHWH’ and constituting the subject of the verse; rather, הבָּשׁ is an exclamation meaning ‘Hark!’, with the word YHWH by itself serving as the subject.31 Thus Kissane renders the passage:

3Hark, Yahweh is upon the waters,
The God of glory thundered,
Yahweh is upon the great waters;

4Hark, Yahweh in might,
Hark, Yahweh in majesty.

5Hark, Yahweh breaks the cedars,
Yahweh breaks the cedars of Lebanon;

6He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
Sirion like a young wild ox.

7Hark, Yahweh cleaves flames of fire,
8Hark, Yahweh scares the wilderness,
Yahweh scares the wilderness of Kadesh;

9Hark, Yahweh makes the hinds to calve,
And strips the forests. 32

The idea that הבָּשׁ sometimes means ‘hark’ is widely accepted in biblical grammars,33 lexicons,34 and secondary literature.35 This sense is generally


32. Kissane, Book of Psalms, 125-27.
33. GKC §146b / p. 467; Jouon-Muraoka §163e.
34. BDB 877a, §1f; Ges 707a, §4 (includes Ps 29:3ff.); C. J. Labuschagne, "הבָּשׁ," TLOT 3:1134; HALOT electronic edition s.v. הבָּשׁ, §8b; ThWNT 9:275.
35. See the sources cited in n. 30 and literature cited by C. Cohen, “Jewish Medieval Commentary on the Book of Genesis and Modern Biblical Philology; Gen 1–18,” JQR 81 (1990) 3-4, esp. p. 4 n. 7. Cohen attributes this interpretation to Ibn Ezra in his commentary on Gen 4:10. Ibn Ezra does not explicitly address the meaning of הבָּשׁ but observes that it cannot be the subject of the plural verb יָשִׁיעַ, the subject must be the plural יָשִיעַ. The meaning of the verse, Ibn Ezra concludes, is “that He (God) heard the outcry of Abel’s spilled blood.” This paraphrase is close to the way that Jouon-Muraoka paraphrase הבָּשׁ in the sense in question: ‘I hear’ (see below). See also Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Canticles,新闻中心 נאשִיעַ, at 2:8. The Masoretes
thought to have developed from an exclamatory use of the word: “The word יָד, voice, sound, followed by a genitive, is quite often used as exclamative: the sound of . . . ! which may be translated by I hear!, Listen!”36 But to be precise, note the following: (1) in this usage, because יָד is an exclamation or interjection and is not part of a construct phrase, the following word is not a genitive37 (it is actually nominative), and (2) יָד is not an imperative verb and does not really mean ‘Hark!’ or ‘Listen!’ however convenient this rendering may seem in certain contexts. The basic sense is ‘A sound!’ perhaps elliptical for ‘I hear a sound,’ ‘a sound is heard’38 (cf. Jer 31:15, יָד בֵּרָם, a sound is heard in Ramah’).

Although scholars disagree on which instances of the word manifest this meaning, there is fairly wide agreement on several. Chaim Cohen cites and explains the following examples:

- Gen 4:10: יָד רַמְיָא אָזִית עִצְּקָא אֵיל מִרְדֹּאָהא, “Hark, your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground!” (NJPSV). In this case, יָד, which is singular, cannot be the subject because the verb מִרְדֹּאָהא is plural.

recognized this sense of יָד even before Ibn Ezra, as indicated by several passages in which they placed a disjunctive accent on the word, such as Gen 4:10 and Cant 5:8. On the other hand, they used conjunctive accents in Isa 52:8, Jer 10:22, and Cant 2:8. For a fuller listing see Z. Goren, Ta’améi Hamiqrá’ Kefarshanut ([Tel Aviv]; Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1995) 133–36.

