

# *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

Edited by

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Winona Lake, Indiana  
EISENBRAUNS  
2008

# “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.<sup>1</sup> It focuses on the effects of thunder, depicted as YHWH's voice (קול ה').<sup>2</sup> One of the effects is described in v. 9: קול ה' יחולל אילות ויחשף יערות, commonly translated 'the voice of the Lord causes hinds [that is, female deer] to calve'—meaning that it induces parturition—'and strips forests bare'.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation of the phrase יחולל אילות in the first clause (v. 9a<sub>1</sub>) is confirmed by the parallelism in Job 39:1, הידעת עת לדת יעלי-סלע חלל אילות תשמר 'Do you know the season when the mountain

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*Author's note:* This essay, a memento of our חברותא 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.

1. H. J. Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary* (CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 344-45. The JB entitles it "Hymn to the lord of the storm."

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 obstetricans [= obstetricans] cervis*. Among the medievals, the same interpretation is given by Ibn Ezra.

goats give birth?<sup>4</sup> 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 קול ה' that it presumes.

### The Alternative Translation

The most common alternative translation of v. 9a<sub>1</sub> is 'the voice of the Lord makes the oaks to whirl' (or '... shudder' or '... twists the oaks').<sup>5</sup> This rendering is based primarily on the assumption that the clause is synonymously parallel to the following one, ויחשף יערות, which, assuming the most common meanings of these words, means 'and strips forests bare'.<sup>6</sup> In order for 9a<sub>1</sub> to refer to some physical effect on trees, יחולל is given the sense 'cause to writhe/twist',<sup>7</sup> and אֵילֹת is revocalized/emended to אֵילֹת\* or אֵלֹת\* 'oaks'.<sup>8</sup> But because this ignores Job 39:1 and involves an anomalous form of the plural of אֵלָה, which is normally אֵלִים(י), many scholars prefer instead to preserve the parallelism by rendering v. 9a<sub>2</sub> 'brings ewes to early birth'.<sup>9</sup> To obtain this meaning, ויחשף is related to Arabic *khašafa*, supposedly meaning 'give birth quickly', and יערות is either construed as

4. ח(ו)לל 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 חזיל/חול (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 אור, ילד, למד, and גחל. Theoretically, the psalmist had the option of using the Hiphil of חזיל/חול 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 חזיל or from two separate roots, חזיל and חול. This question need not be resolved here.

8. R. Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (trans. G. Gregory; 2 vols.; London: printed for J. Johnson, 1787) 2:253, lecture 27, n. 13; T. K. Cheyne, *The Book of Psalms* (New York: Whittaker, 1888) 79, 81; C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906) 256; followed by many others since, such as BHK (parenthetical alternative) and BHS; more recently, O. Loretz, *Psalm 29: Kanaanäische El- und Baaltraditionen in jüdischer Sicht* (Altenberge: Akademische Bibliothek, 1984) 48; C. Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat with the Sea* (Leiden: Brill, 1986) 41-42; J. Jeremias, *Das Königtum Gottes in den Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987) 31.

9. For example, NJPSV note b-b.

“mountain goats” on the basis of Arabic or emended to יַעֲלוֹת\* or יַעֲלוֹת\*, an otherwise unattested feminine plural of יַעַל ‘ibex, mountain goat’, or to עֵירוֹת\* ‘she-asses’.<sup>10</sup> The main problem with these expedients is the poor Arabic evidence for *khašafa* 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.<sup>11</sup> 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, [app(arently) so as to cause a slight sound to be heard,] in going, journeying, or pace.”<sup>12</sup> 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 *khašafat 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’.<sup>13</sup> It means simply ‘hasten’, with no implied reference to giving birth,<sup>14</sup> and if we were to relate יַחֲשֵׁף in the psalm to this sense, we could just as easily take it to mean that the Lord causes יַעֲרוֹת to run quickly. Lane also cites a nominal form of uncertain vocalization—*khašfun* or the like—meaning a ‘young or

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

For these suggestions see, among others, A. B. Ehrlich, *Die Psalmen neu übersetzt und erklärt* (Berlin: Poppelauer, 1905) 62; Zevi Peretz Chajes, סֵפֶר תְּהִלִּים, in תּוֹרָה, נְבִיאִים וּכְתוּבִים עִם פִּירוּשׁ מְדַעִי (ed. A. Kahana; Zhitomir, 1907; repr. Jerusalem: Makor, 1960) 62; BHK; G. R. Driver, “Studies in the Vocabulary of the Old Testament. II,” *JTS* 32 (1931) 250–57; Y. Avishur, *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994) 100–101; HALOT electronic version s.v. יַעֲרוֹת and s.v. יַחֲשֵׁף.

