

1. **INTRODUCTION:** Poetry is an amazing medium for communication. Any song lover knows how much meaning, humor, pain, images, and emotion can be packed into a few brief lines. Musical lyrics are the modern day poet's playground. Professor Brian Morgan loves poetry. Not necessarily what you would expect from a Stanford educated economics graduate, master of Hebrew poetry, and senior pastor of Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino. It was my privilege to have him as my professor of Old Testament Bible Survey at Western Seminary. In one of his many lessons, Professor Morgan, talked about the following poem as prototypical of the medium of poetry:

- a. "The Most a Poem Can Do" – is to reveal four worlds through metaphor-images; an example through a poem by Paul Celan titled "There Stood"

There Stood – A splinter of fig on your lip,

There stood – Jerusalem around us,

There stood – the bright pine scent... above the Danish skiff we thanked

I stood – in you.

Professor Morgan quoted John Felstiner in his reflection on Celan's poem, that "the most a poem can do is to bring four worlds together through its metaphors or images. These worlds are: 1) the natural (creation); 2) the spiritual (eternal); 3) the social/political/geographical; and 4) the personal... not necessarily in that order.

- b. When we apply the concept of these four worlds to David's poetry... song lyrics written to be sung with instrumental accompaniment, we gain a perspective and appreciation of the enduring and transcendent quality of the Psalms.
- i. First – there is an historical situation in which David is personally involved in the context of redemptive history (often filled with metaphors from creation [to make these metaphors universally accessible]). When I read Psalm 19 I can't help but think of a young man alone on a hillside surrounded with sheep bedded down for the night and gazing at the stars and reflecting upon the wonder of God.
 - ii. Second – though Psalm 19 doesn't seem to be obviously geo-political, this poetry would be used for millennia in a wide variety of liturgical settings; which has helped God's people find a relevant voice for their worship of a transcendent God.
 - iii. Third, these poetic prayers give substance and shape to the greater significance of Messiah Jesus' prayers. Though not quoted by Jesus in Scripture, I cannot imagine that He didn't find great comfort in David's words in Psalm 23:4 – "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for You [God] are with me; Your rod and staff [shepherd's protective tools] comfort me." I'm confident that David's relational dependence upon God was forged on such nights when he was alone protecting a flock of sheep with his own life. This would much later be mirrored by Messiah Jesus' prayers especially in Gethsemane.
 - iv. Fourth, as the Body of Christ, the Psalms become our prayers as we give them a voice. They resonate still as powerful reminders of God's love and compassion for humanity as well as Jesus' love for His Church.

- c. Reading poetry is much more work than reading a narrative [story], or a news article – you have to use your imagination to put yourself in the author’s context, and connect with the author’s experience to discover what the author is – 1) emotionally feeling and 2) spiritually sensing. When climbing into poetry, it doesn’t help to think literally when reading the text, instead think figuratively and symbolically. Poetry is an invitation to connect emotionally with the author, where the images presented open a door to discovery of what the author is experiencing about life and eternity.

2. TIME OF WRITING AND AUTHOR:

- a. We know from Scripture that David was an accomplished song writer and musician, having been engaged by King Saul’s court to play and sing to soothe the King’s fears and anxiety – 1 Samuel 16:14-23.
- b. The text identifies David as the author of Psalm 19, and it has been accepted as true through the ages and there is no credible alternative.
- c. In my opinion, Psalm 19 was likely written before David entered into King Saul’s service as a musician, with the Psalm likely dating to David’s service to his father Jesse as a shepherd.
- d. The historical context for this Psalm is in the early years of the monarchy as documented by Samuel in the 11th and into the 10th century BC:
 - i. Though the dates are inexact for Psalm 19, somewhere between 1,040 and 1,000 BC are reasonable. It is also reasonable that the Psalms were not catalogued into a Hebrew Psalter until somewhere between the later part of David’s reign or Solomon’s reign at the earliest; and during the exile in Babylon at the latest.
 - ii. Zondervan’s Expository Commentary of the Bible states about the books of Samuel that: “The overriding theme of the books of Samuel is the beginning of Israel’s monarchy in the eleventh century B.C. [The developmental sequence] having been discussed in 1) its prelude (1Sa 1:1-7:17), 2) its advent (1Sa 8:1-15:35), and 3) its establishment (1Sa 16:1-31:13); the author next turns to 4) its consolidation under David, Israel’s greatest king.”

