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**Exegesis of Psalm 19: Love in the Works and Words of God**

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BY  
ALEXANDER MICHAEL PECK

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## **Exegesis of Psalm 19: Love in the Works and Words of God**

This paper presents an exegetical study of Psalm 19. The study has been prompted by an extraordinary theological claim – in essence, as McCann states, “Psalm 19 affirms that love *is* the basic reality.”<sup>1</sup> He further elaborates:

According to the psalmist, the God whose sovereignty is proclaimed by cosmic voices is the God who has addressed a personal word to humankind – God’s *torah*. Furthermore, this God is experienced ultimately by humankind not as a cosmic enforcer but as a forgiving next of kin! God is love, and *love is the force that drives the cosmos . . .* The love that motivated God to create humankind and bear the burden of human disobedience (Genesis 1-11) is the same love manifested in the story of Israel (see especially Exodus 32-34), in the life of the psalmist (vv. 11-14), and, as Christians profess, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. *Love is the basic reality of the universe* [emphasis mine].<sup>2</sup>

The overall goal of this exegesis, then, is to justify the above theological premise. The paper proposes that the theme of Psalm 19 may be expressed in the words: “Nature and revelation [*torah*] alike testify of God’s love”.<sup>3</sup> The psalm is a grateful meditation on God’s self-revelation in nature and in his law.<sup>4</sup> White<sup>5</sup> expresses this fittingly:

The sunshine and the rain, that gladden and refresh the earth, the hills and seas and plains, all speak to us of the Creator’s love . . . “God is love” is written upon every opening bud, upon every spire of springing grass . . . The word of God [*torah*] reveals his character. He himself has declared his infinite love and pity.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Clinton McCann, Jr., “The Book of Psalms”, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 753.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Seoul: EGPA, 2001), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 3 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 675.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen Gould White (1827-1915) was a Seventh-day Adventist leader. Among White’s publications are the nine-volume *Testimonies for the Church* (1855-1909) and *Steps to Christ*, which has sold more than twenty million copies in more than a hundred languages. W. R. Martin, modern researcher, concluded that Ellen G. White was true to the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith regarding the salvation of the soul and the believer’s life in Christ (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* [2<sup>nd</sup> edition], edited by Walter A. Elwell, p. 1273).

<sup>6</sup> White, *Steps to Christ*, 9-10.

As a framework for this exegesis, nine aspects of the exegetical process will be used as sub-headings<sup>7</sup> which means, however, that the message or theme of the exegesis will not be addressed in each of the nine categories. Notwithstanding, using the nine headings is for the purpose of organization and completeness, but is not to suggest that exegesis is a simple mechanical undertaking.<sup>8</sup> (In fact, it must be emphasized that the exegetical procedures are not related to each other in any rigid architectonic fashion.<sup>9</sup>)

### **A Translation of Psalm 19**

To begin with, an English translation of Psalm 19 is as follows:<sup>10</sup>

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

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.

Ps 19:3 There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.

Ps 19:4 Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

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.

Ps 19:7 The law<sup>11</sup> of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.<sup>12</sup> The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

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<sup>7</sup> John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*, rev. ed. (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1987), 3. The nine aspects have been taken from this handbook.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), 1022-1023.

<sup>11</sup> A. Cohen, *The Psalms: Hebrew Text and English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Soncino Press, 1985), 54. The English word, "law", is from the Hebrew *torah* which properly means "instruction, direction".

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.

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.

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.

### **Textual Criticism**

(The quest for the original wording)

Three textual elements are addressed as follows in the context of the theme of love as the basic reality.

In verse 7a, the statement “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul”, would be better translated as: “The instruction of the LORD is all-encompassing, restoring life.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, God’s *torah* is all-encompassing.<sup>14</sup> No aspect of life is overlooked. The *torah* achieves what God lovingly intends for human life: wisdom (see Deut 4:6), joy (see Ps 4:7), and enlightenment (see Ps 36:9).

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<sup>12</sup> McCann, Jr., “The Book of Psalms”, 752. As stated, verse 7a would be better translated as: “The instruction of the LORD is all-encompassing, restoring life.” In this context, McCann further writes that “as vv. 4b-6 describe the all-encompassing circuit of the sun, so v. 7a asserts that God’s *torah* is all-encompassing.”

