

Ponderings in the Psalms

The following is a Messianic Study on

Psalm 19

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Brit Chadashah
ברית חדשה

The *Pondering* studies were published in the Brit Chadashah Newsletter. Brit Chadashah (*New Covenant*) is a Messianic Fellowship in Sydney. Led by Paul Cohen a Jewish believer in Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). We meet together fortnightly for Bible studies from a Messianic Jewish Perspective. We are a unique fellowship made up of Jewish and Gentile people who are believers in Yeshua as the promised Messiah of Israel.

If you don't know Yeshua as your Messiah, we encourage you to search out the Scriptures for yourself. God promised in the book of Jeremiah, "*You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart*" (Jeremiah 29:13). And we hope you will make contact with us so that we can share more about the Messiah, His life and ministry.

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Psalm 19: The Psalm Declaration

1. For the choir director, a Psalm of David.
The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the works¹ of His hands.
- 2 Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.
- 3 There is no speech, nor are there words;
Their voice is not heard.
- 4 Their voices² have 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,
- 5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber;
It rejoices as a strong man to run his course.
- 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.

- 7 The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.
- 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.
- 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.
- 10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

- 11 Moreover, by them Your servant is warned;
In keeping them there is great reward.
- 12 Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.
- 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.
- 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.

Introduction

In this Psalm, we note two distinct movements, verses 1-6 focus on the glory of God as seen in His creation of the Heavens. In the second movement David changes and reveals the blessings of understanding God's Torah. We can see these two movements also by observing that the Name of 'God' is not used in the first poem (verses 1-6) while and in the second (verses 7-14)

¹ Some Hebrew manuscripts and the Targum indicate a plural construction form, 'works'.

² The Hebrew word in the Masoretic Text is the word קָוָם; (kavam)'line', by contrast the Septuagint and the Vulgate as well as the modern translation of Robert Alter have 'voices' קוֹלָם (kolam) believing that a לamed was lost, in light of this verse and the previous verse this would appear to be so, as such I have used voices, see the footnote in the 'Word Biblical Commentary', Vol. 19, *Psalms 1-50*, by Peter C. Craigie (1983) p. 178.

the Name of God “*LORD*” is used seven times, the two movements are almost two distinct Psalms smashed together. In this Psalm, David goes from the creation (Heavens) the ‘general revelation’ given to all mankind to the ‘specific revelation’ i.e. God’s Word which is followed by his response.

As a song it was sung in the Tabernacle / Temple and even throughout history many hymns have been written with this psalm as its foundation, amongst the more famous is “*The heavens declare thy glory, Lord*” by Isaac Watts. The famous author C. S. Lewis in his “*Reflections on the Psalms*” (1958 page 63), wrote: “*Psalm 19 is the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.*” As such it is right that we too should sing this, make a melody to the Lord and sing these words.

Outline

This psalm has a three-fold division,

1. The Heavens **Declare** in (verses 1-6)
2. The Words of the Lord **Reveal** (verses 7-10)
3. David’s **Response** (verses 11-14)

Psalm (verse 1 or the superscript)

As indicated in a previous study on the Psalms the superscripts in the book of Psalms are part of scripture, and so here we have a מִזְמוֹר (*mitzmor*) Song which was to be accompanied by musical instruments from King David, who passed it on to the ‘choir director’ other translations have overseer or superintendent this person would look after the liturgical worship in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple(s) and ensure it was sung in the right way.

The Heavens Declare (verses 1-6)

Hebrew poetry

In Biblical Hebrew poetry we do not see rhyme and rhythm but ideas that are expressed in a new or different way. For example in this psalm we see

1. *Heavens* declare
2. *Firmament* shows
3. *Tabernacle* for the sun

And

1. *Day to Day* brings forth **speech**
2. *Night to night* shows **knowledge**

This style of poetry helps us in remembering the central ideas that David is trying to communicate with us.

Insights to the Hebrew text

The heavens tell or declare God’s glory, ‘to tell’ here is the Hebrew: סֵפֶר (*sepher*) to record as if it is written on a scroll, an inscription from God to mankind (Psalm 75:1; Job 12:8). The expanse (firmament) ‘declares’ His handiwork in creation from the Hebrew: מַגִּיד (*magid*), to tell as a story (Psalm 111:6; Micah 6:8).

Day after day they pour they utter speech אָמַר (*omer*) (Psalm 78:2; 145:7) and Night after night it is they that reveal or show יְחַוֶּה (*ye’chaveh*) to make known the declaration (Job 15:17; 32:6,

10, 17; 36:2) as if to say This is my work, this is my creation, in the hope that mankind might respond to Him.

He draws our attention from the Heavens to the sun in verse 4 which is compared first to the bridegroom exiting the wedding chamber and then to a mighty man of valour גִּבּוֹר (*gibor*). In both these images, there is a sense of youthful energy and strength.

David says I hear and see the evidence of God's revelation in the heavens there is abundant evidence for Him. Like Psalm 8:3 "*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers....*", we too see the evidence and pondering the heavens, their size, motion, complexity and beauty we ought to be able to see that there is a Creator, knowing there is a Creator should lead us to seek the specific revelation He gives.