3. LITERARY THEME AND STRUCTURE:

- a. Theme – Psalm 19 is unique for the Old Testament as it integrates both Creation and the Law.
 - i. The importance of the witness of “Creation” resonates with Paul’s words in Romans 1:20 – “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that humanity is without excuse.”
 - ii. The importance of the witness of the “The Law” resonates with Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:17-18 – “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”

iii. Creation and the Law are not in conflict in either the Old Testament or the New Testament, instead they are complimentary. Both speak of our almighty God who loves us and provided the means for humanity to find and engage Him... Creation is “general revelation” – that which all should know because of the evidence of order, beauty, and symmetry. While the Law – is “special revelation” – where God has revealed Himself to individuals who then became His mouthpiece to all of humanity. In this sense, they become ambassadors for the Kingdom of God.

b. Structure – Psalm 19 has 3 main parts:

- i. 19:1-6 “God’s Voice” – deals with “General Revelation” as communication of God through the Creation in a figurative and metaphorical sense.
- ii. 19:7-11 “Torah’s Voice” – deals with “Specific Revelation” as communication of God’s Truth for humanity through the Torah in expressing its value and purpose for humanity.
- iii. 19:12-14 “David’s Voice” – deals with David’s personal prayer in light of the awesome wonder of God in experiencing the universality of the witness of Creation and the Law.

4. **BIBLICAL EXEGESIS:** the text below is from the New International Version – “*For the director of music. A psalm of David*” – This pre-script indicates this is a song with accompanying music whose author is David. [See the introduction of poetry <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/1-biblical-literacy/Bible%20Survey%20-%2015.4-0%20-%20Introduction%20to%20Psalms.pdf> for more on what a “Strophe” is and the nature of Biblical Poetry]

a. God’s Voice – verses 1-6:

- i. **Strophe 1** – ^{Ps 19:1} The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
^{Ps 19:2} Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.

Vs 1-2 – In his praise of God’s creation and revelation of Himself through it, David employs wonderful imagery and word usage. “Heavens” and “Sky” are synonyms as are “declare” and “display.” These refer to God’s creative action which is shown in nature to be purposeful, as indicated with “the work of His hands.” Creation was a purposeful event accomplished by God. “Day after day” and “night after night” refer to active and ongoing revelation of God in nature that never ceases; all of which argue forcefully for the existence and presence of a Creator. This statement is a reflection that mirrors the Creation poem of Genesis 1:14-19, which emphasizes the beauty, order, awesome wonder of the regularity and predictability of the cosmic order. This cosmic order is evidenced in the regularity of the agricultural calendar which would have great significance for humanity that relies on the seasonal cycles to survive. This purposeful order is in contrast to the “formless and void” [Hebrew *Bohu* and *Tohu*] in Genesis 1:2, which described the state the world was in prior to God’s order being imposed. This contrast would also be understood as the natural state of human

society with its wars and cruelty apart from the order imposed by God's Law [*Torah*]. Thus in this first strophe, David joins the two topics he will continue to develop in this Psalm – that of “General Revelation” – meaning God's existence and ongoing presence evidenced by order, predictability and goodness; and that of “Specific Revelation” – meaning Torah and Scripture that is God's self-declaration to humanity through designated ambassadors, the prophets.

- ii. **Strophe 2** - ^{Ps 19:3} There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
^{Ps 19:4ab} Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

Vs 3-4ab – God's proclamation is in the substance of His work itself, it needs no words or speech to communicate God's presence and creative glory. Where human speech is limited to a very localized scope, God's self-proclamation in creation [nature] has no limits... it reaches to the limits of creation itself and every human language is inherently aware of it – this is what theologians call “General Revelation” (AKA “Natural Revelation”).

- iii. **Strophe 3** - ^{Ps 19:4c} In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,
^{Ps 19:5} which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
^{Ps 19:6} It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is hidden from its heat.

Vs 4c-6 – David's poetic use of “personification” for developing his metaphors in describing daily celestial events are less about making earth the center of the universe; and is more about making God immanent [close], familiar, and personal [involved]. These metaphors provide a common earthly representation of what creation accomplishes every day. One metaphor revolves around how earthly kings and rulers would often have processions that displayed their power and majesty to impress their people and enemies. They would have their warriors arrayed for battle with their cavalry, chariots and foot soldiers marching in procession to glorify their king. Here, David is writing about the celestial equivalent of such a display by God that is done on a daily basis and with a universal extent. When you consider this passage, think of Paul's statement in Romans 1:20 – “For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” ... of not acknowledging, knowing, and worshiping God. The daily procession of God's self-revelation in the creation is constant, universal, and unequivocal.

b. Torah's Voice – verses 7-11:

- i. **Strophe 4** - ^{Ps 19:7} The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

^{Ps 19:8} The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

^{Ps 19:9} The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.

The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.

ii. **Strophe 5** - ^{Ps 19:10} They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.

^{Ps 19:11} By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Vs 7-11 – In these verses David shifts from the “Law expressed in Creation [General Revelation] to the law of the LORD, meaning the Torah [Specific Revelation]. David now shifts his focus from what God has generally revealed to humanity in nature to what He has specifically revealed to God’s people in Scripture. The context is of a covenant making and covenant keeping God who loves His people. Like Creation, Torah is a huge gift from God to all of humanity.

