

The SUPERScription is discussed with Psalms 4; 11; and 13. Identical formulations occur in Psalms 13; 20-21; 31; 41; 64; and 140.

The unity of Psalm 19 is under considerable debate. Understandably so, because the poem features two markedly distinct subjects: creation and the Torah. Many scholars therefore divide the psalm into two originally unrelated parts (vv. 2-7 and 8-15; see, e.g., Weiser, *Psalms*; Morgenstern; Kraus, *Psalmen*; Gunkel; Mowinckel, *W 1*, 90-91). Form-critical analysis recognizes, however, and many authors agree, that the different parts may have been used as a liturgical unit.

The HYMN TO CREATION is reminiscent of numerous ancient Near Eastern eulogies of the sun-god, found especially in Egypt (Assmann, 95-252; Erman, 12, 138-40, 283-92; *ANET*, 365-68, 386-89). Most of the extant examples are longer compositions that make extensive use of direct-address praise to the sun proper. "[When] thou art risen over the mountains thou dost scan the earth of heaven. Thou art holding the ends of the earth suspended from the midst. The people of the world, all of them, thou dost watch over" (*ANET*, 387; cf. v. 7c). In contradistinction, Ps 19:2-7 is not a hymn to the sun in the strict sense. At least in part, it was at one time a song about the highest god El and his creation (v. 2a; see M. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts* [VTSup 2; Leiden, 1955]; Schmidt, *Königtum*, 17-21). Since vv. 5c-7 concede a good bit of autonomy to the "hero" sun, however, this part may represent an even older layer of sun worship (vestiges of such a cult are manifest in 2 Kgs 21:3-6; 23:5, 11; Jer 8:2; Ezek 8:16; see T. H. Gaster, *IDB IV*, 463-65; T. Hartmann, *THAT II*, 987-99). Only through the accretion of vv. 8-15 did the psalm become a Yahweh hymn (see Psalm 29), a fact that speaks in favor of its liturgical unity.

More important, this little hymn in itself lacks some liturgical essentials. It addresses neither El nor anyone else directly, nor does it summon a congregation to worship and praise. It makes hymnic statements, to be sure, employing a mixture of participles, imperfects, perfects, and nominal clauses. But its outlook is very objective, distant, and meditative. The only visible interest is to describe the marvelous skies and celestial bodies, to let them sing—in a mysterious, superhuman way—the glories of El and witness to the all-penetrating power of the sun.

The second part of the psalm, praise to the Torah, in some ways is similar to the first. Again we meet descriptive phrases. In fact, vv. 8-10 present six double affirmations about the Torah, each line beginning with a different expression for the Law, each first half featuring a nominal clause, each second colon spelling out, in participle constructions, an activity of the Holy Torah (see Psalm 119, which adopted a similar pattern). V. 11 in a summarizing statement stresses the supreme value of the Torah for the believer.

At this point we finally get to the congregational anchoring of Psalm 19. Only the third part (vv. 12-15) uses prayer language, direct address of God, and identification of the speaker ("your servant"; "I"). The emphatic particle *gam*, "also" (not *wəgam*, "but," as the LXX suggests), draws conclusions from the

PSALM 19: HYMN AND PRAYER OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Structure

	MT	RSV
I. Superscription	1	—
II. Hymn to creation	2-7	1-6
A. To the heavens	2-5b	1-4b
B. To the sun	5c-7	4c-6
III. Hymn to the Torah	8-11	7-10
IV. Petition	12-15	11-14
A. Confession of sin	12-13a	11-12a
B. Petition	13b-14b	12b-13b
C. Affirmation of confidence	14c-d	13c-d
D. Plea to be heard	15	14

preceding hymn (cf. Gen 32:21 [RSV 20]; Hos 6:11; Zech 9:11). The following PETITION is a fitting closure, indicative of the *Sitz im Leben* of this poem. From this final section we must determine the genre and setting of Psalm 19 (see "Introduction to Psalms," section 2). The Torah, according to vv. 12-15, brings about self-recognition, fear, and awe, just as depicted in Neh 8:9-12 and 2 Kgs 22:11-13. But it contains, first of all, the taste of life (v. 11; cf. Psalms 1 and 119). Second, it transmits and creates remission of sins (vv. 13-14; cf. Psalm 32). In linguistic usage, this section has features of late OT literature. For example, the verb *zāhar*, "warn," occurs almost exclusively in Ezekiel, and the form *šāgā*, "trespass," is late priestly and sapiential usage (Lev 4:13; Num 15:22; Prov 5:19-20, 23).

The formal elements are akin to those used in complaint psalms. The CONFESSION OF SIN (vv. 12-13a) begins with an acknowledgment that the Torah is right (v. 12a; cf. Ps 51:6 [RSV 4]) and that compensation for the faithful is certain (v. 12b; cf. Deut 29:8 [RSV 9]; 30:16). The confession proper (v. 13a) is very much generalized and schematized, as it is in some Babylonian formulas, e.g., those that plead forgiveness of "conscious and unconscious sins" (*annu idū lā idū*, literally, "the sin that I know, not know"; cf. Ebeling, 8:10-12; Mayer, 111-18). The confession has the form of a rhetorical question and immediately turns into petition to be pardoned (v. 13b). The sinful state, then, is taken for granted (cf. the MT in Ps 31:11 [RSV 10]); it is not elaborated as in Psalm 51 or, on a communal level, as in Ezra 9 or Psalm 106. The subsequent PETITION tries to ward off insolent, godless companions (or oppressors? cf. v. 14b). Frequently in complaint rituals the author draws a line between just and unjust (Psalms 1; 10; 12; 139:19-22). Late psalms imply some group organization of the wicked; the expressions *zēdīm*, "haughty ones," and *māšal*, "govern," in v. 14 do hint in this direction (cf. Isa 13:11; Mal 3:14-15; Ps 119:21, 51, 69, 78, 85, 122). AFFIRMATION OF CONFIDENCE and FINAL PLEA are fitting closures of a personal prayer (vv. 14c-15; cf. Pss 25:16-21; 86:16-17; 119:169-176).

But why does this psalm omit invocation and initial plea, so indispensable in individual complaint (see "Introduction to Cultic Poetry," section 4B)? The composition as a whole indicates that objective, descriptive praise (vv. 2-7 and 8-11), even without the traditional call to worship, was considered an appropriate introduction to individual and congregational prayer.

Genre/Setting

We are dealing with a PERSONAL PRAYER built according to the old pattern of individual complaint (vv. 12-15; see "Introduction to Cultic Poetry," section 4B). This prayer was used, judging from its generalizing and socializing tendencies, in a liturgical framework of community worship. It features a hymnic introduction composed of two different strands of theological tradition (vv. 2-7 and 8-11). As a pattern of ritual prayer, such combination of hymn and petition is widespread and very old (Gerstenberger, *Mensch*, 93-111; Mayer, 39ff.). Since all the elements of Psalm 19 show a marked decrease in direct-address

discourse, both by God and the participants of worship, we may surmise that the prayer comes out of Torah-oriented synagogal assemblies.

Intention

Adoration of Yahweh and meditative prayer encouraged the discovery of individual identity within the community of faith (see "Introduction to Cultic Poetry," section 4D).

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