The Words of the Lord Reveal (verses 7-10)

The Six Descriptions of Torah

Here David uses six words in connection with God's special revelation and with each he gives a single description and then a short reflection:

1. The Torah תּוֹרָה (*torat*) of the Lord is perfect, knowing and applying it can bring restoration to the soul.
2. The Testimony עֲדוּת (*edut*) of God is sure, knowing and applying them will make one wise even if one is simple.
3. The Precepts פְּקֻדֵי (*pikkudei*) of the Lord are right, knowing and applying them will cause our heart to rejoice.
4. The Commandments מִצְוֹת (*mitzvot*) of God, are pure, knowing and applying them will bring enlightenment to our eyes.
5. The Fear יְרֵאָה (*ye-rat*), will bring clean living which should be enduring forever.
6. The Judgements מִשְׁפָּטֵי (*mish'pe'te*) of God are true; they are righteous altogether.

The word 'Torah' and the other five terms here in this Psalm and many other Psalms should be seen as 'God's teaching and instruction'. They should not be limited to the legal requirements of God's Levitical laws and commandments. An additional thought to remember is that at the time when David wrote this, only the Torah (and perhaps Job) was revealed, today we have the entire revelation, the Word of God: from Genesis to Revelation. These are here for us, that we may apply them, they are an encouragement that we may obey and be trained in doing what is right. As a teacher of Scripture looking at this section I see an outline for a mini-sermon, Six Key-words, plus for each a thought, and with their application.

Verse 10 is a summary statement that the Torah in all its aspects is a great price; obeying it brings that sweet enjoyment, (Psalms 119:72, 103, 127). The droppings of the honeycomb is considered the purest virgin honey and so parallels the fine gold metaphor.

David reflects on the Words of the Lord that have been revealed and acknowledges that they are a warning to him, and this is true for us also. And keeping the instructions and teachings of God will bring reward; note this is a general principle. Many believers in Messiah have and are suffering greatly, they have gone hungry and are being martyred many of the saints in the past and today have not received a great physical reward; here on earth during their life even though they kept the Laws, Statutes and Commandments of the LORD. What I do believe is that in the age to come; in the Messianic Kingdom, we all will receive our just reward from God.

David's Response (verses 11-14)

Knowing the Torah has not only benefits but also consequences, one of the purposes for the Torah is to expose sins in the life of the believer (Romans 7:7 see also Romans 5:20).

Three words are used to describe sins: “*errors*”, “*hidden faults*” and “*presumptuous sins*”. This reflection by David on Torah leads David to acknowledge his great sinfulness and as such he prays for God's guidance. Not only does David pray: LORD cleanse me from all my errors, from things that I have kept secret from You, and from my arrogant boastful iniquities but be my Help, so that they will not have dominion over me (Psalm 119:133) restrain my life and I can be without fault. Careful reading here reveals it is not in Keeping Torah, but in his request for the Lord to *hold him back* from sin that David will be found blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

The phrase ‘*hidden faults*’ is in contrast to the heat from the sun, (verse 6) from which nothing can be hidden, how much more so with God, for nothing is hidden from His sight (Hebrews 4:13). David prays even from my hidden faults, my unintentional and unknown sins of which I am not aware declare me innocent.

David now uses the highest accolade a person can receive “*servant*”, the *servant* of God or the *Servant* of the Lord is a title we should all strive for, this title was used for Messiah (Isaiah 53), Abraham (Genesis 26:24), Moses (Numbers 12:8) and Joshua (Judges 2:8) and David (2 Samuel 7:5-8) and a few others.

David now concludes in verse 14 let my prayer and my ponderings be acceptable with you Lord, to be acceptable is an expression borrowed from the laws of sacrifice (Leviticus 1:3-4 compared to Leviticus 22:20). It seemed not just today but even back then prayers were likened to a ‘spiritual’ offering (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8 & 8:3-4).

This is followed by the description of God as Rock צִּוּרִי (*tzuri*) and my Redeemer גּוֹאֲלִי (*go'ali*), the KJV has my strength instead of my Rock, this interpretive reflection applies one meaning of the rock. David acknowledges the LORD as the Rock in the previous Psalm (Psalm 18:2, 31, 46) it not only reflects God as the *strong one*, but this title reflects God as the *mighty Saviour* (2 Samuel 22:32 and Psalm 18:31) and in true Hebrew poetry a second title the Redeemer גּוֹאֲלִי (*goel*) clarifies the first. This title was applied to Messiah (Job 19:25 and Isaiah 41:14) this was a person who had to be a (close) relative; he had to be able to redeem; was willing to redeem and was able to pay the price for the redemption.

Summary: The Psalm Declaration

What we saw is that God gave two revelations, one general the heavens and the sun and one specific revelation the Word of the Lord, both help us to know there is a God and both ought to be examined so that together with David we can make the response: *O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

Selah
Shalom in Messiah
Paul & Sue