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

The outcome of conforming to God’s *torah* (or God’s word) is one of “great reward” (v. 11).<sup>15</sup> This phrase, however, is better translated “great consequence”.<sup>16</sup> It shows that the *torah* should not be reduced to a mechanistic system of obedience (reward) and disobedience (punishment).<sup>17</sup> As McCann notes, “God’s *torah* does not consist of a static body of revelation but a dynamic, living relationship.”<sup>18</sup> Rather, the “great consequence” consists of being connected to the true source of life: God who is love.<sup>19</sup>

The final two words of Psalm 19 support the underlying affirmation that love is the basic reality of the universe. The psalmist addresses God as “my Redeemer”. This suggests a personal experience of God and connotes intimacy.<sup>20</sup> The term “redeemer”, explains McCann, “derives from the realm of family relationships, where it was the responsibility of family members to buy back, or ‘redeem’, relatives who had fallen into slavery (see Leviticus 25:47-49).”<sup>21</sup> Originally from the Hebrew, *go’el*, the word “redeemer” is sometimes translated in the NRSV as “next of kin” (see for example Ruth 4:1, 3).<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the Creator God, whose existence is attested to in verses 1-6, is the same God whom the psalmist has experienced personally as “my next of kin”.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 753.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible*, 229. Leviticus 25:47-49 states: “If an alien or a temporary resident among you becomes rich and one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself to the alien living among you or to a member of the alien’s clan, he retains the right of redemption after he has sold himself. One of his relatives may redeem him: An uncle or a cousin or any blood relative in his clan may redeem him. Or if he prospers, he may redeem himself.”

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

## Historical Criticism

(The setting in time and space)

One view regarding the compilation of Psalm 19 is that two independent psalms have been joined together.<sup>24</sup> Eaton, however, rejects such a notion in that the two parts of the psalm skillfully complement each other.<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, textual analysis reveals that elements in the first part of Psalm 19 (vv. 1-6) are extremely ancient.<sup>26</sup> Since the sun was an object of worship in the ancient Near East, McCann suggests that it is likely that a hymn to the sun lies behind vv. 1-6.<sup>27</sup> Of course, in Psalm 19, the sun is not a god.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the second part (vv. 7-14) echoes the law-piety of post-exilic Judaism.<sup>29</sup> Eaton concludes with the suggestion that “the author is a devout Torah student of about the fourth century BC who has adapted ancient materials to form a prelude for his work.”<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, an earlier dating for Psalm 19 ought not to be excluded.<sup>31</sup> In fact, Sarna has suggested that the attributes and actions of the *torah* (described in vv. 7-10) can be applied to the sun god in different ancient Near Eastern texts.<sup>32</sup> As a result, he has proposed that Psalm 19 “was composed as ‘a tacit polemic’ in the time of Josiah to oppose the Assyrian-influenced worship of astral deities, including the sun.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> H. H. Eaton, *Psalms: Introduction and Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 65.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> McCann, Jr., “The Book of Psalms”, 751.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Eaton, *Psalms*, 65.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> McCann, Jr., “The Book of Psalms”, 751.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* Here McCann is drawing on Nahum M. Sarna’s work entitled *Songs of the Heart* (New York: Schocken, 1993), page 74.

Finally, Mays offers an explanation for a cultic function of Psalm 19, stating that:

The concluding prayer knows about the dangers of “the unintended errors” dealt with in Leviticus 4-5 and of the insolent men who afflict the righteous in Psalm 119. The author asks to be kept innocent and free of these dangers and offers his words and the meditation they express as the acceptable sacrifice to accompany his prayer. That is, *the recited psalm performs a cultic function without the cultic procedures of sacrifice*. This is a clue to the way other psalms, the hymns, and the prayers are viewed by the composer. They are all words of mouth expressing meditation of the heart said as the primary medium of worship (emphasis mine).<sup>34</sup>

### **Grammatical Criticism**

(The language of the text)

The language in Psalm 19 truly reflects the beauty and splendor of the Hebrew poetry in the Psalter.<sup>35</sup> C. S. Lewis wrote, “I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.”<sup>36</sup> Weiser has noted the powerful metaphorical language seen in vv. 7-14, and Craigie has concluded that Psalm 19 combines beautiful poetry with profound theology.<sup>37</sup>

Of vv. 7-10, it has been written that it would be difficult to find more nearly perfect examples of Hebrew parallelism:<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> James Luther Mays, “The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106/1 (1987): 6.

<sup>35</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 178.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* VanGemeren is drawing on C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), 63.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* VanGemeren is drawing on A. Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1959), 198; and Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (Waco: Word, 1983), 183.

