

## **THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE SKIES AND SCRIPTURE**

### **Psalm 19**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

Psalm 19 is many people's favorite psalm. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat. The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:1-14, NIV).

There's a tremendous cadence and glory to that psalm. C. S. Lewis said, "I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world." The psalm is quoted in the New Testament; it becomes a reference by Paul to show that the Word has gone out to all of Israel so that there is none to say they have an excuse for not knowing God's Word, and the

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psalm also serves as an underpinning for Romans 1:18–3:20 where Paul argues that man not knowing anything about God except what is in nature may know sufficiently about God as to be persuaded of His existence.

The psalm, if you look at it carefully, you realize that the psalm divides into two parts and they're very discernable. Probably more discernable in an outline than almost any of the other psalms. The first six verses of Psalm 19 specifically relate to the glory of God in nature. The last verses, 7–14, relate to the glory of God in His law. Or in the Torah, the Old Testament word being for the law of God, which we call now the first five books of the Bible. An Israel rabbi would be talking about this psalm as a celebration of the Torah.

I've called this psalm "The Glory of God in the Skies and in the Scriptures." Verses 1–6 speak of the glory of God in the skies. Either at nighttime when seeing the heavens and the stars or in the daytime seeing the sun go forth on its run through the sky in the day until it sets in its tent in the evening. Beautiful lyrical language. The glory of God in the skies and the glory of God in the Scriptures. We, from a new perspective, can look at Psalm 19 and say not only as David but we can say all of God's written Word—which we have which David did not have—is contained within the descriptions that David is giving in the law of God.

It is David's conviction that the law of the Lord or the Scripture is no less a marvel of divine creation than the majestic order of the heavenly bodies. If we look at the heavens themselves we stand in amazement at their greatness. We ought also to look at the written Word and have the same amazement toward it as we have toward the skies, the heavens, the sun.

Spurgeon said of this psalm as it divides into two categories, "He is wisest who reads the world book and the word book as two volumes of the same work and feels concerning them, My Father wrote them."

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Let's break the psalm down in manageable parts verse by verse.

#### **I. First the glory of God in the skies, verses 1–6.**

This subdivides into two additional parts. One, the heavens declare God's handiwork. And that would be verses 1–3 and two-thirds of verse 4. Then the second subdivision would be the witness of the sun to the glory of God, the last phrase in verse 4 and then all of verses 5–6. The heavens are telling the glory of God. That is the heavens proclaiming His handiwork.

The word "declaring" means narrating the glory of God. The heavens are telling a story about God. A master is known by his work. If we would go to the Sistine Chapel in Rome and see the work of Michelangelo we'd stand in awe. An artist is known by his work. And God, the artist of the heavens, the creator of the heavens is known by His work. Therefore they are telling about Him. In fact His handiwork is shouting about Him.

**A.** As the psalm opens the hymn of God in creation has already begun eons ago at the time of creation. The first notes of the hymn were sounded as Job puts it in 38:7, "While the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy." Never since creation has the celestial host ceased from singing of our God's handiwork.

The preaching of the heavens has three wonderful aspects. It is without intermission. "Day after day they pour forth speech" (Psalm 19:2, NIV). It is in every kind of language. "There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard" (verse 3, NIV). And it is in every part of the world. "Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world" (verse 4, NIV). Therefore an endless witness, a witness in every language and culture, and a witness in every part of the world. Each day this psalm is saying that nature itself cannot wait to tell the next day the story of creation.

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Here the poet by divine inspiration is giving a human quality to inanimate things. It's almost picturing the fact that when the next day is arising it is passing the baton on to the next day, reminding that new day to take up the song that has been sung by the day before you.

One has said, "Each day has a life of its own...each day is handing a trumpet to its successor to blow the same triumphant note while as evening falls and stars come out each night does likewise."

Despite their endless speech, however, both day and night are wrapped in silence. Here is where the unusual things are going on in the poem. The heavens are declaring the glory of the Lord and yet when you listen and try to hear any songs in the heavens, it's a silent witness they are bearing.

