

PSALM EIGHTEEN AND NINETEEN

PROLOGUE OF PRAISE (vers. 1-3). Here the psalmist pours out the gladness and gratitude of his heart which thrills with the highest spirit of adoration.

THE PERIL AND DELIVERANCE (vers. 4-19). The terrible nature of the peril is first made clear, and then the story of the might and majesty of Jehovah's process is told, and the fact of deliverance declared.

THE PRINCIPLE (vers. 20-29). The reason of the Divine deliverance is declared, and the truth of perpetual importance, that God is to man what man is to God, is affirmed.

THE RESULTANT CONFIDENCE (vers. 30-45). Again the song breaks forth in almost tumultuous joy. Absolute confidence in God, and assurance of continued triumph are based upon experiences already gained of His goodness.

EPILOGUE OF PRAISE (vers. 46-50). The anthem ends with further sentences which group the benefits conferred upon the king by his God, and attest his determination to praise Him among the nations.

PSALM 19

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Greater than the Glory of God in the Heavens is the
Grace of Jehovah in the Law.

ANALYSIS

A Composite Psalm: in which, by the mere force of Juxtaposition, the Grace of Jehovah in the Law, is seen to be even More Precious than the Greatness of God in the Heavens. Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, 4, The Witness to God borne by the Heavens in General. Stanza II., vers. 4c-6, The Witness by the Sun in particular. Stanza III, vers. 7-9, The Excellence of the Law in Itself and in its Beneficent Effects. An Overflow from the foregoing Stanza (ver. 10). Stanza IV., vers 11-14, A Personal Application: with Prayer, for Profit by the Law, and for the Divine Acceptance of this Psalm.

(Lm.) Psalm—By David.

- 1 The heavens are telling the glory of GOD,
and the work of his hands the expanse is declaring:
- 2 Day unto day doth pour forth speech,

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- 3 and night unto night doth breathe out knowledge:¹
 4 Through all the earth hath gone forth their voice,
 and to the end of the world their sayings:
 For the sun hath He set up a tent therein;
 5 and he is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
 he rejoiceth as a hero to run a race.
 6 From one end of the heavens is his going forth,
 and his circuit unto the other end thereof;
 and nothing is hid from His glowing sun.²
 7 The law of Jehovah is perfect³—refreshing⁴ the soul,
 The testimony of Jehovah is trustworthy—making wise the
 simple;
 8 The precepts of Jehovah are right⁵—rejoicing the heart,
 The commandment of Jehovah is clear⁶—enlightening the
 eyes;
 9 The reverence of Jehovah is clean—enduring evermore,
 The regulations of Jehovah are truth—vindicated altogether.
 10 More desirable than gold—yea than much fine gold,
 Sweeter also than honey—or than the droppings from the
 comb.
 11 Even thine own servant findeth warning in them—
 in keeping them the reward is great.
 12 Mistakes who perceiveth?
 from concealed things acquit me,

1. M.T. adds:—

There is no speech, and there are no words:
 unheard is their voice.

Sep. and Vul. expand this into:—

There is no speech, there are no words,
 where their voice is not heard.

These are followed by the italics in A.V. Delitzsch renders as follows:—

There is no speech and there are no words,
 whose voice is inaudible.

Driver's alternative rendering runs:

It is not a speech, neither are they words,
 the voice whereof cannot be heard.

2. So. Br.

3. Or: "blameless," "whole," "sound."

4. "See Prov. 25:13, Lam. 1:11, 16, 19; and cf. Ps. 23:3. Lit. *bringing back*, i.e. restoring, invigorating. The 'soul' is the principle of life . . . ; here, of the spiritual life."—Dr. "To restore the sense of life—Dr. Glossary I. to Parallel Psalter.

5. Or: "upright." Ml.: "straightforward." Cp. 119:137.

6. Or: "bright." Sep. "far-shining."

7. "Lapses—who marketh them?"—Del. "That is, sins of inadvertence; cf. Lev. 4:2, R.V. *margin*.—Dr.

