

By Dr. Kenneth Gore, Professor of Biblical Studies, Dallas Baptist University

Lesson Four: Creation Declares God's Glory

Focal Text: Psalm 19 **Background:** Romans 1:19-20

Main Idea: The natural world testifies that the Creator is indeed God.

Question to Explore: How do I see evidence of God in creation?

Quick Read: All one needs to do is look at the sky, and they will see evidence of God.

Introduction

“If God is real, why doesn't He show himself to us?”

Such a question has been asked by so many people since early history. Atheists and agnostics alike have surmised that, if God surely existed, God would display Himself in a way that even the most ardent opponent to His existence would come to believe in Him.

At the same time, for those who *do* believe in God, there is a question as to *how* they believe. If God is so vast and mighty, and infinitely greater than any of His creation could ever be or become, it stands to reason that the only way someone could believe in the existence of God is for God Himself to reveal that to them. Thus, there is a revelation that God has put in place, so individuals may believe that God exists, yet do so in a way without coercing them. They still must accept God by faith.

Psalm 19 is a masterful portrayal of the revelation of God, which allows the psalmist to see God in two different ways: through the general revelation of creation and the special revelation of God's Word. In so doing, such a revelation should evoke a response which cause individuals to follow God completely and wholeheartedly.

Commentary

The fourteen verses¹ of Psalm 19 share the revelation of God, and they allow the psalmist to conclude that this God is worthy of respect and worship. This psalm is categorized as a hymn, the most basic of all psalm categories. A hymn simply praises God for who God is. It may contain the following format: a call to worship, a description of God, and a concluding praise.² In Psalm 19, the psalm focuses primarily upon God's glory, as it is displayed through His creation and His instruction.

The psalm can be easily divided into three sections. The first section speaks of God's general revelation as displayed in His creation (vv. 1-6). The second section of the psalm notes the special revelation that God has shown in His writings, the "Law" (vv. 7-11). The third section brings the psalm to a formidable conclusion, allowing the psalmist to look inward and decide for himself to follow the God who has revealed Himself to Him (vv. 12-14).

God's General Revelation: The Creation (19:1-6)

Rather than beginning the hymn with a call to worship, the psalmist described how the heavens honored God. These heavens "declare the glory of God" and "they proclaim the work of his hands" (v. 1). The introductory verse not only forms a synonymous parallelism, but the original rendition does so in a chiasm³:

Heavens—declare—glory of God

Work of God's hand—proclaim—sky

Or an "a b c//c' b' a'" format. Such a chiasm focuses upon the sky in much the same way that Psalm 8 does (cf. Psalm 8:1, 3). This declaration not only takes place during the day, but it also occurs during the vast night sky. The heavens "pour forth speech," and they "reveal knowledge" (v. 2).

Though the heavens proclaim God's glory in this manner, not a sound is uttered. Indeed, the very essence of silence evoked all that needed to be said. "They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them" (v. 3). This silence from the heavens is deafening, for it allowed the psalmist to be still and to listen to the majestic silence of the day or night sky. Although there may be no sound, and there were no words, the message⁴ of the heavens still is transmitted into all the earth—to the very ends of the world (v. 4).

After spending four verses expounding upon the heavens in general, the psalmist focused upon the greatest orb in the sky, the sun, in particular. The sun has long been the subject of worship by many cultures over the ages. Egypt believed its Pharaoh was the incarnation of the sun god Ra; the Babylonians worshiped the sun god Shamash. In this psalm, however, the sun is neither the subject nor the object of worship. Instead, the sun provided further proof that the heavens declared God's glory.

God provided a place for the sun in the sky, as He has "pitched a tent" for it (v. 4b). The psalmist then described what role the sun played in the sky. First, it is majestic. He described it twofold: like a "bridegroom" coming out of its canopy, and it rejoiced like a champion⁵ running a path. The psalmist, having described the sunrise in this manner, designed it in a majestic way. Each day it rose, it joyfully began a new day.

Second, the sun followed a path. The predictability of the sun's path showed the glory of God. This is not some chaotic orb which followed its own whims; instead, it has an appointed path that

“rises at one end of the heavens” and sets in the other. Such predictability enabled early observers of the sun to calculate seasons and years. Later by understanding the orbit of the moon, they would also calculate eclipses. Rather than creating fear, the sun’s predictability should instead create a sense of awe.

Third, the sun is enveloping. While the sun may cast a shadow, and the clouds may cover its light, nothing can escape its heat or light while it is shining across the world. Instead, all creation would benefit from it each day.

