

Psalm 19

He is There and He is Not Silent

1. Theme

Speaking of the Triune God of Scripture, Francis Schaeffer wrote, “He is there and he is not silent.” That is the substance of Psalm 19 – God speaks! “The very sound of the two movements of the psalm tells something of their two concerns: the broad sweep of God’s wordless revelation in the universe, expressed in the exuberant lines of verses 1-6, and the clarity of his written word, reflected in the quiet conciseness of verses 7-10” (Derek Kidner). “I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world” (C.S. Lewis).

2. Parallels between Psalm 19 and Genesis 1-3

- Genesis 1 and Ps. 19:1-6 These passages deal with the creation of the heavens and the earth; the sun; day and night. Notice especially the word used for “firmament” or “sky” in Genesis 1; the Old Testament doesn’t use this word again until Ps. 19:1. In Genesis 1 God is called “Elohim” and in Ps. 19:1 God is called “El”.
- Genesis 2 and Ps. 19:7-11 In Genesis 2 Man is given his first instructions (concerning work and the Tree of Knowledge); in Ps. 19:7-11 Man is given the Law as the regulator of his life. In Genesis 2 God is called “Yahweh Elohim” (the LORD God); in Ps. 19:7 he is called “Yahweh” (the LORD).
- Genesis 3 and Ps. 19:12-14 Genesis 3 records the Fall of Man into sin, and the promise of the Redeemer; in Ps. 19:12-14 the psalmist confesses errors, hidden faults, presumptuous sins and transgressions, and he prays to the LORD as his redeemer.

3. Structure and Comments

- (a) The praise of God for the penetrating clarity of his creation (vv. 1-6)

Creation “speaks” – pointing away from itself to its Creator.

The lights in the “firmament” bear eloquent witness to the glory of the Creator. When the Old Testament speaks of the “glory of God” it speaks of something that is visible, e.g. the glory descending on Sinai, or filling the Tabernacle/Temple. “The heavens are a visible manifestation of God’s radiant splendour” (Mark D. Futato, *Creation: a Witness to the Wonder of God*).

Notice terms of communication: declare, proclaim, pour forth speech, reveal knowledge, words and a voice that is heard.

“Pours forth” (v. 2) suggests the irrepressible bubbling up of a spring – the inexhaustible variety with which the day and night skies reflect the Creator’s mind.

The witness of creation is heard everywhere (vv. 4-6): “Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world...Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden

from its heat.” C.S. Lewis says that the picture is of “the cloudless, tyrannous rays [of the hot Palestinian sun] hammering the hills, searching every cranny...It pierces everywhere with its strong, clean ardour.” John Goldingay says, “Nothing escapes the ferocity of this warrior.” Compare with Rom. 1:18-20.

- (b) The praise of the LORD for the perfections of his Law (vv. 7-11)

The Law speaks – pointing through its perfection to its Author.

Vv. 6b-7a mark the turning point of the psalm: creation is like the hammering rays of the Sun, while Law enlightens the eyes (v. 9) and illumines the servant of God (v. 12). Remember that Law is Torah, i.e. instruction, especially the instruction that a father gives his son (c.f. the Book of Proverbs). Alternatively, the Torah (the books from Genesis to Deuteronomy) report God’s saving relationship with Israel, i.e. they are a record of the re-creation of the people of God.

The Law is given six designations (vv. 7-9), and six attributes. These allude to the Tree of Knowledge which was “good for food, and...a delight to the eyes, and...to be desired to make one wise” (Gen 3:6). The Psalmist’s point is that the Torah is superior in every way as a source of life, pleasure and wisdom. The

Like the seventh day of the creation week, the seventh, climactic praise of v. 10 sets the Torah of the LORD apart from every other source of knowledge.

- (c) The prayer of the psalmist for deliverance from sin (vv. 12-14)

The Psalmist speaks – conscious that he lives after the Fall and outside Eden.

The very world in which we live witnesses against us and our sin (vv. 1-6). And the Word of God exposes the extent, the detail and the enormity of our sin. This drives us to cry out for forgiveness of sin (v. 12), deliverance from sin (v. 13) and redemption (v. 14).

4. Psalm 19 and the Incarnate Word

Jesus is the “Word [who] became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). We can hardly say that we have understood Psalm 19 until we have related it to him.

- Jesus is the Creative Word by whom the heavens were created (John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:2) – they display his glory.
- Jesus is the One of whom the Law and the prophets spoke (John 1:45; 5:46; Acts 13:16-41; 28:23).
- Jesus is the One through whom the prophets spoke (Matt. 23:34; John 16:13-14; Rev. 19:10).
- Jesus is the One who fulfilled the Law (Matt. 5:17) – conforming to it in every way; fulfilling everything to which it pointed; realizing its seven-fold quality in the lives of his people.
- Jesus is the One through whom God has given his full revelation (John 1:18; Hebrews 1:1-2) so that only through Jesus can we properly read and understand the Law and the prophets (Luke 24:27).
- Jesus alone is the Rock and Redeemer, the “New Creator” (2 Cor. 5:17).