<sup>38</sup> Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 676.

In both grammatical and logical structure the component parts of the parallel clauses of the several couplets are remarkably arranged. The KJV translation almost perfectly conveys to the English reader the beauty and order of the original Hebrew structure.<sup>39</sup>

On a specific note, the language style of verse 14, according to Eaton, resembles the formula of sacrificial propitiation (see Leviticus 1:3ff.).<sup>40</sup> The psalmist presents his words to God as an offering to beseech his mercy and grace.<sup>41</sup>

Table 1, which highlights God’s revelation, suggests that God’s instruction reflects elements of divine love offered to human beings:

Table 1: Divine Instruction Based on Love

<i>God’s revelation</i>	<i>Its nature</i>	<i>Its effects</i>
law	perfect	revives
statutes	trustworthy	make wise
precepts	right	rejoice
commands	radiant	enlighten
fear	pure	endures
ordinances	sure	are righteous

*Source:* Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), 1023.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 676-677.

<sup>40</sup> Eaton, *Psalms*, 67.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 677. Idea for Table 1 obtained from this source.



## Literary Criticism

(The composition and rhetorical style of the text)

Psalm 19 brings together cosmos, *torah*, and prayer.<sup>43</sup> In the words of Mays, “it puts in an interrelated sequence the language of the heavens, the instruction of the Lord, and words of the psalmist.”<sup>44</sup>

Biblical scholars have classified Psalm 19 as a *torah* psalm, like Psalms 1 and 119.<sup>45</sup>

Traditionally, scholars have also often divided it into two poems: Psalm 19:1-6 and Psalm 19:7-14.<sup>46</sup> The first deals with creation; the second with the *torah*.<sup>47</sup> However, there are actually three separate sections to the psalm: (1) vv. 1-6, focusing on the creation; (2) vv. 7-10, focusing on the *torah*; and (3) vv. 11-14, which focus on the psalmist.<sup>48</sup>

Notwithstanding, according to Mays, the psalm is a literary unit.<sup>49</sup> In his view, “the custom of dividing it into two or three separate units overlooks the compositional techniques, uncovered in several recent studies, that unite quite different styles and topics.”<sup>50</sup> Admittedly, to a form-critical approach, the combinations seem artificial.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Mays, “The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter”, 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 171. Joseph Jensen, *God's Word to Israel*, rev. ed. (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982), 229. Jensen places Psalm 19 as a hymn.

<sup>46</sup> McCann, Jr., “The Book of Psalms”, 751.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Mays, “The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter”, 5.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

Mays suggests that the literary model for the second part of Psalm 19 (vv. 7-10) comes from Proverbs.<sup>52</sup> The reason is that the Psalm commends the *torah* in a similar way that the teacher acclaims wisdom (Prov 8:1-21; see also 4:20-23; 6:23).<sup>53</sup> Mays elaborates further:

To extend the commendation, the author has searched out and assembled five companion terms for *torah*: testimony, precepts, commandment, fear, and ordinance. One can put it that way because the terms are at home in various kinds of literary sources, but the list and its order are unique . . . The other four terms [*torah*, testimony, commandment, and ordinance] appear in clusters in Deuteronomy-Kings. This eclectic gathering of terms is a procedure used also in Psalm 119. For now, suffice it to say that the procedure suggests that the psalmist found the instruction of the Lord in a variety of sources.<sup>54</sup>

### **Form Criticism**

(The genre and life setting of the text)

Psalm 19 (together with Psalm 1 and Psalm 119) does not have a significant place in the established critical approaches to the Psalms – it does not easily fit into any of the accepted genres or into any of the liturgical settings in ancient Israel.<sup>55</sup> It is sometimes considered as a “wisdom psalm”, although there is uncertainty whether this is correct (and the classification, “wisdom psalms”, is itself ambiguous).<sup>56</sup>

Mays, on the other hand, proposes that Psalm 19, and many others labelled as “mixed genres”, are in fact “a type of literature whose generic characteristic is the gathering and combination of styles and materials into a new kind of unit.”<sup>57</sup> He states further:

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 5.