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- 13 Also from presumptuous ones restrain thy servant—
let them not rule over me:
Then shall I be blameless—¹
and be cleared of great transgression.
- 14 Acceptable be the sayings of my mouth—
and the soft utterance of my heart,
Before thee continually,² O Jehovah—
my rock and my redeemer.

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician.

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 19

The heavens are telling the glory of God; they are a marvelous display of His craftsmanship.

2 Day and night they keep on telling about God.

3, 4 Without a sound or word, silent in the skies, their message reaches out to all the world.

The sun lives in the heavens where God placed it

5 And moves out across the skies as radiant³ as a bridegroom going to his wedding,⁴ or as joyous as an athlete looking forward to a race!

6 The sun crosses the heavens from end to end, and nothing can hide from its heat.

7, 8 God's laws are perfect. They protect us, make us wise, and give us joy and light.

9 God's laws are just and perfect. Reverence for God keeps us pure and leads us on to heaven.⁵

10 His laws are more desirable than gold. They are sweeter than honey dripping from a honeycomb.

11 For they warn us away from harm and give success to those who obey them!

12 But how can I ever know what sins are lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults.

13 And keep me from deliberate wrongs; help me to stop doing them. Only then can I be free of guilt and innocent of some great crime.

1. *ML.*: "one whole" ("all of a piece").

2. "So *Sep.* as the measure requires"—*Br.*

3. *Implied.* Literally, "is like a bridegroom."

4. *Implied.* Literally, "going forth from his chamber."

5. *Or.* "The rules governing the worship of the Lord are pure and need never be changed."

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14 May my spoken words and unspoken thoughts be pleasing even to You, O Lord my Rock and my Redeemer.

EXPOSITION

This is a psalm of exquisite beauty, which winningly invites us along the path of exposition; but which, nevertheless confronts us with a difficulty which we shall do well to settle at once if possible, so as to study the psalm without distraction and to the utmost profit. The difficulty, when first stated, appears sufficiently formidable; seeing that it involves the serious question whether or not ver. 3 should be regarded as an excrescence. Whoever will look at this verse as it appears in the A.V., will readily understand the nature of the problem. Strip off the three italic words which, in that version, are incorporated with it, and which young readers will remember are to be taken as having no express warrant in the original,—and the statement remaining is found to be a thrice repeated negative: “no speech, nor language, their voice is not heard”—in express contradiction of both the spirit and letter of vers. 1, 2 and 4; and the remarkable thing is that the Hebrew text handed down to us, simply contains these three unqualified negatives. Next observe, that the supplied words have the startling effect of converting the negative into a positive; and asserting that, wherever any language is spoken, there the heavens utter a voice—of course, in harmony with the context; thereby getting over the difficulty, and not wholly without authority, seeing that both Septuagint and Vulgate (Greek and Latin) versions contain the very words (or their equivalent) which thus turn the statement completely round. Noting these things, the first impulse of many readers will undoubtedly be to acquiesce in this solution, by saying: “Evidently some little word or words have dropped out of the Hebrew, the substance of which has been fortunately preserved by the ancient Greek and Latin versions.” Well: for those so content, the verse will be found at the foot of the text; and further, inasmuch as some think that even the direct negatives of the Hebrew can be *harmonised* with the context, as either a sort of “aside” spoken by an objector (which was suggested in “the Emphasised Bible”) or with a sort of mental gloss. “No LITERAL voice—though, ‘in reason’s ear,’ there *is* a voice,” for this cause, the literal Hebrew, as reflected in the R.V., is also

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given at the foot. Now will these contented readers exercise a little forbearance towards a few more critical minds, who are not so easily satisfied, but who prefer the opinion that this verse is an excrescence. Their reasons are: *first*, that it just makes this stanza so much too long, which alone would not count for much, but is of sufficient force to sustain the additional reason now to be submitted: namely, *secondly*, that as soon as the negative is turned into a positive, then it is *needless*, seeing that vers. 1 and 2 positively assert that "the heavens," ect., *tell, declare, pour forth* and *breathe out* their witness to God's glory; and further, that ver. 4 makes this positive assurance universal in extent. So that, in a word, by dropping the two lines which make the stanza too long, nothing substantial is lost, while brevity and point, as well as symmetry, are gained. The reader who is not yet quite persuaded to join the more critical, will at least understand, without a disturbing thought, why the following exposition takes the shorter and more direct route leading to the same end.

