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Psalm 29

Phase 1: ORAL



Step 1: Listen

Listening to a guide translation and versions of the psalm

Listen well to the poem (notice content, emotions and interesting use of language). There are two guide translations in Appendix A:

1. **Hebrew-mirror** - copied from the Exegetical Layout and adjusted for minimal readability,
2. **Guide translation** - the literal, type 1 corresponding (but more readable) translation, exegetically the same as Hebrew-mirror.

Activity: Read the Hebrew-mirror and the Hebrew tight version in Appendix A. One reader per translation or one reader for all translations (as skills permit). Others to listen with closed books. Consider 'how to listen' – posture? With responses? In silence?



Step 2: Familiarise

Explaining and discussing the meaning and beauty of the psalm

Get an overview of the poem (the big picture) - what's the main message? Who is involved? A poem must be understood as 'a whole' (unlike a story).

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE PSALM

After listening to the guide translations, please respond to any of the following questions:

- What do you like about the psalm?
- What do you find difficult?
- How does the psalm make you feel?
- Which verse do you find particularly important in this psalm?
- What does this psalm teach you about the LORD? What is the LORD like?
- Are there any noticeable repetitions in this psalm?





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Optional Activity: For participants with some experience, ask them to recall images of the Lord from other psalms they have worked on, for example:

Ps 23: the Lord is my shepherd... he leads.. restores... guides... comforts

Ps 131: I.. am like a weaned child with its mother

Ps 103: ..forgives...heals...redeems.....as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him...

Read the guide translation again.

- Why do you think this is so different, especially in the middle section?
- Discuss why the psalmist might be using images of strength, violence and destruction to describe the Lord. (*Keep this brief, it is discussed again later.*)

CREATIVE RESPONSES

Activity: the repetition of 'the Lord' in the psalm

Purpose of short activity: to familiarise the participants with the psalm and establish the high level of repetition of the divine name Yahweh.

- Divide the group into either three or four.
- Read either guide translation aloud, at a normal speed, and get each group to count up **how many times 'the Lord' is mentioned**. Point out that each of these is יהוה 'Yahweh', not 'Adonai'. It should be 18. Repeat if the groups haven't got the same number as each other.

Discuss this level of repetition of the Lord's name in an 11-verse psalm. (In other psalms, once the Lord is mentioned, it is often followed by several verses with verbs only, eg in Ps 23 Yahweh appears in v1 and then there are only verbs in verses 2-3: he makes me lie down, he leads me, he restores, he guides me. In Psalm 29, that only happens in v6.) There is more on this in 'Unlocking an obstacle' below.

Activity: STORMS in the local culture, in the psalm

Purpose of activity: to understand and internalise the middle stanza, and to start building appropriate poetic storm vocabulary for oral translation.

The psalm describes the voice of the Lord as if it were a huge thunderstorm. As is usual in Israel, the thunderstorm rolls in from the Mediterranean Sea in the west, and sweeps down from the north to the south of the land. Read the psalm aloud again and discuss:

- What does the voice of the Lord do? Which of these actions are beyond what a normal thunderstorm can achieve? *Mountains to skip, deserts to tremble.*
- Discuss: this is poetic hyperbole (exaggeration for effect). What effect do you think the psalmist is wanting to achieve? *That even the greatest thunderstorm is tiny beside the power of the Lord.*



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- What other events might the psalmist be wanting to remind us of? At what other point in Israelite history do we see thunder, lightning, and earthquakes? *Exodus 19:16-18, when the Lord appeared at Mount Sinai.*

ENGAGING WITH THE WHOLE PSALM

Facilitator: address the following topics:

- *The participants in the psalm, the different “speakers” and “audiences”*
- *The historical background and the context of the psalm, the story behind the psalm, if relevant*
- *The theme of the psalm*
- *The flow of the psalm*
- *The potential big picture obstacles*
- *Emotion map*
- *The peak or peaks of the psalm*
- *The genre and purpose of the psalm*
- *Highly important poetic device(s) related to understanding the big picture*
- *How does the psalm point to Christ?*

Summary

Psalm 29 is an 11-verse psalm, centred around a long middle stanza with a repeated ‘voice of the Lord’ shown in a tremendous, even hyperbolic, thunderstorm. The images are destructive and powerful. At the end of the psalm this same powerful Lord is seen blessing his people with *shalom*.

The local culture and thunderstorms

How does the local culture understand and respond to storms?

- Are thunderstorms common? What direction do they come from? Are they considered a threat to be feared, or a more positive promise of rain?
- What causes the damage, the lightning or the thunder? *It is not uncommon to believe the thunder causes the damage; scientifically, this is not the case, but out in a major storm, the noise of the thunder echoing around the sky can feel overwhelming.*
- What about strong winds? Can they be strong enough to strip branches off trees?
- Who is considered responsible for storms?
- Can they be avoided? How?
- Are there any songs about storms? If so, record and use for local poetry analysis.

Activity: storms in the local language

Use a whiteboard or blackboard to establish local vocabulary associated with storms. Put the word for a major thunderstorm in the centre, and around it vocabulary elicited in response to discussion. Think about:

- What are the key elements of a storm?





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- What do you see first?
- What do you hear first?
- How do you feel during a thunderstorm?
- What is the kind of damage that storms cause?
- If someone sees a storm coming, how do they feel? What do they do?

Try to find *verbs and ideophones* as well as nouns. For nouns, eg strong winds, ask for verbs describing what the noun does. Ask for proverbs or well-known sayings.

Note on Psalm 29, rain, and theophanies in the Bible: Psalm 29 does not refer to rain. In the psalms in general, rain is seen as a blessing, producing crops (eg Ps 72:6, 147:8). The rain of a thunderstorm destroys crops, but rain is not specifically mentioned in this psalm. This may be because the thunder, lightning/fire, storm clouds and earthquakes are intended to bring to mind the *theophanies* of the OT, when the Lord appears, in particular Exodus 19 (but also 1 Kings 19, Ezekiel 1, Revelation 4:5, see Intertextuality in [Appendix C](#)) Rain is not a feature of any of these theophanies.

What does this psalm teach us about Christ?

Jesus also prayed this psalm for himself while on earth, being pressed in and challenged.

Jesus Christ is the God of our righteousness. The New Testament revealed that very clear to us. He is the One who put everything right and aligns us again with God and God's will.

UNLOCKING SOME OF THE BIG PICTURE OBSTACLES TO THE PSALM

Who was Baal, and what is the connection with Psalm 29?

*Purpose: to understand the violence and power expressed in Ps29, and why this would help the people of Israel to worship the Lord. **Do not miss out this section: it is essential to understanding the flow of the psalm.***

The Canaanites, the original settlers in the land of Israel, worshipped a whole pantheon of gods, and the one at the top, over all the other gods, was Baal, the god of storms, war and fertility. As part of his history he was also supposed to have conquered Yam, the god of seas and chaos.

Below and in [Appendix F](#) (larger version) you can see a photo of a relief of Baal. This flat stone carving from Ugarit in Syria has been dated at around 1500BC, not long before the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, and is nearly five feet high (1 ½ metres). It's a bit fuzzy, being over 3000 years old, but try to use either a printout or a projection of this Baal relief (see [Appendix F](#)).





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Activity: Ask the participants to find the following, to understand how the relief portrays Baal in all his power and control:

- Baal has his right hand raised, holding a battle club [god of war]
- He also has a dagger in his belt [god of war]
- His helmet has bulls' horns on it [god of fertility]
- In his left hand is a thunderbolt, pointing towards the ground, with a tree growing out of the top of it [god of storms, god of fertility]
- He is standing on a pedestal which has carved wavy lines representing the mountains and the sea [the conqueror of Yam, the god of the seas and chaos]
- A small figure, probably the local king, prays to him for protection and a good harvest

INSIGHT: Why was Baal a problem?

