

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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by
William D. Barrick, Th.D.
Professor of OT, The Master's Seminary



Psalm 19 — The Heavens Reveal, The Word Regenerates

1.0 Introducing Psalm 19

- Psalm 19 is “the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world”—C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1958), 63.
- Its impact on the New Testament can be seen especially in Romans 1:18-32 and 10:18.
- Psalm 19 clearly divides into two halves:
 - ◆ The name of God changes: El (once) in verses 1-6, Yahweh (Jehovah; 7 times) in verses 7-14.
 - ◆ The content changes: the World Book in verses 1-6, the Word Book in verses 7-13.
 - ◆ The length of lines changes: longer lines in verses 1-6, shorter lines in verses 7-14.
 - ◆ The application or illustration changes: the sun in verses 4-6, the servant in verses 11-14.
- Psalms 18 and 19 contain a number of related terms and phrases:
 - ◆ Compare 18:30 (“The word of the LORD is tried”) with 19:7-9.
 - ◆ “Blameless”/“Perfect” (18:23, 25, 30; 19:7, 13).
 - ◆ “Rock” and “Deliverer”/“Redeemer” (18:1-2; 19:14).

2.0 Reading Psalm 19 (NAU)


19:1 A Psalm of David.

The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.


19:2 Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.

19:3 There is no speech, nor are there words;
Their voice is not heard.

19:4 Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their utterances to the end of the world.

 In them He has placed a tent for the sun,
19:5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber;
It rejoices as a strong man to run his course.

19:6 Its rising is from one end of the heavens,
And its circuit to the other end of them;

 And there is nothing hidden from its heat.

19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

19:8 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

19:9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;


The judgments of the LORD are true; **they are righteous altogether.**

19:10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

19:11 Moreover, by them Your servant is warned;
In keeping them there is great reward.

19:12 Who can discern *his* errors?
Acquit me of hidden *faults*.


19:13 Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous *sins*;
Let them not rule over me;

 Then I will be blameless, and I shall be acquitted of great transgression.

19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,

 O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

For the choir director.

 This symbol is used to mark verses with 3 poetic lines (tricola). They divide the poem into sections.



3.0 Understanding Psalm 19

3.1 Outline

- I. Natural Revelation (vv. 1-6) – World Book
 - A. Continuousness (vv. 1-2)
 - B. Universality (vv. 3-4b)
 - C. Illustration: The Sun (vv. 4c-6)
- II. Special Revelation (vv. 7-13) – Word Book
 - A. Characteristics and Work (vv. 7-10)
 - B. Application: The Servant (vv. 11-13)
- III. Prayer (v. 14)



3.2 Notes

- v. 1 Chiasm—the first half of the psalm begins and ends with a chiasm.
 - A The heavens
 - B are telling of
 - C the glory of God;
 - C' the work of His hands.
 - B' is declaring
 - A' And their expanse
- v. 2 “pours forth”
 - “The image is literally of a gushing spring that copiously pours forth the sweet, refreshing waters of revelation”—James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994), 1:163.
- v. 3 “Their voice is not heard.”
 - Better to translate: “*Where* their voice is not heard” (NKJV) or “whose sound goes unheard” (NJPS) or “Without their voice being heard.”
 - No matter what language someone speaks, he or she can understand natural revelation.
- v. 4 “their line”
 - See Isaiah 28:10, “line on line.”
 - Natural revelation conveys actual propositions:
 - ✓ God exists.
 - ✓ God is eternal.
 - ✓ God is all-powerful.
 - ✓ God will judge those who reject Him.

- **v. 5** “It rejoices as a strong man to run his course”
 - “The psalmist paints an unforgettable scene of the horizon exploding in vigorous, radiant sunrise.”—Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2001), 45.
 - The sun is an exuberant, enthusiastic, and obedient servant of the Creator.