The general witness of the heavens is brought to bear upon a point twice expressed: it is *the glory of God*—their brightness and beauty being expressive of his own; and being, as they are, *the work of his hand*, the inference is that he is greater than they. The fact that the heavens bear this witness is four times expressed: they *tell* it out or *recount* it, as if spoken of a story composed of numberless details, they *declare* it, as with authority, making God's glory conspicuous; they *pour it forth* in a stream of eloquence as from an exhaustless fountain of evidence; and they gently *breathe out* the intelligence, with such soft accents as leave the truth larger, loftier, louder than their low utterance can attain. The second couple of these verbs is apportioned, the one to the day, and the other to the night. It is the *day* that pours forth speech, as through the channels of a thousand voices: it is the *night* that breathes out her almost inaudible whispers. Moreover, one day speaks the *the next*, the day-studies being handed on for further days to prosecute; and the night, ceasing her story when the day appears, takes up the broken thread when the *next night* comes—which is poetically true to fact: since day-studies can only be pursued by day, and night-studies by night. To suggest all this without actually saying so is a triumph of the poetic art. An effective synonymous couplet sets the seal of universality upon this testimony

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to the glory of God. Wherever men can dwell, God is there, in his works, to speak to them of himself. So much, says Stanza 1., of the heavens in general.

But now the *sun* takes a stanza all to himself; and, as seems meet, the figures wax more bold. The emphasis now to be laid on "the sun" is shown by his position at the very head of the stanza. An excellent point of connection with the first stanza is gained by attributing the act of setting up the tent for the sun to God himself (the 'El of the opening line of the psalm) and for once we spell the pronoun *He* with a capital initial. The word *tent* is the simple and usual rendering of the Hebrew 'ohel, and no "Sunday garment" is needed for it. The word *therein* naturally refers back to the *heavens* of ver 1, and so forms another link of connection with the first stanza. Moreover, as every eye can see *where* the sun enters his tent in the evening and *where* he reappears in the morning, the perhaps rather fanciful question arises whether the ancient Hebrews were quite so backward in their nature-views as is commonly supposed. The emphasis on the pronoun *he* in the second line of the stanza naturally carries the mind right back to the "sun" at the head of the previous line: *and he is like*. By a most beautiful figure of speech, comparing the sun to a *bridegroom* coming forth with a smile on his face from his nuptial *chamber*, the freshness of the sun every morning is expressed. With joy behind him, he has at the same time gladness before him, as he *comes forth* like a *hero rejoicing* in the consciousness of his staying powers, and that whoever may have need to retire for sleep at mid-day, he, unwearied, will be able to hold on his way till his race is run. The poet's eye measures the racer's course *from one end of the heavens to the other*; and, impressed with its magnificent sweep, his mind is struck with the universality of the sun's searching *warming* rays. The word for *sun* at the beginning of the stanza was *shemesh*, the customary word: it is now, at the end of the stanza, *hammah*, a poetical and less customary word to denote the orb of day; and though derived from a root meaning *to be hot*, yet in O.T. usage it is always used of the sun himself, and not merely of his heat, as all the other instances of its occurrence in the O.T. will show: Job 30:25, S. Song 6:10, Isa. 24:23 and 30:26. It is hence permissible to conclude that here also is the sun himself that is meant; and, if so, the pronoun *His* ("His sun"),—again spelling it with a capital, like the *He* of the first line,—will once more carry us up to "God," whose representative

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the *sun* so *strikingly is*: implying, without expressing, that, as the sun searches all, so in a higher sense does God. Thus the end of the second stanza returns to the beginning of the first, and the two are locked into a unit.