Wikipedia’s online Encyclopedia states that: “The Law is presented as another source of revelation about God's character and expectations. The instructions are referred to as ‘direct’ from the Hebrew ‘*Yesharim*’ meaning to ‘make straight, smooth, right or upright’. [Cross Reference – Psalm 5:8; Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23]. The fact that this instruction is repeated in so many texts is proof to its importance. One interpretation indicates that this law shows a person 1) what to do, 2) what to keep in mind, 3) what to avoid, 4) how to please God, and 5) what help he can expect from God; hence they are highly desirable and valuable.” It continues with, “The description of the law as radiant and enlightening ties the earlier references to the lights of nature to the character of God and to his laws as revealing truths. The Torah is associated with light in other passages as well, such as: “For the commandment *is* a lamp; and the law *is* light; and reproofs of instruction *are* the way of life – Proverbs 6:23.” (Cross reference John 14:6)

In this section we see some of the more impressive benefits of the Specific revelation in the Torah:

1. God’s Word revives the soul – in other words, it has a restorative quality that brings wholeness and restitution to each penitent and obedient individual, and to the society in general.
2. God’s Word is the source of wisdom – to all who are ready to receive it, it will transform individuals from simple to wise... positively affecting all aspects of life.
3. God’s Word brings joy – meaning “inner peace and tranquility.” The more you know and experience God, the more the eternal becomes your focus over the temporal. A heart tethered to God is secure and confident.
4. God’s Word gives light to the eyes – Luke 11:34 states, “The eye is the lamp of your

body; when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness.” **As the sun is the light of creation, so the Word is the light of redemption and eternity.**

5. **God’s Word is trustworthy – because it is anchored in God’s covenant keeping character, His integrity necessarily secures trust and confidence.**
6. **God’s Word is right – meaning it is straightforward, and just.**
7. **God’s Word is radiant – meaning pure and not changing over time.**
8. **God’s Word is enduring forever – it does not change with the whims of the times or it’s earthly leadership. Earthly leadership is known to be capricious and self-serving while God’s leadership is enduringly consistent and serves others.**
9. **God’s Word is sure and righteous – meaning you can completely count on God’s righteousness being express all the time, even when we don’t understand it.**

Zondervan’s Expository Commentary concludes of this section: “Because of its revelatory qualities and its transforming effects in the godly, the word of God is of greater value than the most valuable objects of human striving: money and fine food. It keeps the wise on the narrow path by forewarning them of possible pitfalls and by guiding them on to the benefits of godliness. The word "servant" bears out the willingness of the psalmist in doing God's will. It applies to one who by appointment, office, or choice commits himself or herself to doing someone else's will – In this context, the will of the covenant keeping Lord.”

c. David’s Voice – verses 12-14:

i. Strophe 6 - ^{Ps 19:12} Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

^{Ps 19:13} Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.
Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

^{Ps 19:14} May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Vs 12-14 – In contrast to the surety and consistency of God, the author calls attention to the uncertainty and inconsistency of each individual. The fallen human nature is sinful and in need of redemption. Isaiah 64:6 states – “For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”

Zondervan’s Expository Commentary states – “The godly stand, therefore, in fear before their Creator-Redeemer, knowing that they may have ‘hidden faults’ or ‘errors’ that he has not yet discovered. The psalmist is concerned about these faults because he aims to live ‘blameless’ before God. Therefore, he asks for forgiveness and an ability to express humility and contrition. ‘Willful sins’ are those often attributed to the ‘arrogant,’ who have no regard for God. ‘The great transgression’ could be idolatry, adultery, or any other sin against the moral law of God.”

As David spends time thinking about Scripture, he realizes that his own actions and

thoughts fall short of God's expectations. David's prayer resulting from this realization is asking God to restrain David from sins of ignorance as well as deliberate sins. He also asks that his words and thoughts be pleasing to God.

This speaks to the transformative nature of God's Word that is reflected in Paul's letter to the Romans in verse 2 – "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

It is understood that we will have our shortcomings, but also that the Word of God has this transformative effect upon the mind as we conform our self to God's will as expressed in Scripture. This disciplined conformation has both restorative and transformative impacts upon the believer, as listed in the nine benefits in the section above on strophe 5.

5. THEOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS:

- a. Creation and the Law are interconnected revelations – both speak to the nature and character of God, and invite a careful search, study, and application for wholeness of life. God's revelation in creation preceded His self-revelation in Scripture – the former points to the latter, and the latter enables insight and interpretation of the former.
- b. The instruction of the Lord – is built into the very structure of the universe. Science and Scripture are not necessarily at odds with each other. When the two are interconnected we get a far more wondrous understanding of God and our reality when we study the two interactively.
- c. From David's perspective – to search intently for God and to remain open and sensitive to His instruction is the only way to live. To observe God everywhere and in everything is the path to wisdom and joy. Also, despite our best intentions and diligence, all will sin and fall short of the Glory of God. David also prophetically foresaw the redemptive mission of Messiah Jesus – read the following passages in light of what we have learned in Psalm 19:

- i. **Read Psalm 139**

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.

You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,

even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"

even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.
How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!
Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand.
When I awake, I am still with you.
If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men!
They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name.
Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you?
I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.
Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

ii. Read 2 Timothy 1:8c-10

By the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

iii. Read Romans 3:21-23

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.