11. G. R. Driver, who defines the term as *protrusit in pariendo celeriter* ‘thrust out . . . quickly while giving birth’, is clearly citing Freytag, whose third definition of *khašafa* is “*protrusit in pariendo celeriter ex utero infantem mater c. /b/ r.*” (G. W. Freytag, *Lexicon Arabico-Latinum* [Halle: Schwetschke, 1830–37] 1:489). The abbreviation at the end presumably means *cum /b/ rem* ‘with [the preposition] /b/ and an object’.

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 יַחֲשֵׁף (reading it as Piel) as ‘cause a premature birth’, is careful to define the Arabic verb only as ‘to hurry’.

newborn gazelle',<sup>15</sup> 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 *khašafa* 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 *khašafa* means 'give birth rapidly' is exceedingly weak and provides a poor basis for interpreting  $\text{וַיִּחַשֶׁף}$  in Ps 29:9 as synonymously parallel to  $\text{יַחֲלִיל}$ . 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.<sup>16</sup>

Others since Bochart have also mentioned that the phenomenon is an observed fact,<sup>17</sup> but I have not found any that cite evidence for it. Dahood

15. Mentioned earlier by Ehrlich, *Die Psalmen* (*khisfun* [sic]), and Chajes, ספר תהלים.

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).

17. A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge Bible; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910) 150; A. Cohen, *The Psalms* (London: Soncino, 1945) 84.

stated that there is no such evidence but that “this does not foreclose the possibility that the ancients may have had some such belief.”<sup>18</sup>

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.”<sup>19</sup> Loud noise causing miscarriage is also described in *Midrash Tanḥuma*, which says that, when Joseph’s brothers recognized Joseph, Judah shouted so loudly that all the parturient women in Egypt miscarried.<sup>20</sup>

The possibility that exposure to loud noise (“noise stress”<sup>21</sup>) 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

18. M. J. Dahood, *Psalms* (AB 16-17A; 3 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 1:179.

19. Pliny, *Natural History* 8.72 §188 (Rackham, LCL); H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (5th ed., 1929; repr. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968) 126.

20. *והפילו כל החיות שבמצרים*, *Tanḥuma, Vayyiggaš* 5, near end (Warsaw ed.; repr. Jerusalem: Lewin-Epstein, 1964) 54b (see also *Yalqut Shim‘oni* §150 near end). *Ḥayyot* 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 *מעוברות* instead of *חיות* (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 *חיה*, see Jastrow 451-52; E. Ben-Yehuda, *Thesaurus totius hebraicitatis et veteris et recentioris* [מילון הלשון העברית הישנה והחדשה] (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."<sup>22</sup> 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."<sup>23</sup> 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."<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, one study did suggest that the stress of loud noise

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22. G. W. Calef, "The predicted effect of the Canadian Arctic gas pipeline project on the Porcupine Caribou herd," cited in K. M. Mancini et al., *Effects of Aircraft Noise and Sonic Booms on Domestic Animals and Wildlife: A Literature Synthesis* (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, and National Ecology Research Center, Ft. Collins, CO. NERC-88/29. 1988) 30, available online at <http://www.nonoise.org/library/animals/litsyn.htm>.

23. "U.S. admits injuring horses during military drills," Japan Economic Newswire, Kyodo News Service, April 28, 1998. Cited from LexisNexis, [http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:8220/universe/document?\\_m=f760a49fd6086685850523c42bf0967b&\\_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVzz-zSkVA&\\_md5=05dc2f4cc9d7d74131fbe2c9b71e3aa8](http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:8220/universe/document?_m=f760a49fd6086685850523c42bf0967b&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVzz-zSkVA&_md5=05dc2f4cc9d7d74131fbe2c9b71e3aa8).

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.”<sup>26</sup>

*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.<sup>27</sup> 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.

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in cattle], *Deutsche Tierärztliche Wochenschrift* 77 (1970) 543–47, 568–71; E. Stephan and W. Heuwieser, “Einflüsse von Fluglärm auf Produktion, Reproduktion und Verhalten von Nutztieren” [Effects of airplane noise on production, reproduction and behaviour of farm livestock], *Zentralblatt für Veterinärmedizin Reihe A* 29/3 (1982) 157–69; L. Zoldag et al., “Steroidhormonprofile bei tragenden Kühen nach Lärmstressexposition mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Kortikosteroide” [Steroid hormone profiles in pregnant cows following exposure to noise stress, with special reference to corticosteroids], *Zentralblatt für Veterinärmedizin Reihe A* 30/10 (1983) 737–48.