With Stanza III. we enter upon the second half of the psalm: the transition to which is certainly very abrupt, however we may account for that circumstance; some conceiving that here we have two distinct psalms on two distinct subjects, whose juxtaposition, as an afterthought, naturally causes the sense of abruptness; others thinking that the same mind that originated the first half, pausing to face a new but counterpart theme, instinctively adopted a new vocabulary and a new style. The exact genesis of the change we may never know, but the fact of the change remains undeniable, and the magnitude and tenor of it we may briefly trace.

Note, then, that the Divine name *El*, "the Mighty One," used once, and once only, in the former half of the psalm, now gives place to the Divine name *Jehovah*, which occurs six times in this stanza and once in the next, making seven times in all, in the second half of the psalm. This fact is significant; for, though this second half of the psalm is not strictly speaking about Jehovah himself but about his Law, etc., yet the repeated use of this different and more gracious Divine Name clearly ought to be regarded as shedding a soft lustre over the whole of this division of the psalm. If it only be true that "Jehovah" is pre-eminently a name of grace, as it undoubtedly is, then everything which it touches is graciously affected thereby. Whether "law," "testimony," "precept," or whatever else of "Jehovah," every form of his instruction for my guidance is lit up by its relation to himself, as the "Becoming One," "the helper of his people."

With this agree the breadth and variety of both nouns and adjectives which are related to Jehovah: his *law* in his "instruction" to guide as well as his "law" to bind; his *testimony* witnesses to his own grace as well as to the saint's duty; and so on to the end. The same with the adjectives: *perfect*, lacking nothing that the soul needs; *trustworthy*, warranting the fullest confidence; *right*, satisfying man's better judgment; *clear*, saying what it means, making duty plain; *clean*, no foul spot in it, to corrupt and abolish it; *truth*, giving right decisions between man and man, claim and claim, and therefore regulations worthy to regulate.

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But if nouns and adjectives have the grace of "Jehovah" resting on them, how much more those beautiful little pendants hanging upon them, each like a jewel in the ear of beauty; which, in four cases, describe the beneficent action of Jehovah's instruction, and in the two remaining instances attest its self-preserving power. The actions are all gracious: they *refresh*, they *make wise*, they *gladden*, they *enlighten*. Such Divine guidance must abide: *enduring evermore*, their Divine perfections are *vindicated* from all attacks, and they mutually explain and defend *each other*.

But is all this praise of the *Law*, not just a little exaggerated? No! why should it? Granted that the *Law* was a tutor guiding to Christ: are we to think that the child-guide had no affection for his ward? Besides, the terms employed are too broad and various to be limited to the mere binding force of the edicts from Sinai's summit: though even the Ten Words of Thunder had their gracious undertones. Let the Christian bethink him whether he cannot translate the whole of these six synonyms into the terms of Jesus and his Apostles, and then sing, "How gentle God's command"! Do the New Testament instructions not "refresh," "make wise," "gladden," "enlighten"—and "endure," triumphantly "vindicated"?

That "overflow," the 10th verse,—what means it? It looks as though, to the incipient apprehension of the psalmist, it had occurred, as a first thought, to have EIGHT full-fledged synonyms of the *Law*, as in Ps. 119; which half-formed design was subsequently abandoned; and then the unused colours were dashed on the canvas in magnificent profusion that nothing might be lost. Instead of saying seventhly,—“The word of Jehovah is costly—*more desirable than gold!*” and, eighthly, “The statutes of Jehovah are satisfying—*sweeter than honey,*” his enthusiasm breaks bounds, and he takes the saint's experimental response alone and intensifies two phases of it into a climax, and exclaims without more ado: *More desirable than gold—yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey—or the droppings of the comb.*

