



Psalm 19 - God's Glory in Creation and the Law

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

Introduction

In singing this Psalm, God's people celebrate his Law, the Torah, as his supreme revelation of himself. The Psalm recounts the way the creation speaks of its Maker (vv.1-6), and then the way in which the Mosaic Law addresses the soul (vv.7-11), followed by the humble response that this calls for (vv.12-14). As Moses does in Genesis Chapters 1-2, the Psalm identifies the transcendent Creator, i.e. God in v.1, with the covenant God of Israel, that is, the Lord in vv.7-9.

Psalm 19:1-6 - The Eloquent Heavens.

These verses describe how features of the sky bear witness to their Maker; in so doing, the song directs attention to divine speech that goes out to all humanity. The ode to the sun (vv.4c-6) follows from the opening, giving a very specific way in which the voice of the heavens is revealed to all mankind; the thought of its scorching heat leads to the next section, the searching and pure law of the Lord.

- 1 The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
- 2 Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.

Psalm 19:1-2

The heavens and the firmament above recall the creation account of Genesis Chapter One. David looked to the heavens - not the spiritual heaven where God is enthroned, but the heavens of the blue sky and the night sky - and he clearly saw the glory of God declared. He could see it in the blue sky, with the glory of the sun and clouds, and the beauty of sunrises and sunsets. He could see it in the night

sky, with the brightness of the moon, the awe of the starry sky and the cloudy spread of the distant galaxies. These together - with their size, their awe, their grandeur - shouted to David and all who would see, 'The God who created all this is glorious, and this is evidence of his glory.'

- He is glorious in his size, having created something so big.
- He is glorious in his engineering, having created something that works together so well.
- He is glorious in his artistry, having created something so beautiful.
- He is glorious in his goodness and kindness, having created something for all humanity to see.

The glory of God is therefore his power, wisdom, and worthiness of honour and worship: <<*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created*>> (Revelation 4:11).

The firmament proclaims his handiwork. David repeats the idea in the previous line. Firmament is a poetic way of referring to the heavens or the sky, and they show the creative handiwork of God. The prophet describes it in a similar way: <<*It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in*>> (Isaiah 40:22).

Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. The day sky and the night sky speak to all of mankind, and reveal knowledge about the glory, wisdom, and creative greatness of God.

- ³ There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
- ⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
- ⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

Psalm 19:3-5

The speech here is that mentioned in v.2a; its voice is not heard, i.e. all people receive it, although not all attend to it.

Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. Paul uses these words in Romans 10:18-19 to show that the entire world has received some kind of message. Refer to the comments made on that passage.

The Apostle Paul expanded on this idea in Romans Chapter One. He explained that God's invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse: <<*Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened*>> (Romans 1:20-21). Paul explains that because this testimony had gone out through all creation, all men are without excuse for rejecting the God who gave them such clear and beautiful evidence of his power and wisdom.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun. David poetically described the night time sky as a dwelling place - a tent or tabernacle - for the sun. The sun comes out of his 'tent' every day to cross the heavens, and returns to his tabernacle at night.

⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hidden from its heat.

Psalm 19:6

Like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. The sun makes its course through the sky with strength and joy; like a man in his prime or an athlete running a race: <<*'So perish all your enemies, O Lord! But may your friends be like the sun as it rises in its might.' And the land had rest for forty years*>> (Judges 5:31).

Its rising is from the end of the heavens; nothing is hidden from its heat. The sun covers the whole sky, and its strength extends everywhere: <<*From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the Lord is to be praised*>> (Psalm 113:3), and: <<*The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises*>> (Ecclesiastes 1:5). It is a wonderful example of the glory of God declared in the heavens.

Psalm 19:7-11 - The Perfect Torah.

These verses describe some characteristics and effects of God's revelation to Moses. The terms law, decrees, precepts, commandment, and ordinances all come from the Pentateuch and are ways of referring to the Mosaic covenant. The whole section builds up to the delight expressed in vv.10-11.

- 7 The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure,
making wise the simple;
- 8 the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear,
enlightening the eyes;
- 9 the fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring for ever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true
and righteous altogether.

Psalm 19:7-9

The law of the Lord. Here David abruptly shifted from praising the God who reveals himself in creation to praising the same God for revealing himself in his Word. It is as if David said, “Creation tells us much about God, but his Word tells us much more.”