36. Jouon-Muraoka §162e. On the semantic development of this sense, note the comment of B. Kedar-Kopfstein, TDOT 12:576, s.v. יָד:

The relationship with Akk. qâlû and qâlu is more difficult to determine since these words . . . [mean] quite the opposite, namely, “be silent, pay attention,” or “quietness, silence.” The relationship with words in the other Semitic languages probably derives from a development in which the designation for a certain acoustic perception split semantically into the opposing notions of “generate a sound” on the one hand, and “listen attentively to a sound” on the other. Such development would also explain the use of the Hebrew word as an interjection: qōl, approximately “listen,” can mean both “a sound is audible” and “be quiet and listen!”


37. Contra GKC §146b / p. 467; Jouon §162e; Jouon-Muraoka §162e; and Ges 707a, §4.

38. As observed by Luzzatto, לְוָד יָד, 448; B-Y 12:5831, col. 1; and others.

39. Thus Cohen in this example and, implicitly, in those that follow. The NJPSV renders ‘Hark’ in all these examples and many more.
• Isa 52:8: ‘Hark! Your watchmen raise their voices, As one they shout for joy’ (NRSV). Here also the initial מִצְפָּר (singular) cannot be the subject because the verb גָּאָה is plural. If מִצְפָּר were the subject, the meaning would be nonsensical: ‘The voice of your watchmen raise their voices’.

• Jer 10:22: ‘Hark, a noise! It is coming’. The word מִצְפָּר, which is masculine, cannot be the subject of the feminine verb בבוה.

• Cant 2:8: ‘Hark! My beloved! There he comes, Leaping over mountains, Bounding over hills’ (NRSV). Here, מַלֵּא cannot be the subject because the clause would then mean that the beloved’s voice, not the beloved himself, is leaping over mountains (the beloved is also the subject of v. 9, which continues the thought of this verse). Likewise, in Cant 5:2: ‘Hark, my beloved knocks! “Let me in, my own, My darling”’ (NRSV). מַלֵּא cannot be the subject, because the clause would then mean that the voice, not the beloved, knocks.

Most scholars who write about this sense of מַלֵּא do not include Ps 29:3-9 in their lists; Joüon and Muraoka explicitly reject it. Nevertheless, this interpretation of our psalm has long had advocates. Kissane’s reason for preferring it is that in every case ‘Yahweh’ is the logical subject, as is clear from the parallel clause; and in 5-6 and 7-9 the reference is probably not to thunder at all [he thinks that v. 5 refers to a tempest or hurricane, 6 to an earthquake, and 7-9b to lightning]. In 3-4 the thunder is referred to; but even there the other interpretation (hark!) seems preferable.

These arguments are not convincing. The fact that יְהֹוָה himself is the subject of the parallel clauses does not preclude his voice being the subject of the initial clauses; what יְהֹוָה’s voice does, יְהֹוָה does, and synonymous


41. Kissane, Book of Psalms, 127. See also Luzzatto, מִצְפָּר הַשּׁוֹרֶשׁ; Ges; Vogt, “Der Aufbau von Ps. 29”; and Greenstein, “Yhwh’s Lightning in Psalms 29:7.” Peters (“Hebräisches מַלֵּא als Interjektion,” 290–91) argues that taking מַלֵּא as ‘hark’ also makes it possible to see vv. 3, 5, and 8 as manifesting climactic parallelism, which to him makes the psalm more artistic and effective, but this argument is subjective and runs into the difficulty that v. 4 cannot be so construed (nor can vv. 7 and 9a, but the likelihood that they are incomplete renders them irrelevant to the argument).
parallelism does not require absolute synonymity. In fact, YHWH minus קִּיר is mentioned as the subject of the parallel clauses only in vv. 3, 5, and 8, and the omission of קִּיר in the second stich of these verses may simply be for literary effect, to achieve rhythmic balance. In these verses, the subject of the first stich is the compound phrase יְהֹוָה קִּיר and the object is a single word (מרבד, רָאתָם), while the reverse is true in the second stich: the subject is a single word, YHWH, and the object is a two-word phrase (קִּיר וְאֶלְדוֹנֵיהֶם). This is also true in v. 3 (מיִּי יְהֹוָה קִּיר // קִּיר וְאֶלְדוֹנֵיהֶם), setting aside the anomalous middle clause. In other words, קִּיר is omitted in order to compensate for the longer object-phrase. Nor does it seem impossible to describe all the statements about storms, earthquakes, and lightning in vv. 5–9 as the effects of YHWH’s voice in the sense of thunder. These phenomena are all associated in biblical poetry, and it is not a stretch for them all to be attributed to thunder, which is the only one of them that is commonly depicted as an attribute/function/part of YHWH’s body, his voice.