The Israelites intermarried with the Canaanites and constantly turned to Baal – they were mostly small farmers, and prayed to him for rain, so essential to their crops, as well as seeking his protection from their frequent attacks by neighbouring peoples. They failed to see Yahweh as the Lord of nature, despite historical events such as the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14).

True believers in Yahweh fought against this; for example, in Judges 6, the Lord calls Gideon and tells him to demolish his own father's altar to Baal. Gideon is so afraid of doing this that he does it at night – and with reason, for the next day the men of the town come seeking him to kill him.

The prophets also warn the people constantly that this was a sin that angered the Lord deeply, for example:

- Jeremiah 2:23, "How can you say, 'I am not defiled; I have not run after the Baals?'"
- Zephaniah 1:4: "I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem; I will destroy every remnant of Baal worship in this place ...".

Understanding why Israel needed to sing Psalm 29

Activity:

- Find all the natural objects in Ps 29 v3-9 that the Canaanites thought Baal ruled over. *The sea, trees and forests, thunder and lightning, mountains, deserts.*
- Why do you think Psalm 29 uses the name of Yahweh 18 times? *The psalmist is hammering his point home, element by element, that it is Yahweh, not Baal, that is in control.*
- In v10, at the end of the psalm, who sits enthroned over the floodwaters? *Yahweh.*



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- What is Baal left ruling over at the end of the psalm? *Nothing.*
- How would singing this psalm have helped the Israelites?

SEGMENTATION OF THE PSALM

1-2: 'ascribe to the Lord'

Call to acknowledge the Lord's glory and strength, his alone, and worship him.

3-9 the 'voice of the Lord'

The Lord is shown in absolute control over all the forces of nature thought to be controlled by Baal.

10-11 'the Lord, the king'

This Lord who has control over all aspects of nature is king over his people, and he is the one who is able to bless them with strength and peace.

FINAL SUMMING UP

To summarise the Psalm, discuss the following questions:

- What is the main point or message of the psalm?
- What does this Psalm teach you about the LORD?
- How can you or your church use this psalm?
- What heading or title would the group suggest for this psalm?

To summarise the Psalm, get at least two people to **restate the big picture** of the psalm:

The psalm starts with a call to heavenly beings to acknowledge the Lord and goes on to describe an event like a catastrophic thunderstorm, in which the Lord's strength and power is shown in destruction and control. The final stanza shows the Lord enthroned as king, giving his people strength and security.

Try to get this restated first in English (for checking), then in the local language.

- What heading would the group suggest for the psalm?
- Can they see a way of using it, either personally or in a church setting?



Step 3: Internalise

Absorbing the big picture of the psalm

'Get the poem inside yourself' (feel the emotions and be able to recall the main ideas).





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Look at the whole psalm so that you can experience it and retell the message. This is not an attempt to memorize the psalm, but to be able to understand the whole message and to express it in the target language. Aim to do at least the first two activities.

CREATIVE RESPONSES

First, do Internalisation Activities 1-5 as a whole group

Internalisation Activity: Listen to Psalm X being read again. Note all the words you hear which speak of God's power, or which are very intense/extreme language.

Internalisation Activity: Say each line of the psalm in the right order, as a group. Use your own words; there's no need to have it precisely right. Then let one or two persons say each line of the psalm, again in the right order

Internalisation Activity: Then, as a group, make gestures for each line and again say all the lines in order, but this time with gestures. Use mime/gestures to show the emotion and action.

Internalisation Activity: Lastly, as a whole group, use the popcorn method. Each line, in the right order, is said by a different person. Do this a second time to further reinforce.

Internalisation Activity (optional): The storyboard method: draw pictures of each event in the psalm as they unfold.

Then divide the group into two or three groups

Internalisation Activity: Skits (see activity 2 below)—act out what's happening in each of the lines. Make a little drama. Encourage them to use facial expressions, body language, motions, and movement to try to experience the emotions and the sequence of events. This psalm lends itself well to a skit.

Internalisation Activity: Memory song, chant or memory aid to help remember the psalm. Consider making a short poem of the song in the local language or Language of Wider Communication to help you remember the different actions in order. This song is only to help everyone remember each stanza in sequence (and the lines in sequence if it is a short psalm)

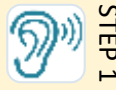
Other options

Activity 1: finding the segmentation in Psalm 29

Purpose: to help the participants discover the structure of psalm 29 and so the flow of the psalm

This simple activity helps to establish the segmentation of the psalm. Read guide translation one aloud (not two) and ask the participants to listen to the opening words of each line. The opening **word repetitions** establish the stanza boundaries (see [Appendix C](#) for further discussion).

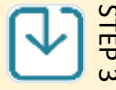
- Read v 1-2 and ask the participants to identify the repeated opening for these two verses. *Ascribe to the Lord.*



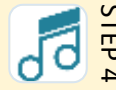
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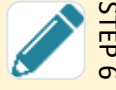
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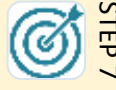
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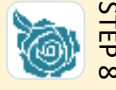
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- Then continue into the second stanza, pausing after 5a ‘voice of the Lord breaks the cedars’, and ask them to identify the repeated opening for the middle stanza. *Voice of the Lord*.
- Continue reading to the end of the psalm and ask them to identify where *Voice of the Lord* stops (v 9; more than one reading may be necessary). What repetition takes over for the final two verses? *The Lord*.

Translate these structurally important phrases, ready for step 4 song composition.

- help in translating *ascribe*: *ascribe* translates the Hebrew verb *הבין*, *havu*, which has the meaning here of acknowledging, recognising, and affirming the Lord’s glory and his strength; it has the sense of acknowledging what is due to someone, giving someone what is rightfully their due. This acknowledgement or affirmation leads on naturally to the *worship* in verse 2b. There is also a sense that it is the Lord’s glory and strength and no one else’s that is being affirmed.

Activity 2: finding the repetitions in Psalm 29

Purpose: using physical activity to understand how repetition is used in the parallelisms and structure of the psalm

Repetition: there is a lot of repetition in Psalm 29. We have already seen the repetitions of the name of the Lord. The participants will now find others through a physical activity, preferably outside.

- line up 10 participants beside each other with a clear space in front, and give each participant one of the words below to listen out for. (If you have fewer than 10 participants, miss out ‘cedars’ and/or ‘wilderness’: mention this afterwards.)
- read guide translation one aloud fairly quickly, and when each one hears their word, they should take a large step forward to form a new line, and again when they hear their word the second time.
- In the end, the two participants with ‘shakes’ and ‘glory’ should be out in front of the others, as their words are repeated three times.

Words to give out to participants:

- glory: 1b, 2a, 9c
- strength: 1b, 11a
- splendour: 2b, 4b
- waters: 3a, 3b
- cedars: 5a, 5b
- Lebanon: 5b, 6b
- shakes: 8a, 8b, 9a
- wilderness: 8a, 8b
- sits enthroned: 10a, 10b
- his people: 11a, 11b

Discuss:

- ask them how many of them took their steps quickly, one after the other. These are words that are repeated within a *parallelism*.
- Which participants had a long gap to wait between repeats? The ones with the two *thematic* words: *glory*, and *strength*, found at the beginning and end of the psalm.



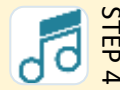
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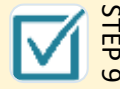
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Discuss how these different types of repetition are like building a wall (this is an activity which most participants will be familiar with): the 'short wait' parallelisms are like bricks, placed next to each other, and the 'long wait' are like the pillars that go from the top to the bottom of the wall. Ask them to look out for the ones like pillars in other psalms; the 'brick' ones are easy to identify.

Poetic impact: ask the participants what they feel the poetic effect is of all the repetitions in Psalm 29. *Segal for example sees them as creating the effect of reverberating thunder. This is a very subjective issue and may raise interesting insights into how they experience their own poetry.*

Activity 3: drama based on stanza two

Purpose: internalisation of the sequence of activities in stanza two through physical actions, emotional participation in the psalm, and preparation for the song crafting in step four.