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 קול ה'

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 קול ה' 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 קול ה' with thunder (הרעים), v. 4 characterizes קול ה' as power and majesty (בכח, בהדר [beth essentiae]), and v. 5 credits קול ה' (in this case the associated heavy wind, heavy rain, or lightning) with breaking cedars. While v. 6 does not explicitly refer to קול ה', 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.<sup>28</sup> Verse 7 apparently refers to thunder causing lightning,<sup>29</sup> and v. 8 refers to קול ה' causing the wilderness of Kadesh to quake; this also is a clear allusion to thunder.<sup>30</sup> Verse 9a<sub>1</sub> refers to קול ה' causing animals to give birth prematurely or to abort, and 9a<sub>2</sub>, by describing קול ה' as defoliating trees or breaking off their branches, is certainly referring to the strong wind and heavy rain of a thunderstorm.

28. Joel 4:16, ודה' מציון ישאג ומירושלם יתן קולו ורעשו שמים וארץ; J. V. Kinnier Wilson, "The Kurba'il Statue of Shalmaneser III," *Iraq* 24 (1962) 93, line 6, in an address to Adad describing his power over nature. In the Old Babylonian version of the *Gilgamesh Epic*, Mounts Sirion and Lebanon are apparently split asunder by the roar (voice) of Huwawa. See A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 1.262-63, line 31'. See also UT 51 (= CAT/KTU 1.4) vii 29-34 (Ginsberg, *ANET* 135; Smith in *UNP* 136-37). For other examples, see Weinfeld, "Divine Intervention," 121-22; S. M. Paul, *Amos* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 38-39.

29. "Following an old-world conception, the effect of the lightning is here attributed to the thunder" (A. Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962] 263). Scientifically, of course, the reverse is the case. I do not know of an "old-world" source for this conception, but thunder is mentioned before lightning in Exod 9:23-24, 2 Sam 22:14-15, Jer 10:13, Ps 77:19, Job 37:2-5 (both before and after lightning), 38:34-35 as well as UT 51 v 70 (= CAT/KTU 1.4, lines 8-9; Ginsberg, *ANET* 133; Smith in *UNP* 129) and *Iliad* 875-76: "Then [Zeus] thundered aloud from Ida, and sent a blazing flash amid the host of the Achaeans" (A. T. Murray, *Homer: The Iliad, with an English translation*, vol. 1 [LCL 170; London: Heinemann / Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946] 343).

30. See the comment on v. 6. Cf. *Adad ša ana rigmišu . . . iḫīlu šēru* 'Adad, at whose roar . . . the plain shakes' (KUB 4 26 A 10ff. and parallels cited in *CAD* ḫ 55a, Š/3, 204a, and Q 213b).

Nevertheless, some scholars have argued that in Ps 29:3-9 קול is not part of a construct phrase meaning 'the voice of YHWH' and constituting the subject of the verse; rather, קול is an exclamation meaning 'Hark!', with the word YHWH by itself serving as the subject.<sup>31</sup> Thus Kissane renders the passage:

<sup>3</sup>Hark, Yahweh is upon the waters,  
The God of glory thundered,  
Yahweh is upon the great waters;

<sup>4</sup>Hark, Yahweh in might,  
Hark, Yahweh in majesty.

<sup>5</sup>Hark, Yahweh breaks the cedars,  
Yahweh breaks the cedars of Lebanon;

<sup>6</sup>He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,  
Sirion like a young wild ox.

<sup>7</sup>Hark, Yahweh cleaves flames of fire,  
<sup>8</sup>Hark, Yahweh scares the wilderness,  
Yahweh scares the wilderness of Kadesh;

<sup>9</sup>Hark, Yahweh makes the hinds to calve,  
And strips the forests.<sup>32</sup>

The idea that קול sometimes means 'hark' is widely accepted in biblical grammars,<sup>33</sup> lexicons,<sup>34</sup> and secondary literature.<sup>35</sup> This sense is generally

31. S. D. Luzzatto, *ספר ישעיה / Il profeta Isaia* (Padua: Bianchi, 1855) 448 (at 40:3); Ges 707a, §4; E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Psalms* (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1964); C. Peters, "Hebräisches קול als Interjektion," *Bib* 20 (1939) 288-93; E. Vogt, "Der Aufbau von Ps. 29," *Bib* 41 (1960) 17-24, esp. pp. 17-18 n. 1; E. L. Greenstein, "YHWH's Lightning in Psalms 29:7," *Maarav* 8 (1993) 56 and earlier sources cited there in n. 40.