The psalmist remarkably portrayed the sun in a magnificent way. However, there must be no mistake: this beautiful object cannot be worshiped. Nature may be placed in personified terms, but it is never to be deified.⁶ Reminiscent of Genesis chapter 1, the heavens are not gods to be glorified. Instead, God is their Creator, and they are His creation.

God’s Special Revelation: The Scriptures (19:7-11)

After reading the first six verses, readers could conclude that there is someone greater than themselves who has created the heavens. It would therefore be reasonable to conclude that a higher power exists. However, the psalmist was determined to show that God wanted His creation to believe that God and God alone made all of this. Thus, God gave His creation words of wisdom, that if His creation would follow them, they would become full of wisdom and righteousness.

Collectively, these writings are called *torah*. While *torah* can be translated “law,” it can also mean “instruction,” “teaching,” or “counsel.” Discovering what these teachings are, and having the ability to meditate upon them, would make these readers wise.

Verses 7-9 contain six poetic lines, which provide elaboration for what the instruction of God is. Four of the six lines follow a similar pattern⁷:

“The ____ A ____ of Yahweh is ____ B ____ ,
____ C ____ the ____ D ____ .”

- A. The word *torah* (or its synonym) is used as the subject—*Yahweh* is the creator of *torah*;
- B. An adjective (or participle) serves as the predicate of *torah*;
- C. A participle explains the benefits of A and B;
- D. A noun (the object of the participle).

—A: The word *Torah* (or its synonyms) explain what these items are. Whether it is called “Law,” “testimony,” “precept,” or “command,” they are saying the same thing. These are instructions from the Lord, counsel from God for His followers to learn.

—*Yahweh* is the creator of *torah*. He is the one who sets their parameters, as well as their purpose. If they meditate upon God’s words, they will prosper (Psalm 1:2-3).

—B: The adjective (or participle) provides the predicate as to what these instructions are. They are perfect, trustworthy (lit., “sure,” “faithful”), right, and radiant (lit., “pure”). They are of this manner, because of the God who gave it to them.

—C & D: The participle and the noun serve to qualify the benefits of the instruction to the reader. They “refresh the soul,” give wisdom, provide joy, and give insight for living.

Rather than seeing each of these as singular, “stand-alone” statements, they should be taken together. When placed together, they are like many facets of a diamond. As the diamond is turned into the light, so its facets sparkle and shimmer. Such is the case with the instruction of God. The conclusion of each statement is the same: their counsel is worth the time for them to study and meditate, for these instructions reveal who God truly is.

After listing these four lines pertaining to the counsel of God and the reward of learning them, the psalmist provides two additional lines which show further qualities of following God. It is wise to fear the Lord, and it is wise to follow God’s precepts. Both are pure; both are righteous (v. 9).

The things that God has created—whether they are the macrocosm of the heavens or the microcosm of His Holy Word—reveal to viewers and readers who this God truly is. Such majesty of the heavens and such benefits of his instruction should evoke a response to those who observe them.

After viewing the words of God in such an elaborate style, the psalmist concluded that these words are of great benefit. First, they are invaluable. They are more precious (lit., “more desirable”) than gold, even the finest, most refined gold (v. 10a). Second, they are delicious. They are sweeter than honey, even honey which dripped from the honeycomb (v. 10b). Third, they provide warning. By knowing these words, which reveal to the reader who the Lord is, they are worth the time to know, as they provide great instruction (v. 11a). Fourth, they are rewarding. Keeping the precepts of God will provide much reward, possibly materially, but undoubtedly spiritually (v. 11b). The poet realized that the words of God would not lead anyone astray, and this would be beneficial for anyone to keep them throughout their lives.

Humanity’s Appropriate Response (19:12-14)

In a sense, God has done all the “talking” so far in this psalm. God has spoken through His creation and the meticulous nature in which He made it. He has declared Himself through His

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written Word, *torah*, and provided the benefits of following it. Now came the time for humanity to respond. After all, it is not enough for God to declare Himself to others; they must also accept and receive Him.

Now that the psalmist has found the value in the revelation of God, in both creation (general) and in word (special), he evaluated where he stood in the midst of such a holy God. “But who can discern his own errors?” (v. 12a) is how the NIV renders this, but in the Hebrew no personal pronoun is attached to the sentence. Instead, if one rendered the sentence “Who can discern errors?” (as it literally states in the Hebrew), it allows the understanding that the writer cannot discern anything, but he knew who could.