One reason the Word is a greater revelation than creation is that it reveals much more about God. It reveals him as the covenant God of love, as reflected in the structure of this Psalm. In vv.1-6, God is referred to as *'El* - the most generic word for God in the Hebrew language, even more generic than the commonly used *'Elohim*. Yet here God is referred to as *Yahweh* - the Lord, the God of covenant love and faithfulness to his people.

David then explains seven glorious statements about the Word of God; how wonderful and effective it is. As is common in other places, especially the great Psalm 119, David uses a variety of expressions to refer to the Word of God: law, testimony, statutes, commandment, fear, judgements. It is best to see these as poetic terms describing God's written revelation in general, rather than one specific type of revelation, such as only the laws given in the Mosaic Law.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The Word of God is perfect. It gives all things that pertain to life and godliness: <<*But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing*>> (James 1:25), and: <<*His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness,*

through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness>> (2 Peter 1:3). While it does not provide all knowledge, all the knowledge it gives is true and perfect. Understood in its literary context, God's Word is never wrong in science or history or the understanding of either divine or human nature. Part of the perfection of God's Word is that it is effective; it does the work of converting the soul. There is power in the reading and hearing and studying of the Word of God that goes beyond intellectual benefit; it actually changes for the better, i.e. converts, the soul.

Reviving the soul. That is, giving refreshment to the spirit as used in: <<*Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest are faithful messengers to those who send them; they refresh the spirit of their masters*>> (Proverbs 25:13); David uses a similar statement in: <<*He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake*>> (Psalm 23:2-3).

The decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple. The Word of God is sure, being reliable and certain. As the psalmist would write at Psalm 119:89, <<*The Lord exists for ever; your word is firmly fixed in heaven*>>. Sure, by its passive form, can mean not only what is firm but what is confirmed. Because it is so sure and certain, it does the work of making wise the simple. Many people of simple education or upbringing have tremendous wisdom concerning life and godliness because they study and trust the sure Word of the Lord.

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. God's Word and the commands contained within are right. They are morally right, they are practically right, and they are universally right. They are right because it is the revelation of a God who is holy, true, and always right.

The commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes. Because God's Word comes from a God who is himself pure and holy, it itself is pure. A pure God can communicate no other way. The believer never has to worry about the Word of God leading people into sin or impurity; if it seems to have happened, it is evidence that the scriptures have been twisted: <<*So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures*>> (2 Peter 3:15b-16). For the eyes to have light or to be bright is for the person to be alert and active, as confirmed in: <<*But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the troops with the oath; so he extended the staff that was in his hand, and dipped the tip of it in the honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes brightened*>> (1 Samuel 14:27), <<*But now for a brief moment favour has been shown by the Lord our God, who has left us a remnant, and given us a stake in his holy place, in order that he may brighten our eyes and grant us a little sustenance in our slavery*>> (Ezra 9:8),

<<Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death>> (Psalm 13:3), <<My heart throbs, my strength fails me; as for the light of my eyes – it also has gone from me>> (Psalm 38:10), and: <<The poor and the oppressor have this in common: the Lord gives light to the eyes of both>> (Proverbs 29:13).

The fear of the Lord often means revering God, but here it is the revealed way by which one properly reveres God, i.e. the precepts of the covenant and is seen similarly in: *<<Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord>> (Psalm 34:11).*

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring for ever. The Word of God is clean, and therefore is enduring forever. It is a reliable transcript of God's will. It will never fade or corrode, diminishing because of impurity. It is clean and it makes clean: *<<You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you>> (John 15:3), and: <<Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word>> (Ephesians 5:25-26).* Here David called the Word of God the fear of the Lord. It is deeply connected to the awe and majesty of God himself. One who reads and hears and studies the Word of God, meeting him in his Word, will have an appropriate appreciation of God's awe and majesty.

The ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. David summarised this beautiful chain of seven pearls, each describing some aspect of the Word of God. Here he declared that the Words of God are true and righteous altogether; there is nothing false or unrighteous in his Word. There is no applied aspect to this statement as in the previous six. For David, it was enough to simply say it: true and righteous altogether. Perhaps David assumed others would be wise and logical enough to apply it themselves: 'Therefore read it, study it, meditate on it, love it, and live it.' Remember that King David wrote this with only a fraction of what is known today as the Word of God; and by most accounts his portion was not as glorious as the complete revelation of God. David would have the first five books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy); Joshua, Judges, a few Psalms, and perhaps Job and Ruth. It can only be imagined what King David would have written about if he had had Isaiah or Hosea or the entire Psalter; much less any of the books of the New Testament. It can be said with confidence that God's Word is far more glorious than King David ever knew!

¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb.

Psalm 19:10

More to be desired are they than gold. The fundamental attitude here is one of delight: God's instructions are more desirable than the best riches, as confirmed in: <<*Truly I love your commandments more than gold, more than fine gold*>> (Psalm 119:127), and: <<*My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver*>> (Proverbs 8:19), and more pleasurable than the finest tastes: <<*My child, eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste. Know that wisdom is such to your soul; if you find it, you will find a future, and your hope will not be cut off*>> (Proverbs 24:13-14).

¹¹ Moreover by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

Psalm 19:11

Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. David here gave two reasons why the Word of God was greater than material wealth or sensual pleasures. God's Word gives instruction and warning that wealth or pleasures do not give.

- Warning is needed for sins that people are susceptible to.
- Warning is needed for dangers that people cannot see.
- Warning is needed for dangers that people cannot appreciate.
- Warning is needed for dangers far off in the future.
- Warnings are often rejected.

This great reward is the proper outcome; in this case assurance and character growth: <<*Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me'*>> (Mark 10:21).

Psalm 19:12-14 - The Humble Response.

Although some may use the Law of God as a means of self-promotion, that is not what this Psalm instils. Instead it leads the singers to reflect on their own moral failures, known and unknown; to rely on God's forgiveness; and to seek protection from sin's domination.

¹² But who can detect their errors?
Clear me from hidden faults.

Psalm 19:12

But who can detect their errors? In the previous verse David reflected on the warnings found in the Word of God, and in the great reward found in obeying God's Word. This made him reflect on the times and ways he had ignored the warnings and not kept the Word. David understood that he had ignored and disobeyed God's Word even more than he was aware of. What he knew was enough to make him concerned; his actual errors before God were still worse.

The word hidden shows the flow of thought in the Psalm: just as the sun's heat searches every nook and cranny so that <<*nothing is hidden from its heat*>> (v.6), so too the law searches all the hiding places of the soul; the honest faithful can only ask God to declare them innocent. This prayer includes a request for forgiveness even from hidden sins which one does not remember, or which were committed in ignorance: <<*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin*>> (Psalm 51:2), <<*You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance*>> (Psalm 90:8), and: <<*For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every secret thing, whether good or evil*>> (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

- 13 Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
 do not let them have dominion over me.
 Then I shall be blameless,
 and innocent of great transgression.

Psalm 19:13

The insolent here are those who commit presumptuous sins, which are sins committed in arrogant disregard of divine commands: <<*As for anyone who presumes to disobey the priest appointed to minister there to the Lord your God, or the judge, that person shall die. So you shall purge the evil from Israel*>> (Deuteronomy 17:12). These, when repeated, come to have dominion, and thus to enslave. Instead the desire is to become blameless, which is what the law is; refer to the comment made on Psalm 18:30. The term innocent points back to v.12; there the singer asked: <<*Clear me from hidden faults*>>, that is, to be declared innocent of great transgression, while here he desires innocence in his own practice as well.

- 14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
 be acceptable to you,
 O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Psalm 19:14

Be acceptable comes from the language of sacrifice, as in: <<*You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable in your behalf*>> (Leviticus 22:20); thus the request is that this song be a suitable act of worship before God, like a sacrifice. The Psalm ends, not on the note of avoiding sin, but on that of offering back to God the mind's fitting response to his own words, as a pure sacrifice: <<*Take words with you and return to the Lord; say to him, 'Take away all guilt; accept that which is good, and we will offer the fruit of our lips'*>> (Hosea 14:2).

O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. King David looked to the Lord God to be his strength and redemption. He knew that he needed a Redeemer, and that the faithful God would rescue him. Strength can also be translated as Rock. God's strength is like a mighty rock that rescues people and gives them a firm standing place. Redeemer is that great Hebrew word *goel*, the kinsman-redeemer. It was the *goel* who bought his relative out of slavery; who rescued him in bankruptcy and total loss. King David looked to God himself as his kinsman-redeemer.

This Psalm has run a glorious course. It begins with recognising the glory of God in creation, then the glory of his written revelation. Next to this great God and his great works, David knew himself to be small and sinful. Yet this great God would also be David's strength and redeemer as David put his trust in him. The glorious God of creation and revelation was also the glorious God of personal relationship and redemption for his people. King David knew this; so should all Christian believers.