In this drama the group acts out the violence and destruction in stanza two, in each case in response to a drum roll and shout of 'voice of the Lord'.

First translate the calls: these are all in square brackets in the chart: voice of the Lord; powerful; majestic; Glory!

Note: see if there are any appropriate ideophones or exclamations which could accompany the actions: otherwise, **do not use words** apart from the specified ones, all of which appear in Ps29. This is consistent with Ps 29, where the 'voice of the Lord' is tremendous in power, but - in contrast to some of the other psalms - there are no actual words spoken by the Lord.

Sequence:

- first time round, *all the instructions* in the chart are said aloud to the group as they do the actions
- then, just give the *key words* in bold on the chart, group does actions
- finally, participants do the whole mime in the correct order *without any prompts*. At this stage there should just be local language use and actions, no LWC.

Group action	Voice of the Lord	Group response
v 3: all do actions and sounds to represent a violent sea	One person does a loud drum roll and shouts loudly [Voice of the Lord!]	Flatten themselves on hearing the voice of the Lord
v 4: -	<i>as above</i>	Shout together: [power!] [splendour!]
v 5: group forms strong tall cedar trees (more than one person per tree)	<i>as above</i>	Actions in two steps: the trees bend and break
v 6: group forms two large mountains (Lebanon and Sirion)	<i>as above</i>	The two mountains leap and shake
v 7: -	<i>as above</i>	Group mimes lightning striking
v 8: group lays out cloths and clothing, or otherwise mimics	<i>as above</i>	Group makes the desert roll and shake



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flat desert, covering as much floor/ground as possible

v 9a,b: half of group stands up as **trees, with arms out** as branches

v 9c: whole group drops to its **knees in worship** and calls out together [Glory!]

as above

Other half of group mimes stripping branches off



Step 4: Explore and compose

Explore the Hebrew and local poetry and compose a song

EXPLORING HEBREW AND LOCAL POETRY

For the facilitator: in this step, address the following topics to explore in Hebrew poetry:

- 1) Repetition of words, images, and sounds
- 2) Handling the Hebrew parallelisms
- 3) Figures of speech, like metaphors, personification
- 4) Rhythm, verse length, beat
- 5) Word order, clause order
- 6) Poetic devices that emphasize and mark something as important

Once the artist-translators have sufficiently internalised and drafted the psalm in the workshop setting, compose a song, poem, rap, chant, or prayer to capture as much of the psalm as possible.

2. Repetition

Activity: Listen to the psalm again and in groups, list all the words and concepts that are being repeated, and all the concepts that form opposites or contrasts.

INSIGHT: Repetitions

- “I”, “me”, “my” in v.1, 2, 3, 7 and 8
- “God” in v.1 and “LORD” in v.3, 5, 6 and 8
- “call” in v.1 and 3
- “righteousness” in v.1 and 5
- “hear my prayer” in v.1 and “the LORD hears when I call to him” in v.3
- “heart” in v.4 and 7
- “on your beds” in v4 and “let me lie down and let me sleep” in v.8
- “trust” in v.5 and “securely” in v.8 have the same root in Hebrew
- “many” in v.6 and “abounded” in v.7 have the same root in Hebrew

INSIGHT: Contrasts

- “in distress” vs “open space” in v.1 and “in peace” in v.8



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- "honour" vs "shame" in v.2
- Calling out, praying, speaking vs "be silent" in v.4
- "tremble" (being anxious) in v.4 vs "in peace" and "securely" in v.8
- "emptiness" in v.2 vs "abounded" in v.7
- "light" in v.6 vs the darkness of night in v.4 and 8

The frequent repetition makes this psalm easy to sing. One way to write a whole-psalm song would be as follows:

Key repetitions and responses

Group	Individual
Ascribe to the Lord	you heavenly beings
Ascribe to the Lord	strength
Ascribe to the Lord	glory
Worship the Lord	in his holiness
Voice of the Lord	over waters
Voice of the Lord	thunders
Voice of the Lord	with-strength
Voice of the Lord	with-splendour
Voice of the Lord	breaks trees
Voice of the Lord	makes mountains skip
Voice of the Lord	slashes with lightning
Voice of the Lord	shakes desert
Voice of the Lord	strips trees bare
All fall on their knees singing 'Glory!'	
The Lord	sits as king/sits on throne
The Lord	gives strength
The Lord	blesses his people (<i>all kneel</i>)

Whatever way the group decides to sing this psalm, suggest that there should be a **strong contrast** between the end of stanza two, and the beginning of stanza three. The storm should **crescendo**, ending at maximum volume, with very dramatic gestures, finishing with a shout – Glory!

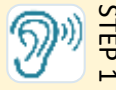
The final two verses, enthroned and blessing, should be sung in a calm, peaceful, resolved way, quiet and confident.

Children's song

It is perhaps slightly harder to write a short children's song from Ps 29 than from some of the other psalms, but ask the participants to craft something memorable with a strong teaching point. Ps 29:1 has been used by other groups.

2. Main Images or Metaphors of the Psalm

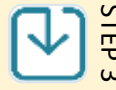




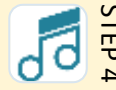
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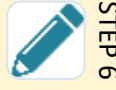
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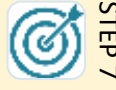
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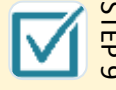
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Activity: Can you identify any images, similes or metaphors?

Nature images

Comparisons

Allusions to historical events that really happened

COMPOSING A SONG

For the facilitator: several considerations, like the big question when to start doing the song

- 1) *When to start composing a song? The guide writer and facilitator have some freedom when. Either at the end of step 4, or after step 5. There are pro's and con's to each option. One advantage of doing it in Step 4 (before the detailed exegesis) is that the team starts to think about poetry. They only start to think about poetry once they start composing a song. The risk is that when they compose something early, before step 5, that they settle on a melody they like, but need to change it or even abandon it after getting the more detailed exegetical insights. The advantage*
- 2) *Some other considerations: what about memory aid, the poem or song made at the end of Step 3?*
- 3) *Another option is to only compose a nice tune and song on one stanza with not any serious exegetical issues. That tune can then be used for the rest of the psalm at the end of Step 5. Experience with shorter sections, like one or two stanzas at a time, to compose.*
- 4) *The team needs to learn some song-writing skills.*
- 5) *It is not necessary to use the same tune for every stanza. Sometimes 3-4 tunes can be used for long psalms.*

Note the poetic devices used in the Hebrew mirror or in the Flower Garden (Appendix C). What is the psalmist trying to achieve? Consider what poetic devices are used in the local language to achieve the same functions.

Activity: NOW, COMPOSE A SONG! Participants are to choose a style or genre that is relevant for the psalm, and to set the whole psalm or sections to a rhythm or music. The song needs to cover all the main stanzas, but doesn't need to be correct in every detail (that comes later in Step 5)

Activity: Make a recording of the composition(s).



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Step 5: Draft

Translating stanza-by-stanza

Listen to the poem again. Orally create stanza-by-stanza a first draft of the psalm in the target language, trying to capture the poetic elements and essential details of the meaning. To take full advantage of the oral form, avoid reverting to written Biblical text at this point.

Activity: Divide into smaller groups and let one in each group read through guide translation #2: Hebrew-tight (or play a recording) while others translate. The oral draft can at that point be recorded and/or immediately written down (Step 6 merged with Step 5).

For the purposes of dividing up the psalm for oral translation, the second stanza has been divided into three: 3-4, 5-7, and 8-9. These are not natural breaks in the psalm, and have only been introduced because of the memory load on participants doing oral translation, so they can be ignored if not needed.

STANZA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Often it speeds the work to have different groups do different stanzas. If you do this, make sure you all hear the psalm from top to bottom and to make suggestions to other groups when you come together...

Stanza 1: Verses 1-2

Psalm of David.

1 Ascribe to YHWH, heavenly beings,
Ascribe to YHWH glory and strength.
2 Ascribe to YHWH glory of his name,
Bow before YHWH in splendour of holiness.