32. Kissane, *Book of Psalms*, 125-27.

33. GKC §146b / p. 467; Jōuon-Muraoka §163e.

34. BDB 877a, §1f; Ges 707a, §4 (includes Ps 29:3ff.); C. J. Labuschagne, "קול," *TLOT* 3:1134; *HALOT* electronic edition s.v. קול, §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 קול but observes that it cannot be the subject of the plural verb צורעקים; the subject must be the plural דמי אודיך. 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 Jōuon-Muraoka paraphrase קול in the sense in question: 'I hear' (see below). See also Ibn Ezra's commentary on Canticles, הפעם השנית, at 2:8. The Masoretes

thought to have developed from an exclamatory use of the word: “The word קול, voice, sound, followed by a genitive, is quite often used as exclamative: *the sound of . . . !* which may be translated by *I hear!, Listen!*”<sup>36</sup> But to be precise, note the following: (1) in this usage, because קול is an exclamation or interjection and is not part of a construct phrase, the following word is *not* a genitive<sup>37</sup> (it is actually nominative), and (2) קול 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’<sup>38</sup> (cf. Jer 31:15, קול ברמה נשמע ‘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: קול דמי אחיך צעקים אלי מן האדמה ‘Hark,<sup>39</sup> your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground!’ (NJPSV). In this case, קול, which is singular, cannot be the subject because the verb צעקים is plural.

recognized this sense of קול 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’amei hamiqra’ Kefarshanut* ([Tel Aviv]; Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1995) 133–36.

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

The relationship with Akk. *qālu* and *qūlu* 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!”

On the meaning of Akkadian *qālu*, see E. Reiner, “Dead of Night,” in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (AS 16; ed. H. G. Güterbock and T. Jacobsen; Chicago: University of Chicago Press [1965]) 247–51.

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

38. As observed by Luzzatto, *ספר ישעיה*, 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: קול יחדו ירננו קול צפירך נשאו קול 'Hark! Your watchmen raise their voices, As one they shout for joy' (NJPSV). Here also the initial קול (singular) cannot be the subject because the verb נשאו is plural. If קול were the subject, the meaning would be nonsensical: 'The voice of your watchmen raise their voices'.
- Jer 10:22: קול שמועה הנה באה 'Hark, a noise! It is coming'. The word קול, which is masculine, cannot be the subject of the feminine verb באה.
- Cant 2:8: קול דודי הנה־זה בא מדלג על־ההרים מקפץ על־הגבעות 'Hark! My beloved! There he comes, Leaping over mountains, Bounding over hills' (NJPSV). Here, קול 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: קול דודי דופק פתח־לי אחתי רעיתי 'Hark, my beloved knocks! "Let me in, my own, My darling"' (NJPSV), קול 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 קול do not include Ps 29:3-9 in their lists; Joüon and Muraoka explicitly reject it.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup>

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

40. Joüon §162e, note (1); Joüon-Muraoka §162e, note (1). So, too, N. H. Torczyner (Tur-Sinai) in B-Y 12:5831 col. 1, n. 1.

41. Kissane, *Book of Psalms*, 127. See also Luzzatto, *ספר ישעיה*; Ges; Vogt, "Der Aufbau von Ps. 29"; and Greenstein, "YHWH's Lightning in Psalms 29:7." Peters ("Hebräisches קול als Interjektion," 290-91) argues that taking קול 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 synonymy.<sup>42</sup> In fact, YHWH minus קול is mentioned as the subject of the parallel clauses only in vv. 3, 5, and 8, and the omission of קול 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 'ה קול and the object is a single word (מדבר, ארזים), while the reverse is true in the second stich: the subject is a single word, YHWH, and the object is a two-word phrase (מדבר קודש, ארזי הלבנון). This is also true in v. 3 (קול ה' . . . מים // ה' . . . מים רבים), setting aside the anomalous middle clause. In other words, קול is omitted in order to compensate for the longer object-phrase.<sup>43</sup> 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,<sup>44</sup> 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 קול means 'Hark!' in Psalm 29, however, is that, if קול 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 קול 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 קול alone in order to limit the phrase 'ה קול 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,<sup>45</sup> but it is not explicit; it must be inferred or supplied mentally. This example does show that even where קול 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,”<sup>46</sup> 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 קול 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 קול in vv. 3–9 refers to YHWH’s voice, which means ‘thunder’ and does not mean ‘Hark!’<sup>47</sup>

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45. Just as קול in Gen 3:8 refers to YHWH’s footsteps (cf. 2 Kgs 6:32, “the sound [קול] 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 חצב in v. 7. I only claim that understanding קול as ‘Hark!’ creates an additional problem in the verse; nor do I believe that his solution depends on that understanding of קול.

47. I am grateful to Roger Allen, Laura Jones, Alvin Turner, Gurston Turner, Andrea Weiss, and Baruch Schwartz for references, advice, and other assistance helpful to me in the preparation of this essay.