Because God can discern errors, he invited God to “forgive my hidden faults” (v. 12b). Literally, the phrase is “hidden things,” be they sinful or otherwise. In this, God is indeed more powerful than the sun. Whereas the sun emitted heat, and nothing could be hidden from it physically, God emitted His holiness, and nothing could be hidden from Him—period! This caused the psalmist to ask forgiveness for anything that he did in the past.

Verse 12 is reminiscent of Isaiah chapter 6. In that chapter, when Isaiah encountered a holy God, and began to see God for who he truly was, Isaiah began to see himself for who he truly was. This caused Isaiah to ask forgiveness for his past, and it provided him an opportunity to serve God in the future.

Verse 13 calls the present and the future into play. The writer asked God to keep him⁸ from willful sins. In so doing, he will be blameless and innocent of many sins. Verses 12 and 13, then, serve as the past, present, and future of the psalmist’s life. As he encountered the revelation of God, it allowed him to see his past sins, come to terms with his present condition, and think of his future life.

Verse 14 serves as a fitting finale to the psalm, for it brings the psalm to a formidable conclusion. After acknowledging God in nature, and seeing God in his instruction, the psalmist recognized his sin and need for forgiveness. Following his prayer, he hoped that his words and meditation would be pleasing (lit., “acceptable”) before the Lord.

The two words to describe the Lord, “rock” and “redeemer,” are quite amazing. “Rock” (*sur*) is the hard rock that would serve as protection. “Redeemer” (*goel*) is an individual who came and rescued another at a moment of need and vouched for them. This often occurred in the psalmist’s society, in the areas of debt retirement and commerce. Like counter-signing a contract, this person took on the responsibility and the burden of another. In the book of Ruth, the *goel* was Boaz, who provided for both Ruth and Naomi. In the book of Job, Job knew that a *goel* would come and make things right in his life (Job 19:25). Using these two words, “rock” and “redeemer,” to describe God, the psalmist was indeed joyful in knowing God’s redemptive power.

Conclusion

Psalms 19 provides a great hymn to declare who God truly is. It begins in the grandiose, considering the grand design of the heavens. While saying no words, the heavens declare God in such a way that all of the earth can keep silent in order to hear its praise. Yet, God did not stop there. God also provided his written word to ensure that the world could know who he is. These laws, commands, and precepts are pure and whole, and will benefit the one who reads, meditates, and follows them.

Today, it is not as easy to encounter “the heavens” in the way that the psalmist did, but it can be done. As any visitor to West Texas can attest, one can observe both a glorious sunrise and sunset, feeling the power of the sun’s heat as it moves from the East to the West throughout the day. At night, the stars shine brightly and brilliantly. So many stars can be seen that it is easy to get disoriented. The “dark sky” makes it difficult for gazers to find constellations, as there are so many stars to see! Whether in the daylight or into the night, the “silence” of the West Texas sky is humbling.

Likewise, the Word of the Lord, the Bible, is a humbling collection of books. Upon reading them, they provide individuals with a sense of purpose. These books allow them to learn that there is a loving God, who truly wants the best for them. As they read and hear these words, God’s spirit can move upon them to convict them of their sin but also to challenge them to follow him with all their heart, soul, and strength.

Of course, it is possible for someone to witness the grandeur of the day or night skies, read the majestic words of the Scriptures, and still be unable to follow God as the psalmist does. If this happens, it is done willingly, as all who encounter such evidence are truly without excuse (cf. Romans 1:19-20). As the heavens and *torah* declare God’s glory, may many more people do so each day that the Lord carries.

1. As in other psalms, verse one of Hebrew Psalm 19 is the same as the heading in the English versions. Consequently, the Hebrew version has 15 verses. For the sake of simplicity, this study will follow the NIV numbering of the verses.

2. Adapted from William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 433.

3. Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger Jr., *Psalms*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 102. (For a further explanation of chiasm, please consult Lesson One of this GC2 Press Commentary on Psalms.)

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4. The word translated “message” (or NIV’s “voice”) is *qaw* (“line”). While several comment that this might be a misspelling of the word *qōlām* (“voice”), “line” can have the same meaning, albeit a bit harder to understand.
5. While the NIV uses “champion,” the word *gibbôr* is more like a strongman or a warrior.
6. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 181.
7. Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 368.
8. Brueggemann and Bellinger, 103, note that in verse 13, as well as in verse 11, the phrase “your servant” is used, probably indicating a close relationship between the psalmist and God.