A Psalm of David.

1 Ascribe to YHWH, O heavenly ones,
ascribe the glory and strength of YHWH.
2 Ascribe the glory of YHWH'S name;
bow before YHWH in the beauty of holiness.

Discuss:

- V.1 staircase parallelism - This verse is an example of *staircase parallelism*, where the first line is unfinished (there is no object, the heavenly beings are not told what to ascribe to the Lord) but the second line provides what is missing: glory and strength.

*Ascribe to YHWH, heavenly beings,
(ascribe what?)
Ascribe to YHWH glory and strength.*

Try to maintain this poetic device, which builds tension and allows repetition of the structurally key word *ascribe*





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- V. 1a heavenly beings - In the Hebrew this is 'sons of gods'. If necessary, see [Appendix C](#) for the reasons for translating this 'heavenly beings', or 'heavenly ones', as in the guide translations.
- V.2 in the splendour/beauty of holiness - If necessary, see [Appendix C](#) for debate about this phrase. The recommended translation is 'in the splendour/beauty/brightness of (his) holiness'.
- Vv.1-2 repeated in Ps 96: 7-8 - The first two verses of Ps 29 are used, with some slight variations, in the central section of Ps96. If that psalm has already been translated, the same words should be used. Check especially what was used for *ascribe*, and *in the splendour/beauty of holiness*.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

Stanza 2 (Part 1): Verses 3-4

3 Voice of YHWH over the waters,
God of the glory thunders.
YHWH over many waters.

4 Voice of YHWH in the power
Voice of YHWH in the splendour

3 The voice of YHWH sounds over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
YHWH thunders over mighty waters.

4 The voice of YHWH is strength;
the voice of YHWH is majesty.

Discuss:

- Verse 3: ellipsis of 'thunders' - There are three lines in v3, and only one verb, 'thunders', in v3b.

3a: voice of the Lord over the waters

*3b: the God of glory **thunders***

3c: Lord, over many waters.

If using ideophones in the translation, use the same one in 3a and 3c. If not:

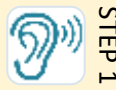
- 3a: you could include the verb *is*, or *sounds*, as in guide translation two. Do not use a verb which implies words, as in this psalm, the frequently-mentioned 'voice of the Lord' is not heard speaking any actual words.
- 3b-c: 3b has the verb *thunders*, above. For 3c, you could either use an ellipsis, as in guide translation one and above (no verb at all), or if the poetry will not allow that, either repeat *thunders*, or repeat what you used in 3a, *sounds* etc. Either of these will carry through the idea of repetition that is so important in this psalm.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

Stanza 2 (Part 2): Verses 5-8

5 Voice of YHWH breaks cedars,
He shatters, YHWH, cedars of Lebanon,
6 He caused them to skip like a calf,

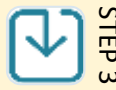
5 The voice of YHWH breaks the cedars;
YHWH breaks in pieces the cedars of
Lebanon,
6 he makes them skip like a calf,



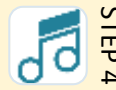
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Lebanon and Sirion, like son of wild oxen.

7 Voice of YHWH strikes flames of fire.

8 Voice of YHWH shakes wilderness,
He shakes, YHWH, wilderness of Kadesh.

Lebanon and Sirion, like a young wild ox.

7 The voice of YHWH strikes with slashing fire.

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

Discuss:

- Verse 5: cedars - These are very tall, strong, slow-growing trees. See the photo in Appendix F (with google link). Cedars are known elsewhere in the Bible, for example cedars were cut in Lebanon and floated down the coast in rafts for use in constructing Solomon's temple (1 Kings 5). There are frequent references to cedar wood elsewhere (eg Song of Songs, Jeremiah, Ezekiel). If a similar tree is known locally, especially one famous for its timber and its strength, that name could be used here.
- Verses 5, v6: place names Lebanon and Sirion - These will probably need to be transliterated. Lebanon refers to the mountains of Lebanon, rather than to the modern country. These mountains lie north of Israel. Sirion is the Phoenician name for Mount Hermon, the highest mountain in Syria, northeast of Israel. Mount Hermon may be familiar to participants from its use in Ps133, where the 'dew of Hermon' comes down to Mount Zion, in Jerusalem.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

Stanza 3: Verses 9-11

9 Voice of YHWH twists oaks,
And strips forests bare
And in his temple all say 'Glory!'

10 YHWH over the flood is seated,
And has been enthroned YHWH
forever.

11 YHWH strength to his people gives,
YHWH blesses his people with peace.

9 The voice of YHWH makes the oaks thrash,
and strips the forests bare;
and in his temple, all declare "Glory!"

10 YHWH is seated above the flood;
YHWH is seated as king forever.

11 YHWH gives strength to his people,
YHWH blesses his people with peace.

Discuss:

- Verse 10 the flood - This is not the same word as used for 'waters' earlier; this rare word is used only here and in the Noah's ark flood story in Gen 6-9. Try to find a word for floodwaters. See [Appendix B](#) footnote to this verse.
- Verse 11: strength - Make sure that 'strength' is translated the same way as in v1. This word forms an inclusio in the psalm. The virtually synonymous word for 'strength, power' in v4 should be a different word, if possible.



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- Verse 11: parallelism - Try to bring out the parallelism of v11: lines a and b both start with 'the Lord'. Their components are:
Lord – gives/blesses – his people – strength/peace.
The similarity of the elements is slightly obscured by the different word order in a and b.
- Verse 11: 'shalom' - Translating שלום *shalom*: this is the final word in the psalm. Try to keep it final. The Hebrew word refers not only to 'peace' as in freedom from war, but also material prosperity, well-being, happiness, all that it takes for us to flourish as human beings. It also includes the spiritual dimension of trust and confidence in the Lord, based on his providence, forgiveness and steadfast love.
Bible-literate groups will be familiar with the priestly blessing in Numbers 6: the Lord bless you and keep you.... this also finishes with the word *shalom*.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Activities:

- 1) Listen again to the recordings of each verse or section.
- 2) Think about how to include relevant parts from previous steps and to use ideas from the previous creative activities.
- 3) Put everything together to make a poetic oral representation of the complete psalm, and then record it.

Phase 2: TEXT



Step 6: Transcribe

Make a written draft

Activity: Transcribe the recording/s of the oral draft onto paper or a computer.

Before moving on to the checking steps, check the transcribed draft for the following. This should be done as a whole group, looking at the psalm projected onto a screen or wall. Doing this now will help the exegetical and poetical checks that follow to stay focused on essential matters.

1. **Versification:** put the verse numbers into the psalm.
2. Check that the number of the psalm, and any **superscription**, are in place at the top. (Superscriptions are often left out completely according to team policy, but they are recommended to be put in the written text but not the song.)
3. Put in the **stanza breaks** (blank lines usually).



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4. Correct the **punctuation**, in particular finding out where the sentences should end. Different groups use different approaches. Our recommendation is to use capital letters only for the beginning of sentences, not for the beginning of each poetic line.
5. Correct the **spelling**. You may find that there is a lot of discussion over this. The group needs to have consistency but also needs to abide by any government guidelines.
6. Raise any questions you have about the **back translation** at this point. The back translation just needs to be comprehensible; it does not need spell checks etc. You, the facilitator, are the only person who needs it. However, without a good back translation you cannot understand what is going on. As a bonus, at least a couple of exegetical questions you've prepared usually turn out to be unnecessary after this step.
7. Check the **line divisions** (this refers to how the power is broken up into lines and where to make those breaks).



Step 7: Contents Check

Checking exegetical faithfulness

Check the exegesis of the oral translation. Consider whether the correct meaning has been translated and if the wording used can be improved. The purpose of this step is to check the content of your draft for faithfulness and trustworthiness.