The juxtaposition of cosmic speech with categories of the Lord's instruction is certainly intentional. The heavenly order praises God, and the psalmist praises the instruction of the Lord. The implication of this pairing is not expressly stated . . . The certain point is the presentation of a God who is known both through creation and *torah*. The *torah* of the Lord is just as certain and everlasting, just as much a part of the nature of reality as the succession of day and night and the regular course of the sun.<sup>58</sup>

### **Tradition Criticism**

(The stages behind the text)

The Psalter, a collection of collections, is the final stage in a process that spanned centuries.<sup>59</sup> The formation of psalters may possibly go back to the time of David, or probably to the early days of the first temple (Solomon's) – when temple liturgy first began to take shape.<sup>60</sup> The present Psalter refers to certain collections and other evidence points to further compilations.<sup>61</sup>

Regarding Psalm 19, it has been suggested that the author lengthened an existing hymn that celebrated God's wisdom in his works and words.<sup>62</sup> He upholds that God's revelation is sufficient over paganism, secularism, and humanism.<sup>63</sup>

Psalm 19, together with Psalms 1 and 119, are generally regarded as the latest of the Psalms.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible*, 994.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. The present Psalter refers to (1) the songs and/or psalms of the sons of Korah; (2) the songs and/or psalms of Asaph; and (3) the songs of ascents. Other evidence for compilations includes the fact that Ps 1-41 frequently refers to the divine name of *Yahweh*, while Ps 42-72 frequently refers to *Elohim*.

<sup>62</sup> VanGemeren, "Psalms," 178.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. VanGemeren adds that "Paul's argument against paganism assumes the clarity of the natural revelation of God's eternal power and divinity (Rom 1:20)."

<sup>64</sup> Mays, "The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter", 3.

### **Redaction Criticism**

(The final viewpoint and theology)

Psalm 19 shares one distinctive feature with Psalms 1 and 119 – it is a psalm in which the instruction of the Lord (*torah*) is the central organizing theme and is seen as the prime reality in the relation of humans to God.”<sup>65</sup>

Those who composed Psalm 19 wrote it as a *psalm*, and it was included in the *Psalter*.<sup>66</sup>

This means that Psalm 19, together with Psalms 1 and 119 – the latest and smallest group of the Psalms – could provide an important clue to the way the psalms (individually and as a book) were read and understood at the time of their composition and inclusion.<sup>67</sup>

Psalm 19, as is the case for Psalms 1 and 119, are the work of poets who, as Mays proposes, are bringing together elements of vocabulary, style, and theology from various parts of the emerging Hebrew canon of scripture.<sup>68</sup> “This intentional mixing is a way of expressing a more comprehensive understanding of God and is the basic characteristic of such poetry.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

Additionally, Psalm 19, with its *torah* theme, does not stand isolated in relation to the other psalms.<sup>70</sup> Mays suggests that other expressions of this theme are found throughout the Psalter.<sup>71</sup> Altogether seventeen psalms can be identified.<sup>72</sup> “They all belong,” writes Mays, “to the last stratum of the collection or have been developed by *torah* interests.” In fact:

Taken together, this harvest of texts contains a profile of understanding of the Lord’s way with people and the world that is organized around *torah*. *Torah applies to everything* [emphasis mine].<sup>73</sup>

Finally, examining the location Psalm 19 in the Psalter (as well as Psalms 1 and 119), reveals that those who made the final shaping and arrangement of the Psalter were totally committed to *torah* as the divinely willed way of life.<sup>74</sup>

### **Structuralist Criticism**

(The universals in the text)

The premise that Psalm 19 shows love as the basic reality of the universe can be supported by the fact that the *torah* represents an expression of God’s love for mankind. God, as sovereign over the created order (seen from vv. 1-6), provides loving life-sustaining guidance and instruction for the humans he has formed (vv. 7-10).<sup>75</sup> This is demonstrated when five synonyms for God’s revelation are considered: “law”, “statutes”, (v. 7); “precepts”, “commands”, (v. 8); as well as “ordinances” (v.9).

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Mays elaborates by showing how the *torah* applies to the basic narrative that runs from the fathers to the land. How it applies to the offices of priest and king. How it applies to Israel’s future. And, finally, how it applies to the life of every person.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>75</sup> McCann, Jr., “The Book of Psalms”, 752.