One has said of this silent witness, if you think of the whole heavens and the earth as a great machine which God has made, you know that a machine isn't worth much when it begins to make noise. When your car begins to clunk you know things are beginning to go wrong with it.

But the good machines are ones that make no sound. No deterioration, no mechanical imperfection. There's the silent witness that goes on declaring Him. It is the mighty machine.

The heavens are telling the glory of the Lord.

**B.** Moving past the heavens which include all the daytime sky and the nighttime sky—especially in the first 4 verses David is speaking of the nighttime sky—he comes to the part where he sees the sun as that most magnificent creation, for man. This is a God-centered poem but with a man-related orientation.

The most glorious thing for man is the contemplation of the sun. David sees the sun as a special object of God's creation, which in the heavens God has pitched a tent for that it may have a dwelling place in the evening. His attitude, if you don't get anything out of Psalm 19 except the personification of the sun's attitude toward a new day as applied to your own day, take the two

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metaphors that are used of the sun to describe an attitude for the day. It's like a marathon runner or champion rejoicing to face his course (verse 5). That is, the well-trained runner is waking up and it is the day of the race. As the sun comes out, not thinking, "This is the day someone else is going to beat me in the race." But, "This is the day I've trained for. This is the day I'm going to win."

If that metaphor isn't pleasing enough then the sun is compared to that of a bridegroom on his wedding day who comes out of his pavilion and that day is going to bring the opportunity for the marriage (verse 5). I perform a lot of marriages—I can't think of any reluctant marriages I've performed. People are eager.

What a great attitude to awaken every day with. That's what the psalmist is saying about the sun. The sun is declaring the glory of God and it can't wait to begin its course across the horizon until it will find its tent pitched by God in the evening.

Our scientific world has rendered us unable to appreciate poetry. We know that the sun doesn't go live in a tent in the evening so we destroy the metaphor for the sake of scientific accuracy. Therefore it destroys some of the tremendous vitality that can be brought to us in life if we think of things in terms of pictures. David is doing that for us.

So get up in the day and go forth as a well-trained athlete to face the challenge of the day or as a bridegroom eager for the marriage. Such is the radiant and festive mood of each day's journey in life as David sees it.

That's the first six verses, declaring God's glory in the heavens. To the glory of God in the skies.

### **II. Then with verse 7 we switch themes to the law of God.**

We need to develop a bridge between the two sections of the psalm. In the Hebrew language there are two different names for God that are employed in the psalm. The first part of the psalm

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the word “God” occurs once in Hebrew, that’s in verse 2. God is referred to by the name *El* which is the common Hebrew name for God. In verses 7–14 God’s name occurs seven times but this time not as the word *El* but as the word *Yahweh* or as we say in the English *Jehovah*, which is His covenant name which He revealed to Moses when He declared, “I am who I am.”

It’s the special name for God that marks His relationship with the children of Israel—God in covenant, God in redemption, God in personal relationship. Not just the God who created the heavens and the earth but the God who redeems and cares and knows us individually. So the second part of the psalm celebrates a more personal link with God. He’s not only the God of creation but the God of covenant and redemption. The sun’s light may give off heat but the Torah—the law, the Scripture—illuminates the eyes.

**A.** What is the glory of God in the law? In verses 7–10 we see the first subdivision of this part of the glory of God in the law or in the Scriptures. There is a praise given to the law or the Scripture or to the Torah, verses 7–10. Notice different synonyms are given for the law of the Lord. It is called the law of the Lord, the statutes of the Lord, the precepts of the Lord, the commands of the Lord, the fear of the Lord, the ordinances of the Lord. Six terms in all. Synonyms. The law in six different ways in the Old Testament. Law of the Lord is the comprehensive term for God’s revealed will. It’s meant to produce in us fear, which is reverence for Him.

**1.** This law is “perfect” (Psalm 19:7). The Scriptures are perfect. Meaning they’re without flaw. The Scriptures, God’s written Word, are entirely sufficient. Especially when we understand them as being summed up in Jesus Christ. Entirely sufficient, nothing lacking. They’re perfect in the sense of being many sided. That is, the Scriptures cover completely all the aspects of life that need to be dealt with. Every human problem that we need answers for, every eternal truth that we

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need to get a hold of, everything that touches salvation and growth, all the critical questions that a mortal faces in life, the law of the Lord is perfect as it addresses. It's without a flaw.