Activity: Review the draft translation in detail, using the oral recording of Step 5 or the transcription of Step 6. Do an exegetical check by comparing the draft with the guide translations given in Appendix A and the exegetical layout in Appendix B and adjust the text as necessary.

EXEGETICAL CHECKLIST

Give special attention to:

- ...



Step 8: Poetry Check

Compare and weigh the poetic features

Check if the Hebrew poetry is all accounted for in the translation through equivalent poetic features in the target language. Consider if the poetry of the translation can be improved, for example, look at the length of lines and the use of rhythm and ideophones.



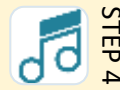
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Activity: Consider the poetic features of your translation. Do they reflect the purpose of the Hebrew poetic features, drawing attention to the correct parts? Experiment a bit with different word-orders and see what sounds the most beautiful, the most poetic.

POETIC CHECKLIST

Give special attention to:

- Rhythm and pulse
- Eliminating wordiness: are all the connectives, pronouns and verbs necessary?
- Word order
- Metaphors and similes
- Exclamations and ideophones. Note that participants may be reluctant to add ideophones because they are not in the guide translations: explain why they are not there. If ideophones are used, make sure any redundant verbs are removed.
- Verbs: discuss whether any 'stripped down' verb forms can be used.
- Breaking the rules: discuss which language rules might need to be observed, for example placement of vocatives, and where – and for what purpose – in poetry, rules can sometimes be broken.
- Feel free to raise and discuss other poetic features during checking, especially line length, repetition, chiasms, ellipsis, enjambment or anything you have observed in their own poetry.



Step 9: Finalise

Preparing the final version of an authenticated translation

Prepare the final version which will serve as an authorized translation, that in turn will serve as the basis for performing the psalm in the community (audio, visual and written).

Activity: Re-check the spelling of your transcription, the punctuation, in-setting, and the layout of paragraphs to represent stanza segmentation.

Activity: Re-check the essential accuracy of the back translation (not worrying about spelling).

Activity: In AVTT, ensure that the final text of your psalm is uploaded with a back translation, check that the recordings from different steps are in the correct place, and do a final audio recording.

Activity: If possible, copy the final written text into Paratext.



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Phase 3: PERFORMANCE



Step 10: Perform

Performing the psalm in your community

Convert text into performance (dramatic reading/song/chant) to both perform and share this psalm, ensuring the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible).

You now want to convert your written translation into a performance (song or chant) so that you can share it with your community. You need to make sure that the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible). The genre - lament or praise or thanksgiving or other - should be similar to songs of the same genre in your culture.

Psalm-specific ideas:

- ...

Activity: Identify any relevant genres or styles or performance and put the psalm to music. You can put the whole psalm to music, word-for-word, or you can use creative licence to adapt the psalm for the performance.

Activity: Complete a transcript and back translation for the lyrics of any song created by the team to be checked before recording.

FINAL CHECKLIST

In the end of each psalm, there should ideally be four products:

1. Transcription: An authorized, authenticated, or officially written draft in AVTT and Paratext.
2. Dramatic Reading: A recording of a dramatic reading or recitation of the whole psalm, using the authenticated version word-for-word, recorded in AVTT.
3. Whole Psalm Performance: A recording of a performance of the whole psalm, using the entire authenticated version but with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance, including poetic and dramatic features beyond the authenticated version, recorded in AVTT.
4. Song or Hymn: A recording of a performance of part of the psalm including the main idea of the psalm, in the form of a song, hymn or chorus, with or without drama, with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance and to make it easy to sing and remember, recorded in AVTT. An improved version of the Step 4 composition could be used here.



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Appendix A: Guide Translations

Guide Translation #1 (Hebrew-mirror)	Guide Translation #2 (Hebrew-tight)
<p><i>Psalm of David.</i></p> <p>1 Ascribe to YHWH, heavenly beings, Ascribe to YHWH glory and strength.</p> <p>2 Ascribe to YHWH glory of his name, Bow before YHWH in splendour of holiness.</p> <p>3 Voice of YHWH over the waters, God of the glory thunders. YHWH over many waters.</p> <p>4 Voice of YHWH in the power Voice of YHWH in the splendour</p> <p>5 Voice of YHWH breaks cedars, He shatters, YHWH, cedars of Lebanon,</p> <p>6 He caused them to skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion, like son of wild oxen.</p> <p>7 Voice of YHWH strikes flames of fire.</p> <p>8 Voice of YHWH shakes wilderness, He shakes, YHWH, wilderness of Kadesh.</p> <p>9 Voice of YHWH twists oaks, And strips forests bare And in his temple all say 'Glory'!</p> <p>10 YHWH over the flood is seated, And has been enthroned YHWH forever.</p> <p>11 YHWH strength to his people gives, YHWH blesses his people with peace.</p>	<p><i>A Psalm of David.</i></p> <p>1 Ascribe to YHWH, O heavenly ones, ascribe the glory and strength of YHWH.</p> <p>2 Ascribe the glory of YHWH'S name; bow before YHWH in the beauty of holiness.</p> <p>3 The voice of YHWH sounds over the waters; the God of glory thunders, YHWH thunders over mighty waters.</p> <p>4 The voice of YHWH is strength; the voice of YHWH is majesty.</p> <p>5 The voice of YHWH breaks the cedars; YHWH breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon,</p> <p>6 he makes them skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion, like a young wild ox.</p> <p>7 The voice of YHWH strikes with slashing fire.</p> <p>8 The voice of YHWH shakes the wilderness; YHWH shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.</p> <p>9 The voice of YHWH makes the oaks thrash, and strips the forests bare; and in his temple, all declare "Glory!"</p> <p>10 YHWH is seated above the flood; YHWH is seated as king forever.</p> <p>11 YHWH gives strength to his people, YHWH blesses his people with peace.</p>





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Appendix B: Exegetical Layout

...

SUGGESTED HEADING

...

Coding for TAM Verbs and Hebrew features:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qatal perfective = blue • Yiqtol imperfective = red | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infinitive construct = purple • Wayyiqtol waw+imperfective = pink • Jussive/cohortative = light brown | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imperative = brown • Participle = green • Weqatal = navy |
|--|---|--|

מְזֻמָּר לַדָּוִד	psalm of.David
הִבְּרֹה לַיהוָה בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים	1 ascribe ¹ to. YHWH ² sons.of [gods] ³
הִבְּרֹה לַיהוָה כְּבוֹד וְעֹז:	ascribe to. YHWH glory and.strength
הִבְּרֹה לַיהוָה כְּבוֹד שְׁמוֹ	2 ascribe to. YHWH ⁴ glory.of name.his ⁵

¹ *Ascribe* is the best option for translating הִבְּרֹה in English, but the Hebrew is stronger than *ascribe*: it is to recognise and acknowledge, affirm, YHWH's glory and strength, possibly that it is exclusively his. *Give* or *render* are alternatives.

² This is an example of *staircase parallelism*, where the first line is unfinished (there is no object) but the second line provides what is missing. Translating this should not be a problem, especially in languages where the vocative must come first.

³ For a discussion of the preferred translation of this as 'heavenly beings' in the guide translations, see [Appendix C](#) note to the facilitator.

⁴ Construct chain: there is an implied definite article *the glory of his name* because of the possessive suffix on the final noun *name*; this can be seen in guide translation two. The article is not added in guide translation one, or in the interlinear, either to this or to other construct chains in this psalm, but they are all present in guide translation two. Later examples are not footnoted here. Note that your language will not necessarily need a definite article where English requires one.

⁵ Note that for all possessive and pronominal suffixes, this interlinear shows the suffix after the noun, to make the structure of the Hebrew noun + suffix more transparent. Normal English usage can be found in the guide translations. Other examples are not footnoted.