The transition at ver. 11 to the last stanza is very striking. Hitherto, neither "El" nor "Jehovah" has been directly addressed; but now a sense of *nearness* leads the psalmist reverently to look in the face of Jehovah, and say, *Thy—Thou—Thee*. He is in his heavenly Master's presence, and dutifully terms himself Jehovah's *servant*, yet without losing his sense of nearness or

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favoured acceptance; for he lays stress on this as a further commendation of the *regulations* of the Divine Law: *Even thine own servant*—who has long delighted himself in thy precepts and made them known to others—even HE *findeth warning in them*; lest, through inattention or over-confidence, he should insensibly or presumptuously fall into the error of the wicked. Thus admonished and restrained, he can bear witness that in *keeping them the reward is great*.

As if now moved to a searching of heart, the psalmist abruptly exclaims: *Mistakes who perceiveth?* By the emphasis he throws on the word “mistakes” through boldly preplacing it, he calls pointed attention to the precise nature of the failures of which he is thinking. Of course he is keeping within the general limits of *practical* “mistakes,” errors of conduct in doing or leaving undone, as alone worthy of notice here; but in thus calling attention to their exact character, he throws his mind back on this as the essence of them, that, being genuine “mistakes,” they are of course *unperceived*, or they would not be “mistakes”; and then the disturbing question arises: “How often may I not have unwittingly done wrong? For ‘wrong,’ after all, was the doing of the thing graciously forbidden, or the leaving undone of the thing graciously commanded. It was ‘wrong’ all the same—though I noted it not: the ‘law’ was transgressed, and my ‘soul’ lost its ‘refreshing.’” And so on, along the interminable line of sins of ignorance, which yet *are* sins. And therefore the psalmist is moved to pray the first prayer of the psalm: *from concealed things* (understand, “SUCH concealed things, concealed from myself by error or inadvertence,” otherwise they might still have been presumptuous though “concealed” from others) *acquit me*. What a searching lesson for us all!

Carelessness, in not noticing or remembering Divine Law, may lead to indifference as to heeding it when known and remembered; and thus sins of ignorance suggest sins of *knowledge and daring*; and behind even these the impulse to commit them may be strong, the temptation great; and then Divine restraint will be needed and is here earnestly sought—*how* earnestly, is seen by observing how aptly the petitioner reminds himself that he *is* Jehovah’s *servant*—and therefore bound by every tie thrown about him by his Master’s favour,—and by observing how seasonably he calls to mind that *presumptuous*

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sins, if not sternly checked, will assume *dominion* over him. No wonder that, with an evident sense of relief, a mind thus happily sensitive should exclaim: *Then—acquitted from unwitting sins and restrained from presumptuous sins—shall I be perfect—not indeed in degree, but in whole-heartedness, and be cleared of great transgression.*

Most appropriately is this last stanza of the psalm concluded by the unique prayer—in which surely even the holy men of today may join, at a long distance behind those holy men of old—*accepted be the sayings of my mouth*—which are here set forth as “pruned” to suit the strings of my lyre, *and the soft utterance—the tentative soliloquising—of my heart*—on mine own ear while constructing this my poem: *Before thee, continually* (surely the recording angel made a memorandum of them all!) *O Jehovah—thou God of covenant grace—my Rock of strength and confidence, and my Redeemer—from sin, sorrow and death.*