Because it addresses all of these it revives the soul. Life can make you lose faith. Hardship, persecution, difficulty can knock the stuff out of you in life. But when we get to the Scriptures suddenly we get the energy to go again. I don't know how anyone can last without the Scripture. I have to have a mega vitamin dose of the Scripture daily. But that's not nearly as powerful for me as taking it a word, a sentence at a time. So I try to do extensive Scripture and intensive Scripture. I found that the law of the Lord does revive the soul. The Scriptures are full of vigor and vitality and provide us with an enduring food that we need. The law is perfect, reviving the soul.

**2.** God's statutes are "trustworthy" (verse 7). That's the second category. They're sure. They're dependable. You can build a foundation on which you can unhesitantly build. The Scriptures are not variable things to be changed according to the circumstances. Therefore because they are dependable and because they lay a great foundation in life they make wise the simple. That is the young and the inexperienced finds wise guidance in life. It is the Scriptures, which provide the reverence for God which is necessary lest we not live life as we ought.

**3.** The Scriptures are "right" (verse 8). The precepts are right. The Scripture sets down our moral duty. That duty lies straight ahead as a person directing an individual by using a map to guide out a straight course for us to follow. Because the precepts of the Lord are right and they call white, white and black, black and make a delineation between what is wrong and what is righteous, because the precepts are right they produce a joy in our heart. We look at the Scripture and as our life is being conformed to the Scripture we respond and there is an inner release. Psychologically

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and spiritually this is so sound because when duty lies before us and we do it brings a rejoicing in the heart.

**4.** The law of the Lord is “radiant,” or shining (verse 8). Pure. The Scripture sheds light on the pathway of life. In its radiant pure quality there is no unwholesome elements in it. It is enlightening to the eyes. It reveals dimensions of truth and reality in our experience.

Some people, every once in a while, you’ll find a pornographer that makes claim that pornography is in the Bible. Stories of incest and rape and murder and mayhem of all kinds. Therefore if you take these books out of the school library you should take the Bible out of the library too because it’s an awful book. If the Scripture gives stories like this, how can it give light to the eyes? A response is, whenever Scripture contains a story that has a profound element to it of sadness and human sin, it never glorifies the sin. It always elevates the truth and the story is there to show us where a person went wrong that we don’t repeat it ourselves. So what David is saying—and he knows this because he gave us some of the terrible stories of Scripture in his own life—the law of the Lord, the Scripture is shining. It sheds light on our path.

**5.** It is “pure” and clean and therefore it endures forever (verse 9).

**6.** And it’s true and altogether right. Scripture will never betray those who trust in them. They are entirely “righteous” showing that their origin is in God (verse 9).

So what does the law do for us, what do the Scriptures do for us? They restore our soul. They give us light. They give us joy. They have purifying power and they are enduring and absolutely perfect. David adds to these tremendous descriptions of the law by saying that the law is worth so much, it’s worth more than gold, much pure gold.

You have to have a moral appreciation, a spiritual appreciation for who God is to say this. If you ask the average person, “Do you want a thousand pounds of gold or do you want this book here?”

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You can have your pick. You can't have both and you can't come back later and get the other.

It's one or the other. Which do you want?" David says if you put it like that, take the Word any day. It's more valuable than gold.

And it's like honey. Honey wouldn't be my favorite metaphor for the Bible because honey is sticky. I like it, but I like it in little bits. So honey from the honeycomb really doesn't grab. If you talk about a chocolate Hershey bar, a chocolate shake... We can put our own metaphor to that.

Whatever we have an appetite for, the Bible, David is saying, the Bible we would want better.

I'd use a different metaphor than honey from the honeycomb.

But the law is desirable. These are the things which we are to have an appetite for. God's Word.

So he celebrates the glory of the Torah, verses 7–10.

**B.** Then in verses 11–14 David prays for a blameless life. In light of the fact that God has given us this pure, enduring, eternal Word, how are we to live? "By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward" (verse 11, NIV). The law, the Scriptures operate one mind as a warning. They therefore give us at times a green light, a red light, or a yellow light. There are times we play around too many times with the yellow light.