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הַשְׁתַּחֲוֹנוּ לַיהוָה בְּהַדְרַת־קֹדֶשׁ:	bow.down to. YHWH in.splendour ⁶ .of holiness
קוֹל יְהוָה עַל־הַמַּיִם	3 voice.of YHWH ⁷ over-the.waters ⁸
אֶל־הַכְּבוֹד הַרְעִים	God.of-the.glory ⁹ thunders
יְהוָה עַל־מַיִם רַבִּים:	YHWH over-waters many ¹⁰
קוֹל־יְהוָה בְּכֹחַ	4 voice.of- YHWH in.the.power
קוֹל יְהוָה בְּהַדְרָה:	voice.of YHWH in.the.splendour ¹¹
קוֹל יְהוָה שִׁבַּר אֲרָזִים	5 voice.of YHWH breaks ¹² cedars
וַיִּשְׁבַּר יְהוָה אֶת־אֲרָזֵי הַלְּבָנוֹן:	and.shattered YHWH cedars.of Lebanon

⁶ For a discussion of the preferred translation of this as ‘splendour, beauty’, or even ‘brightness, brilliance, of holiness’, or ‘of his holiness’ see [Appendix C](#) note to the facilitator.

⁷ There is no verb in either 3a or 3c. These are copulas, missing the verb ‘to be’, ie ‘the voice of YHWH is over the waters’. However, note that several translations choose to repeat the ‘thunders’ of 3b in 3c (NIV, NLT), while guide translation two uses ‘sounds’.

⁸ If ‘waters’ does not work well as a translation, ‘sea’ or ‘seas’ could be used, here and in line 3c, particularly in view of the allusion to Canaanite mythology (see guide). See also the specific reference to floodwaters in v10; in v3 the Lord is shown to rule over waters of every description. Some interpret this verse as referring to the waters ‘over heaven’ (Gen 1:6–7; Psa 104:3; 148:4) but that is not specifically mentioned here.

⁹ *Glory* forms an inclusio in the second stanza, appearing in v3 and as the final word in v9. Note that it is also repeated in verses 1 and 2.

¹⁰ See the footnote to v3a above, on how to translate this ellipsis. Guide translation two repeats ‘thunders’ from v3b here.

¹¹ This is the masculine noun corresponding to the feminine noun, translated ‘splendour’ or ‘beauty’,

used in v3. Translate if possible with related words (unlike NIV and ESV, for example). These phrases might also be translated ‘with-(the)-power, with-(the)-splendour’.

¹² *Breaks* and *shatters*: these are the same verb root in the Qal and Piel. The Piel indicates either repeated action, breaks again and again, or intensified action, break into pieces, shatter. Since the thunderstorm is seen as a single event, *shatters* might be a better choice. Make sure the translation shows the intensification.



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וַיִּרְקִיעַם כְּמו־עֵגֶל	6 and ¹³ .caused.to.skip.them ¹⁴ . like-calf ¹⁵
לְבָנוֹן וְשִׂרְיֹן כְּמוֹ בֶן-רְאָמִים:	¹⁶ Lebanon and.Sirion ¹⁷ like son.of-wild oxen
קוֹל-יְהוָה חֹצֵב	7 voice.of- YHWH hews ¹⁸
לְהַבּוֹת אֵשׁ:	flames.of fire ¹⁹
קוֹל יְהוָה יַחֲלֵל מִדְבָּר	8 ²⁰ voice.of YHWH will.shake wilderness
יַחֲלֵל יְהוָה מִדְבָּר קִדְשׁ:	will.shake ²¹ YHWH wilderness Kadesh ²²
קוֹל יְהוָה יְחַלְלֵל אֵילוֹת ²³	9 voice.of YHWH was.causing.to.shake oaks ²³
וַיַּחֲשֵׁף יַעֲרֹת	and.he.has.stripped.bare. forests

¹³ Note that this is the only verse-initial *vav* in the psalm, tying verses 5 & 6 closely together; make sure there is no sentence break here.

¹⁴ Poetic hyperbole: in terms of the features even of a major thunderstorm, this is hyperbole, perhaps alluding to the trembling of the Mount Sinai in the theophany in Exodus 19.

¹⁵ Hebrew does not have an indefinite article, 'a/an'. English does, and requires one here, which is found in the guide translations, but not in the interlinear. Your language may be one of the many which, like Hebrew, does not require an indefinite article, either here or elsewhere.

¹⁶ There is verbal ellipsis here. Lebanon and Sirion are also 'caused to skip', this time like a son of wild oxen.

¹⁷ Sirion is the Phoenician name for Mount Hermon, and is referred to as such in Deut 3:8-9, where it is also given as Mount Senir; it was taken as part of Israelite territory.

¹⁸ For a discussion of all of the translation issues in this verse, see [Appendix C](#) note to the facilitator. A good choice would be 'strikes with flames of fire', but the translation in any particular context should take culturally-familiar descriptions of lightning into account.

¹⁹ See note above.

²⁰ Note reverse word order: voice of Lord + verb + wilderness, verb + voice of Lord + wilderness. The first gives prominence to the patterned voice of the Lord, the second is default word order.

²¹ The verb here in 8b, and the verb in 9a, are the hifil and polel of חיל. If possible, use related verbs in the translation.

²² The 'wilderness of Kadesh' is the preferred translation. For a discussion of this, and what type of desert/wilderness this refers to, see [Appendix C](#) note to the facilitator. Note the movement from general to specific.

²³ The preferred translation of 9a and 9b is referring to oaks 9a and forests 9b; for a discussion of the complicated translation issues in this verse see [Appendix C](#) note to the facilitator. Note the intensification from *shaking* to *stripping bare*.



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וּבְהִיכְלוֹ לְלוֹ אִמְרַ כְּבוֹד:	and.in.temple.his ²⁴ all.of.its says glory ^{25 26}
יְהוָה לַמַּבּוּל יִשָּׁב	10 YHWH over.the.flood ²⁷ sat.down ²⁸
וַיֵּשֶׁב יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ לְעוֹלָם:	and.has.sat YHWH king to.forever
יְהוָה עֲזוֹ לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן	11 YHWH strength ²⁹ to.people.his will.give ³⁰ .
יְהוָה יְבַרְכֶךָ אֶת־עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם:	YHWH will.bless. people.his with.the.peace ³¹

²⁴ The psalm does not specify whether this is in the Lord’s earthly temple in Jerusalem, or his heavenly temple. Try to maintain the ambiguity, if possible.

²⁵ The closure of the *glory* inclusio opened in v3 finishes the second stanza.

²⁶ This third line of the only tricolon in the psalm is a response to the dramatic events of v3-9, and concludes the stanza.

²⁷ The rare word מַבּוּל is found only here and in the Noah’s flood stories of Gen 7-9. In Canaanite tradition Baal subjugated the chaotic forces of the god Yam (‘sea’), a deified flood. Here and in Gen 7-9 the Lord is shown in complete control over the flood, it is merely a tool in his hand.

²⁸ The *qatal* verb in this context carries the technical sense of being enthroned as king, (Jacobson, NICOT), followed by almost all major translations (with variants such as *as King*, NASB and *rules*, NLT). Cf Heb 1:3, [Jesus] ‘sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven’. Note the royal theme of ‘ascribe’ and ‘bow down’ is continued here.

²⁹ This closes the *strength* whole-psalm inclusio opened at the end of v1.

³⁰ For a discussion of whether to translate the *yiqtol* verbs in this verse as future, present tense, or jussive, see [Appendix C](#) note to the facilitator. The preferred choice in this guide is the present tense.

³¹ *Shalom* is hard to translate; it includes the concept of peace, but also means ‘well-being, prosperity, happiness, success’ (Bratcher). Note that although it does include the idea of material prosperity, it includes all that is needed for human flourishing. The ‘emphasis is on inner peace and rest’ (Wendland), in a two-way relationship in which peace given by the Lord is reflected in the trust placed in him by his people. At heart, it is a spiritual term.



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Appendix D: Notes to the Facilitator

A. exegetical and translation choices in Psalm 29

Verse 1a: sons of God/heavenly beings/mighty ones

The Hebrew is בְּנֵי אֱלִים, “sons of gods” or “sons of God”.