There is little need to say, that reasonable latitude should be given to the inscription *To David*. So long as the Royal Librarian felt justified in thus marking a psalm, the ends of literary justice and working convenience were met. A psalm may have been written by one of David's prophetic scribes or singers; yet, if offered to his royal master, and examined and approved by him, it would naturally be regarded strictly Davidic, and be fittingly deposited in the department of the library set apart to David's psalms. Notwithstanding all this, there would seem to be a peculiar poetic justice in attributing the first part of this psalm to David himself. The shepherd of Bethlehem was as familiar with the sun as with moon and stars; and having, in the leisure hours of his pastoral duties, oft marked the freshness of the sun in his rising, the triumphant valour of his unwearied way, the vast sweep of his daily circuit, the searching energy of his penetrating heat, and the calm majesty of his nightly retirement to his tent,—who so likely among psalmists as he, to have penned this snatch of song in his praise? The poetic justice lies in cherishing the conception that he who harped to the moon and the stars in Ps. 8 was the likeliest man to be allowed to sweep his strings to the sun in Ps. 19. It has been remarked, in the above Exposition, that even this snatch of song to the sun possesses a closely welded unity. Nevertheless, its ending is abrupt, and if it stood alone, must, as a psalm, have

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been pronounced unfinished. This apprehension is at once appeased by the theory of co-authorship. What the original ending of the sun-stanzas may have been, we know not; but the hypothesis is an easy one, that it had in it some local or temporal element which could be spared for the worthy purpose of making way for a second part. And then, as to the authorship of that second part, who so likely as Hezekiah to have composed it? With the passionate love for the law and for the temple and for the functions of priests and Levites which history attributes to him; with the leisure and the culture which as a prince naturally fell to his lot; and with the high poetic genius which, from Isa. 38, we know he possessed;—who so likely in all history as he, to have wedded this Law-Bride to that Sun-Bridegroom? Besides, the segments of truth are formed for cohesion; and the poet who penned the second part of this psalm, is the likeliest man whose shadow has ever been seen, to have possessed in himself and been able to command in gifted associates, the constellation of sanctified genius adequate, under Divine guidance, to the production of that literary marvel, Ps. 119,—after which it is but little to say, that, of course, he also wrote our present Ps. 1. Thus, another chain of unity at an early date, is forged for binding together The Song Book of all coming ages. “The king whose delight it was to speak of ‘the Maker of heaven and earth’ (Isa. 37:16; Ps. 121:2); and who encouraged the priests and Levites in their devotion to the Law of the Lord (2 Chron. 31:4), would readily adopt (and expand) this poem of David’s” —Thirtle, O.T.P., 314.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why doesn't Rotherham include verse three in the text of his translation? Discuss the problem.
2. What is the meaning of the expression “the glory of God”?
3. Do the heavens speak of the glory and power of God to an unbeliever? Cf. Rom. 1:20-23. Discuss.
4. The sun is especially considered in the handiwork of God—check our present known facts on the immense size of the sun—i.e. compared with the earth—What is “the tent” of the sun?
5. Give three of the beautiful comparisons made between the sun and a bridegroom—Discuss.

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6. Is there some connection between the first half of this psalm (verses 1 thru 6) and the last half? (verses 7 thru 14) what is it?
7. Discuss the terms "law"—and "testimony"—as they relate to God's word.
8. Discuss the adjectives: "perfect"—"right"—"clear"—"clean"—"truth" as they relate to our response to God's Law.
9. If the Old Covenant was to produce such response as: "refresh"—"make wise"—"gladden"—"enlighten"—how much more the New Covenant—discuss how this can actually happen.
10. How can God help us overcome sin? Be practical and personal.

PSALM 20

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

To Prayer for a King in Distress, a Favourable Answer
is Confidently Awaited.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-4, Petitions for Divine Succour. Refrain, ver. 5, Promise of Praise for Victory. Stanza II., vers. 6-8, Assuring Answer Acknowledged. Refrain, ver. 9, Praise Offered in Anticipation.

(Lm.) Psalm—By David.

- 1 May he¹ answer thee in the day of distress,
may the² God of Jacob set thee on high;
- 2 Send help to thee out of the sanctuary,
and out of Zion uphold thee;
- 3 Remember all thy grain-offerings,
and thine ascending-sacrifice esteem.³
- 4 Give thee according to thy heart,
and all thy purpose fulfill.

1. M.T.: "Jehovah."

2. M.T.: "name of the."

3. "Find thy sacrifice fat"—Dr.