Like a conscience, the Scripture approves, condemns, or counsels watchfulness. David prays that he lets the law be celebrated in his life and it will be so effective it will save him from two kinds of sins, verses 12–13. That it will save him from "hidden faults." Or secret faults or sins. Then the contrast that the Scripture will keep him from presumptuous sin or "willful sins." Secret sins. Here are three categories of secret sins.

**1.** Those who are known to ourselves but are not known to others. Is there anything you know about yourself that nobody else knows? It is a secret fault. Probably most of us could identify in our life something that is between us and God that is a fault, a flaw, in simple disposition or

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attitude or action. David is crying, “God save me even from these.” Why do we have these secret things? Because there’s a certain privacy left us that God may test us as to how far we are good because the world looks at us and how far we want to be good because He looks at us. When they’re known only to me then I can choose to work on them or not and nobody else is worried about it. It’s just me and God. God is saying to me, “How serious are you about your relationship with Me that you’re willing to work on your secret faults?” There are secret faults that we ourselves alone know. And God knows, of course.

**2.** Then as a second category of secret faults that we might pray to be delivered from, that is those secret faults about us that are known to others but not to us. Think about that. It’s hardest for me to see myself as I truly am. People who live with me see me better. What is not to me a secret fault is a glaring and obvious failure. Maybe one of the things David is reaching for is “God not only save me about the things about myself that only I and you know. But help me to be aware of those things in my life that other people know that I am really blind to. Everybody I know closely, I see things that are wrong in them that I wish they could see themselves. I suspect if that’s true of me in regard to other people, then it’s got to be true of other people as they look at me.” Save me, O Lord, from secret faults.

**3.** Then it’s possible there’s a third category of secret faults. Where there are those faults about us that are not known to ourselves and not known to others but God alone knows. Maybe God is concerned about some things in us that we haven’t even yet begun to see. In some areas of our life the grass has not been cut and the weeds have grown. God knows things about us that we do not know nor do others know. Save me, O Lord, from secret faults. David will be content with nothing less than a relationship with God, which presses through to have everything that is unlike Him ultimately rooted out of the personality. That’s a great way of looking at relationship with

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God. “Ultimately when You’re done with me, hammer me so well and smelt me in your furnace to so refine that everything unlike You will be melted out or beaten out, whichever way you choose. But bring it out, O Lord.” It’s always more pleasant and less hurtful when God vacuum cleans it out of us rather than beating it out of us. We’ll take it anyway He wants to get it out.

Save me from secret faults.

Then a wild switch. All the way from secret faults to presumptuous sins. Those are the things we stumble into. We know they’re wrong when we enter them and we go ahead and do it anyway.

Keep Your servant also from these sins, O Lord. The psalmist David moves from macrocosm to microcosm. Macro being the universe. Micro being the Bible—we can hold it. Who can hold the universe? From the universe and its glory to the individual and its humility before God. But the climax lies in the microcosm. Not in the heavenly roar of praise. The heavens declare the glory of God but the law declares the will of God for mankind, the creature. Though the vast firmaments so high above us declares God’s praise, it is the Torah, the law of God, the Scriptures alone that reveal to us that we have a place in the universal scheme of things. It is not a place that gives ground for human boasting or declaration of human might over the cosmos.

When the psalmist prays for God’s revelation in the Torah he issues immediately a prayer for forgiveness and acceptance. When he’s done looking at the macrocosm, the skies, he has no idea of God’s will for his life. He has no idea of redemption. He has no idea of his own personal sin.

All he knows is here’s something out there that’s put all this in place. But when he’s done looking at the microcosm—the Law—he knows who God is, what God’s will is for his life, how to be joyful and how to bring to God that perplexing matter in our life that has separated us from Him, our sin. He rests in a quiet knowledge and assurance of God, which is what the Scriptures always do. Scriptures bring us in a personal and living relationship with Jesus Christ. God has

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two witnesses. His witness in the heavens. And His witness in the Bible. Psalm 19 eloquently puts that forth for us.