In Canaanite mythology, the divine council of the high god El is referred to as “the sons of El”, and Bratcher notes that one interpretation of this phrase is the gods of other nations. There is no evidence however that this pantheon of ‘gods’ and divinities are the addressees in v1. The theme of victory and supremacy over Baal in this psalm is clear, but is not specific enough to warrant this interpretation of v1.

The only other place this expression is used in the psalter is in Ps 89:6; in that psalm the same addressees are also called “the assembly of the holy ones” and “council of the holy ones.” (NET). Most commentators agree, presumably on this basis, that v1 in this psalm is addressed to the divine council or assembly of the Lord (Craigie, Jacobson, Goldingay), beings who are supernatural and eternal but less than God, created beings. These are well attested in other parts of Scripture.

The ‘sons of...’ is a Hebraism which does not translate well in this context, so although it would be permissible to say ‘sons of God’, and a number of translations do, in many cultural contexts it would be misunderstood, and the recommendation is to use a phrase such as ‘heavenly beings’.

Verse 2b: bow before the Lord in the [splendour/attire] of holiness:

הַשְׁתַּחֲוֹנוּ לַיהוָה בְּהַדְרַת קֹדֶשׁ

The identical Hebrew phrase is found here in Ps29:2, in Ps 96:9, and also in 1 Chronicles 16:29, where David appoints Asaph and singers to sing a psalm as the ark is brought into Jerusalem (see below, Intertextuality). It is thought to mean ‘adornment’ or ‘attire’. Other than these examples, the feminine noun הַדְרָה is only used once in the Hebrew Bible, see below.

The masculine noun הַדָּר, at the end of v4, is frequently used in the psalms and elsewhere, usually meaning ‘splendour’ or ‘majesty’.

The remaining use of the feminine noun, however, in Proverbs 14:28 refers to the glory of a king, הַדְרַת-מֶלֶךְ (a large population is the glory of a king). So it is clear that the feminine noun can also connote glory, or splendour. *Attire* or *adornment* would not make a great deal of sense in that context.

Despite this, a number of commentators, such as Craigie, and some translations, eg NET, NASB, LEB, prefer to translate the phrase ‘in holy attire’, understanding this to refer to the clothing worn by the worshippers. Jacobson notes that this is problematic. It also fails to fit with the overall interpretation of the first two verses taking place in the heavenly realms.





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So the recommended translation is in the splendour, beauty, or even brightness or brilliance, of holiness. Some translations, such as NIV and NLT, add a possessive: his holiness.

v 7: lightning: cuts with spears of fire/strikes with flashes of lightning/flashes forth flames of fire

There are two translation issues in this short verse: what does the verb **חָצַב** mean, and what does the noun phrase **לְהַבֹּת אֵשׁ** mean? It seems clear in the context of the thunderstorm that these are referring to lightning, but in what way?

The noun **להבה** normally means a flame, but in 1 Samuel 17:7 it is used in reference to Goliath's spear (Jacobson) – the **להבת** of his spear weighed around 7kg, usually understood as meaning the iron blade of his spear. Lightning could certainly be seen as spears of fire, and so Jacobson translates this as 'the voice of the Lord cuts with spears of fire'. Either flames or spears of fire work fairly well for lightning in English poetry; find out what fits best in the local language.

The sense of the verb root **חצב** is to *hew, hew out* (Jacobson) or to *hew out, cut, inscribe* (HALOT), with related meanings to *dig*, and to *inscribe* or *work with stone*. In Hosea 6:5 the verb is used, also in Qal, **חָצַבְתִּי**, to describe a punishment of the Lord inflicted on disobedient Ephraim and Judah, which is usually translated 'cut in pieces', or 'hewn', with the sense of attack. This would be well translated with 'strike' in English, but check what can be done, especially poetically, in terms of lightning striking or attacking in the local language.

v 8: wilderness of Kadesh/holy desert

There are two translation issues here: the first is simply what kind of desert is **מְדִבְרָה** referring to?

This is not a sandy desert, but 'semidesert steppe country that was not permanently settled'

(Craigie); 'a desolate area that is not cultivated nor inhabited by farming people. Because it is out beyond the limits of where people settle, a *wilderness* is looked upon as dangerous. It may be inhabited by nomads and their herds, and by wild animals. In the Middle East such areas are treeless but often have grassy patches where herds can graze.' (Alter)

The second issue is whether **קִדְשׁ** should be understood as the proper noun 'Kadesh' or the adjective 'holy', **קִדְוֶה**, also found as **קִדְשׁ**. There does not seem to be much justification for the adjective, and although Craigie proposes this, it is not used by any of the major English or Portuguese translations. In addition, as Wendland points out, throughout the psalms there are many word pairs following a generic-specific pattern. In this psalm we find this in v5 with the specific location being given after the general description: v5 cedars.... cedars of Lebanon, which fits well with v8: wilderness....wilderness of Kadesh.

The commentaries which choose the place name Kadesh spend a good deal of ink discussing whether this is referring to the Kadesh of the Sinai tradition, or Kadesh/Qadesh in Syria. The Sinai Kadesh is in the south, linking with the north-south movement of the thunderstorm in Psalm 29, and also alluding back to the Lord's appearance at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, where there is thunder, lightning, and the mountain trembles. The Kadesh/Qadesh in Syria is proposed by some as it keeps



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all the specified geographical locations in the psalm in the north. For translation purposes, there is no real need to decide.

Verse 9a: is it deer giving birth, or oaks being stripped?

There are two main options for translating this verse. They are:

‘The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth
and strips the forests bare,’

(Segal, NASB, LEB, CEV and ARA *Port*, ESV)

and:

‘the voice of the LORD twists mighty oaks
and strips the forests bare.’

(NIV, NRSV, NET, NTLH *Port*, NCV, GNB, NVI *Port*, NLT)

The choice is whether in v9a the psalmist is referring to deer, or to large trees.

The noun in v9a is אֵילֹת, meaning ‘deer’; the verb חיל can mean to writhe or tremble, or to be in labour, thus the Lord ‘causes the deer to be in labour’. However, a simple vocalisation change from אֵילֹת ‘deer’ to אֵילֹת ‘large trees, oaks’, would give the second translation above.

Either translation is acceptable. The choice comes down to how important translators consider the parallelism in Psalm 29 to be, compared with the relative importance of the Masoretic pointing. Those less concerned about the parallelism will probably choose ‘deer’ in 9a and ‘forests’ in 9b, as in the first example above.

Those who are more concerned about the parallelism in Ps 29, and happy to accept the vocalisation change in 9a, will translate with oaks + forests, as in the second example above.

This guide would recommend the latter interpretation, oaks/trees and forests, on the basis that:

- the parallelism in Psalm 29 is a key feature
- the required vocalisation change to 9a is very limited
- all the other features of the thunderstorm are connected with non-animal objects, so trees, mountains, deserts (although there are similes using animals).

However, if it would cause difficulties for the participants at a workshop to follow the choice of the guide translations, because of other translations in use in the area, the deer + forests combination is a perfectly valid choice.

Verse 11: verb TAMs: are these indicative present *gives, blesses*; or indicative future *will give/will bless*; or jussive *may he give, may he bless*?

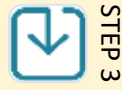
The verbs are יִתֵּן and יְבַרֵךְ, *yiqtol* verbs. Grammatically, there is no clear signal from the TAMs of preceding verbs, and any of the options above are possible; all three have been used by different translations. However, in the context of this psalm, the Lord has been shown to be powerful and



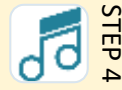
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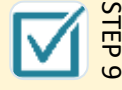
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victorious, and to be enthroned, now and forever. As a result of this enthronement, the blessings of strength and peace are available now to be enjoyed by his people.