Verses 7-10 show that God has spoken a personal word to humankind.<sup>76</sup> “It is revealing,” notes McCann, “that the personal name for God, Yahweh (“LORD”), occurs six times in verses 7-9, whereas it does not occur at all in verses 1-6.”<sup>77</sup> Relatedness to God, who is love (1 Jn 4:16b), makes life possible – and it is the *torah* that mediates this personal relatedness.<sup>78</sup> In other words, God’s personal word enables humans to live in harmony both with God and with the creation.<sup>79</sup>

In relation to Psalm 19, Simon concurs that love is the basic reality of the cosmos when he states that:

This God is not the God of the philosophers – as Pascal perceived in his vision of fire (1654) – but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of the Exodus and Sinai: the God who redeemed Israel and will redeem man. This *Go’el* is man’s next-of-kin just because he is Beginning and End, infinitely beyond in eternal Glory. Wisdom and Law derive not from a moral principle, but from the Creator and Redeemer. Thus the objective demands are rendered personal through God.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ulrich Simon, *Psalm No. 11: The Dimension Bible Guides* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1972), 48.

Love being the force that drives the cosmos, is further substantiated in verses 11-14.

Verses 12-13 indicate that humans will fall prey to “errors”, “hidden faults”, and even “willful sins”. As a result, verse 12b (“forgive my hidden faults”) and verse 13b (“may they [the willful sins] not rule over me”) represent petitions for forgiveness.<sup>81</sup> The outcome is forgiveness, evidenced by the words “blameless” (v. 13c) and “innocent” (v. 13d), due to God’s grace – a demonstration of the love of a forgiving next of kin. To be blameless, however, does not mean to be sinless, but to live in humble dependence upon God – both for continued forgiveness and for life itself, all by the grace and love of God.<sup>82</sup>

Finally, the last affirmation of this *torah* psalm, that God is both “rock” and “redeemer”, shows that in his constant love is the beginning and end of all one’s hope.<sup>83</sup>

### **Canonical Criticism**

(The sacred text of synagogue and church)

Regarding the canon of the Hebrew Bible, including the Psalms, Collins states the following:

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<sup>81</sup> McCann, Jr., “The Book of Psalms”, 752-753.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 753.

<sup>83</sup> Eaton, *Psalms*, 67.

The Hebrew Bible took shape over several hundred years, and attained its final form only in the first century C.E. The *Torah* was the earliest part to crystallize. It is often associated with the work of Ezra in the fifth century B.C.E. . . . The Hebrew collection of the *Prophets* seems to have been formed before the second century B.C.E. We find references to the Torah and the Prophets as authoritative Scriptures in the second century B.C.E., in the book of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus) . . . The preface to the book of Ben Sira also mentions other writings that were regarded as authoritative. There does not, however, seem to have been any definitive list of these writings before the first century C.E. Most references to the Jewish Scriptures in the writings of this period (including references in the New Testament) speak only of “the Law and the Prophets”. The *Psalms* are sometimes added as a third category. The Dead Sea scrolls include a Psalms Scroll that has additional psalms, and this would seem to indicate that the canonical collection of psalms had not yet been fixed. *The first references to a fixed number of authoritative Hebrew writings are found toward the end of the first century C.E* [emphasis mine].<sup>84</sup>

### Conclusion

From this exegesis, Psalm 19 affirms that love *is* the basic reality. The psalm begins with creation, continues with God’s instruction (*torah*), and ends with the psalmist’s own sinfulness and salvation.<sup>85</sup> In all stages, the underlying theme is love. This is evidenced as God reveals God-self through nature (vv. 1-6), contrasting God’s power and human finiteness; as God reveals God-self through the *torah* (vv. 7-11), contrasting God’s holiness and human weakness; and as God reveals God-self through daily experiences (vv. 12-14), contrasting God’s gracious forgiveness and human sinfulness.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> John J. Collins, “Introduction: What Are the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament?” in *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 3-6.

<sup>85</sup> *Life Application Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, Inc., 1990), 890.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*



That love is the basic reality of the universe is *specifically* attested to by the heavens which give dramatic evidence of God’s existence, power, and care.<sup>87</sup> The design, intricacy, and orderliness reveal a personally involved Creator.<sup>88</sup> Love is attested to through God’s *torah* which revives those who faithfully acknowledge their Creator, makes them wise, rejoices their hearts, enlightens their eyes, warns them, and rewards them.<sup>89</sup>

In closing, one may tentatively conclude that Psalm 19 understands the *torah*, not merely from without as law – but also from within as love.<sup>90</sup> Or, perhaps better: law and love are not opposed but complementary.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> VanGemen, "Psalms," 186. Here VanGemen draws on the work of Basil de Pinto, "The Torah and the Psalms", in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967): 154-174.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* This, as VanGemen notes, "excludes legalism, working for rewards, justification by works, or Pharisaism".

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