The main problem with the view that that קִּיר means ‘Hark!’ in Psalm 29, however, is that, if קִּיר does not mean ‘voice’, there is no explicit reference to a sound in vv. 4–9; only in v. 3 is a sound mentioned explicitly and in vv. 4–9 the listener must supply the audible phenomenon mentally. This is problematic because almost everywhere else in the Bible where קִּיר has been understood as ‘Hark!’ it is followed by an explicit reference to a sound. For example, in the passages cited by Cohen, we have “your brother’s blood cries out” (Gen 4:10), “Your watchmen raise their voices” (Isa 52:8), “a noise” (Jer 10:22), and “my beloved knocks” (Cant 5:2). Only in Cant 2:8 is the object of hearkening not explicitly a sound (“My beloved! There he comes, Leaping over mountains, Bounding over hills”). In this

42. There are, in fact, other verses in the Bible in which parts of YHWH’s anatomy are parallel to YHWH. See Prov 22:12, “The eyes of the Lord watch the wise man; He subverts the words of the treacherous”; and Isa 41:20, “That the Lord’s hand has done this, That the Holy One of Israel has wrought it.” In these verses, despite the fact that YHWH is the subject of the second colon, the construct phrases at the beginning of the first colon cannot be dissolved into an exclamation followed by YHWH’s name as the subject. Compare with Deut 11:12, “It is a land which the Lord your God looks after; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from year’s beginning to year’s end.”

43. Another possibility is that these three stichs use קִּיר alone in order to limit the phrase יְהֹוָה קִּיר to seven occurrences.

44. See, for example, Isa 30:30–31; Ps 18:8–16, 77:19–20; Job 37:2–5, 38:34–35.
passage, the sound to which the poet refers may be the beloved’s footsteps, but it is not explicit; it must be inferred or supplied mentally. This example does show that even where הב may reasonably be construed as ‘Hark!’ there is not invariably an explicit reference to the sound. But to assume that that is the case in Psalm 29 would mean that what is rare elsewhere is the rule here: only one verse out of seven would explicitly mention the sound to which one must hearken. Furthermore, in some verses it would be hard to imagine what sound the listener is invited to hear. If v. 7 means “Hark, Yahweh cleaves flames of fire” (Kissane) or “Hark! YHWH—his arrows are flames of fire” (Greenstein), and the verse “refer[s] to lightning, not thunder,” what is the listener supposed to hear? And in the case of v. 9, what is the sound of hinds giving birth prematurely (as distinct from the sound that induces it, or the sound of panicked bleating that may precede parturition)? Without reference to an audible phenomenon, it is unlikely that הב means ‘Hark!’

Conclusion

The above discussion indicates that thunder and thunder-like noises have been thought for centuries to induce labor in animals. This both illustrates and supports the most common understanding of Ps 29:9a and lends further support to the view that הב in vv. 3–9 refers to YHWH’s voice, which means ‘thunder’ and does not mean ‘Hark!’

45. Just as הב in Gen 3:8 refers to YHWH’s footsteps (cf. 2 Kgs 6:32, “the sound [הב] of his master’s footsteps”). See the discussion by Marvin H. Pope, Song of Songs (AB 7C; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977) 389.

46. Greenstein, “YHWH’s Lightning,” 56–57; Kissane, Book of Psalms, 127, at v. 3. I do not claim to have a better solution than Greenstein’s to the problem of הב in v. 7. I only claim that understanding הב as ‘Hark!’ creates an additional problem in the verse; nor do I believe that his solution depends on that understanding of הב.

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