In addition, there is no ‘voice’ in the psalm that would naturally be making such a petition, if the jussive were used; there are no first-person referents, either singular or plural, and no reference to the identity of the psalmist. We may assume congregational singing, possibly at the Feast of Tabernacles (according to the LXX superscription, not present in the Hebrew MT), but there is no clear statement of this in the psalm.

For these reasons, this guide prefers to use the indicative present of these verbs, or in a local language a tense which indicates a present with ongoing consequences.

B. Segmentation

There is almost no argument over the segmentation in Psalm 29. The repetitions divide the psalm:

- Praising the Lord, v1-2: the triple repeat of *הִבְּיָנוּ לַיהוָה*, *ascribe to the Lord*
- The thunderstorm image, v3-9: the sevenfold repeat of *קוֹל יְהוָה*, *the voice of the Lord*
- Praising the Lord on his throne, v 10-11: the fourfold repeat of *יְהוָה* + verb, *the Lord + verb*

The second stanza:

The majority of Bible translations keep v3-9 together as one stanza. Those who do not, such as the ESV and NRSV, break the stanza into couplets, ie after v 4, 6, 8 and 9. GNB also does this but combines 7-9. This may be easier to read, but makes the segmentation harder to follow.

The placing of line 9c:

There is an issue as to whether 9c, ‘and in his temple all cry ‘Glory’!’ should form the end of the second stanza, or the beginning of the third. Essentially, if it is placed at the end of the second stanza, the interpretation is of an earthly temple. If the line is moved to the beginning of the third stanza, the temple is seen as a heavenly one, in which God is enthroned. Craigie vigorously refutes the latter, however, arguing inter alia that the closing stanza should not begin with *vav* and that the rhythm of the psalm does not allow it to have five cola. Placing it at the end of the second stanza, however, allows v9 to be the only verse in the psalm which is a tricolon, the final line being an appropriate response to the preceding verses.

Bible translations evidently agree with Craigie; many do not divide the psalm into stanzas at all, but of those that do, all have a division between v9c and v10.

Chiastic structure of the psalm

Bratcher, in the *Translators’ Handbook*, proposes a chiastic structure to the psalm. This is a convincing explanation for the single colon in v7, as it forms the axis of the chiasm. (Verse 4 is also noticeably shorter than the other verses in Hebrew, but it is a bicolon.)

Slightly remodelled, this is:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| A | 1-2 Lord (four times) |
| B | 1 strength |



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C	3 waters
D	4 majesty
E	5 cedars
F	6 Lebanon
G	7 flashes of fire
F'	8 Kadesh
E'	9 oaks
D'	10 enthroned
C'	10 flood
B'	11 strength
A'	10-11 Lord (four times)

NET notes have a similar but shorter chiasm, also pivoting around v7, but involving only v5-9.

These are convincing, but of limited interest in a workshop context, particularly as neither provides an explanation as to *why* v7 should be the pivot of the whole psalm. The other issue with Bratcher's chiasm is the blurring of the stanza divisions, with v 3 & 4, the opening of stanza two, reflected in v10, which is in stanza three. For this reason the chiastic structure has not been used in the guide, although the quadruple name of the Lord in stanzas one and three has been noted.

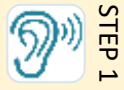
C. Intertextuality

Brueggeman notes that the words עָז and בְּרֵךְ at the end of Ps 29 connect that psalm with the final two verses of preceding psalm, Ps 28 (there is in addition the term עֲמֹן, which he doesn't comment on). In Ps 28, v 8 declares that יְהוָה עֲזָרְלָמוֹ 'the Lord is the strength of his people', and v9 the Lord is requested to 'save his people עֲמֹן, and to bless וּבֵרַךְ his inheritance.'

Craigie notes that there are close parallels between Ps 29 and other songs in the OT, in particular Miriam/Moses' song in Exodus 15:1-18, the Song of the Sea, and Deborah's song in Judges 5.

Although very different in many respects, Ps 29 and Exodus 15 share some features in common: the use of עָז, *strength*, the close conjunction of עָז with the *name* of the Lord (successive verses in each case), a reference to *sons of God* or *gods*, and *among the gods*, and a stress at the end on the Lord's kingship.

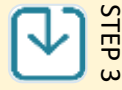
Deborah's song in Judges 5 relates to the world of nature in a similar way to Ps29: she refers to the whole world of nature being involved in the conquest of Canaan – 'as the Lord marched out from Seir, ... the earth shook.. the mountains quaked..' and in the particular battle of the moment, she notes in v20 that the 'stars... in their courses... fought against Sisera' and in v21 that the waters of the river swept the enemy away.



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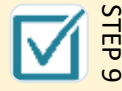
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Neither of these, however, comes close to using the storm imagery of Ps29. For that, we need to turn to the theophanies of Scripture: the Lord’s appearance at Mount Sinai, as mentioned above, where there is thunder, lightning, and the mountain trembles. His self-revelation to Elijah on the same mountain in 1 Kings 19, also refers to a great and powerful wind, an earthquake, and fire (although in that case the Lord was not in those, but was in a gentle whisper that followed). The vision of the Lord in Ezekiel 1 is perhaps even closer, with a windstorm coming out of the north, accompanied by flashing fire, while the sound of the creatures’ wings is like **מִים רַבִּים**.

In the New Testament, the closest parallel is in Revelation 4:5, where the heavenly throne room is described: ‘From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder’.

It is clear that in the whole sweep of the Bible, the real presence of the Lord is awesome and full of power, often referred to as being accompanied by thunder and lightning, or fire, so that the description of the Lord’s presence in a huge thunderstorm in Ps29 is not a strange one and certainly does not need to be explained in terms of taking on Canaanite imagery and beliefs. Note that none of these includes rain, which is perhaps why rain is not referred to in Psalm 29, despite the image of the thunderstorm.

The closest connection intertextually however, does not relate to the storm imagery, but to the opening two verses. These are effectually ‘contained’ within Ps96: 7-9. Ps 96:7 is identical to Ps29:1, except that the **בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים** of Ps 29 is replaced by **מִשְׁפְּחוֹת עַמִּים** ‘families of nations’ in Ps96. Moving on, Ps 29:2a is the same as Ps 96:8a, and Ps 29:2b is the same as Ps 96:9a. The interesting thing is that although Ps 96 is not ascribed to David in the psalter (it has no superscription), the whole of Ps 96, including the verses that overlap with Ps 29, is found in the longer song in 1 Chronicles 16:23-33, which David instructs Asaph and the group of singers to sing on the occasion of the Ark being brought into Jerusalem.

D. Psalm 29 and OT victory songs

There are victory songs in the OT over specific named enemies (Miriam and Moses’ song in Exodus 15 over the Egyptians; Deborah’s song in Judges 5 over the Canaanites, see above). Psalm 29 has been compared with these, and even described as a ‘general victory hymn’ (Craigie). It is true that Psalm 29 has a number of similarities with the OT victory songs, but there is one significant difference: Baal is never named. As a false god, Baal never actually existed, and probably for that reason he is not named as an enemy. The other victory songs were against real enemies. And those enemies had specific and real spheres of power. Baal has no sphere of power, as Ps 29 conclusively proves - all the giants of nature supposedly under Baal’s command are actually under the command of the Lord.

It may not be true to say that because Baal is a false god, there is no reference to a battle with him. In fact, 1 Kings 18 does describe a conflict between Yahweh and Baal. However, the key feature of Baal on that occasion is his non-existence: he does not speak, he does not answer. The context is that, after a long drought sent by Yahweh, an altar is set up on Mount Carmel. The 450 prophets of Baal go first but get absolutely no response from their god, whereas the Lord answers Elijah’s prayer with fire from heaven, and (later) rain. Despite this evidence of Baal’s non-existence, however, the Israelites continued turning to him, and no victory song is recorded for that ‘battle’.



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Appendix F: Images

Baal



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baal_with_Thunderbolt





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Cedars of Lebanon



<https://chiswickhouseandgardens.org.uk/2016/10/27/conservation-famous-chiswick-house-gardens-cedars-lebanon/>