- **v. 6** Chiasm
 - A from one end of the heavens,
 - B
 - B’
 - A’ to the other end of them;

Its rising is And its circuit

- **v. 7** “revives the soul”
 - In Psalm 23:3 “It may picture the straying sheep brought back, as in Isaiah 49:5, or perhaps Psalm 60:1 (Heb. 3), which use the same verb, whose intransitive sense is often ‘repent’ or ‘be converted’ (e.g. Ho. 14:1f.; Joel 2:12). Psalm 19:7, by its subject (the law) and by the parallel verb (‘making wise’), points to a spiritual renewal of this kind, rather than mere refreshment. On the other hand, *my soul* usually means ‘my life’ or ‘myself’; and ‘restore’ often has a physical or psychological sense, as in Isaiah 58:12, or using another part of the verb, Proverbs 25:13, Lamentations 1:11, 16, 19. In our context the two senses evidently interact, so that the retrieving or reviving of the sheep pictures the deeper renewal of the man of God, spiritually perverse or ailing as he may be.”—Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 110.
 - Is the meaning refreshment or regeneration?
 - Note the parallel line.
 - See 2 Timothy 3:15.

- **v. 9** “they are altogether righteous”
 - “Righteousness inheres in the *torah*, and the righteousness of persons depends on it”—James Luther Mays, *Psalms* (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1994), 99.
 - “They are altogether righteous” can also be taken in the sense of “They make completely righteous” in the sense of “sanctify.”

- **vv. 11, 13** “great reward” and “great transgression”
 - The concept is one of quantity, not quality: “much/abundant reward” and “much/abundant transgression.”

- v. 12 “errors”
 - “The words related to *shagah*, ‘to err,’ suggest some act of turpitude, perpetrated through distraction under the effect of anger, alcoholic intoxication, or the passions of love and hatred (Job 5:24; 12:23; 19:4; Prov 5:23; 19:27; 20:1; cf. 1 Sam 14:24; 26:21; Isa 28:21).”—Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 213.
- v. 13 “let them no rule over me”
 - The language here is reminiscent of Genesis 4:7.
- v. 13 “presumptuous *sins*”
 - See Numbers 15:30-31; Deuteronomy 17:12

4.0 Singing Psalm 19

(Tune: “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”)

- 1 The heavens declare thy glory, Lord,
In every star thy wisdom shines;
But when our eyes behold thy word,
We read thy name in fairer lines.
- 2 The rolling sun, the changing light,
And night and day, thy power confess;
But the blest volume thou hast writ
Reveals thy justice and thy grace.
- 3 Sun, moon, and stars convey thy praise
Round the whole earth, and never stand;
So when thy truth began its race,
It touched and glanced on every land.
- 4 Nor shall thy spreading gospel rest
Till through the world thy truth has run
Till Christ has all the nations blest,
That see the light or feel the sun.
- 5 Great Sun of righteousness, arise,
Bless the dark world with heavenly light:
Thy gospel makes the simple wise;
Thy laws are pure, thy judgments right.

— Isaac Watts



5.0 Praying Psalm 19

- “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, My Rock and My Redeemer” (v. 14).

- Lord, we praise You for Your handiwork. [v. 1]
- Help me know my errors. [v. 12]
- Cleanse me of hidden faults. [v. 13]
- Prevent me from being arrogant and presumptuous, Lord. [v. 13]
- Father, don't let my sins govern me. [v. 13]

6.0 Applying Psalm 19

- All mankind is without excuse because God has revealed Himself in His creation.
- God has revealed Himself in both creation and in His written revelation.
- Salvation can come only through the written revelation, the Word of God.

Observance of those laws will give light to eyes confused by lurid billboards and TV screens, will refresh souls dumbed by soulless sex, will prove more valuable than anything that gold can buy, will taste far sweeter than honey, including sweethearts called "honey," who are readily discarded whenever a more delicious flavor comes along. These positive effects of the observance of those laws will be obtained because they protect the soul, when the sudden onrush of temptation leaves no room for the mind to make lengthy reflections on the long-term benefits of doing the right thing.

— Stanley L. Jaki, *Praying the Psalms*
(Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 65