

The Voice

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Num 7:89a

(BHS)

וּבָא מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אֱהֹל מוֹעֵד
לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ
וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶת־הַקּוֹל מְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו
מֵעַל הַכַּפֹּרֶת

(ASV)

And when Moses went into the tent of meeting
to speak with him,
then he heard the Voice speaking unto him
from above the mercy-seat

Pretty straightforward Hebrew for once. You should be able to just follow along. One important thing to note however: “the LORD” is not mentioned by name—there is just “him” and the Voice. It is amazing how many English translations gratuitously interpolate it into the text (ESV, NIV, NLT, etc.).

Azzan Yadin in his 2003 article defines a “hypostasis” this way, “a quality, attribute, manifestation of God which is personified and differentiated from God so as to be a distinct or even independent divine being in its own right.” Think of an “avatar.”

Yadin identifies a number of hypostases in the Old Testament. God’s Spirit is an attribute of God but is also a mediator or even an independent agent. In Christian theology we consider him a Person in the Trinity. Another example is the Angel of the LORD. He is Yahweh—the “name” of God is “in him” (Exod 23:21)—and yet he is sent on covenantal mission from Yahweh. Christians can identify him with the second Person of the Trinity. We might also mention the personification of God’s Wisdom. “Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence” (Prov 8:30 NIV). An attribute of God who has its own personality and presence.

Other possible hypostases are God's Glory in Ezekiel (personified in cherubim), and God's Holiness in Isaiah (personified in seraphim). Anyway, Yadin suggests that sometimes in the Bible, such as in our verse, the Voice of God is also a hypostasis, a manifestation of God who is also differentiated from God. As if this divine disembodied Voice was a Being in its own right.

The very first occurrence of the Voice is Gen 3:8. Adam and Eve heard the Voice and fled (see KJV, ASV, Darby, Jub, etc.). In our verse the Voice speaks to Moses from above the ark in the Tent of Meeting.

Psa 29:3 – 9 celebrates the divine attribute of the Voice. Here it is in NIV.

The **voice of the LORD** is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.

The **voice of the LORD** is powerful;
the **voice of the LORD** is majestic.

The **voice of the LORD** breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.
He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
Sirion like a young wild ox.

The **voice of the LORD** strikes
with flashes of lightning.

The **voice of the LORD** shakes the desert;
the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh.

The **voice of the LORD** twists the oaks
and strips the forests bare.
And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

Here, the voice of God is probably thunder and tree-splitting lightning. The psalmist sees Yahweh's power on display as a manifestation of his glory.

The Voice terrified Adam and Eve. It instructed Moses. It devastatingly prevails over the created order, both land and sea.

I like to think that Jesus is the Voice of God incarnate. In the New Testament, Jesus is never called the Voice (*phōnē*), but he is called the Word (*logos*). He is the word become flesh. Perhaps he is the Voice become flesh.

There are three places in the gospels where Jesus spoke with a “loud” (*mega*) voice. I suppose it is in those places that Jesus most clearly fulfills the Voice motif. When you read “loud voice,” think, “the **voice of the LORD**” that overpowers creation in Psalm 29. Here are the first two places (ESV):

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a **loud voice**, saying, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46).

“And Jesus cried out again with a **loud voice** and yielded up his spirit” (Matt 27:50).

The Voice that commanded Moses, that thunders and splits trees, the Voice that terrified guilty Adam and Eve—is the Voice who cried out from the cross in anguish of soul and body. The Voice finally died on the cross.

Think about that for a moment.

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But there is a third place that Jesus spoke with a loud voice. It is here: “When Jesus said these things, he cried out with a **loud voice**, “Lazarus, come out!” (John 11:43).

The Voice that suffered and died for his people will return for you. He will cry out at your grave, and you will live. And then we will see the final fulfillment of this motif in Scripture.

Hallelujah! Come Lord Jesus, the Voice of the LORD!