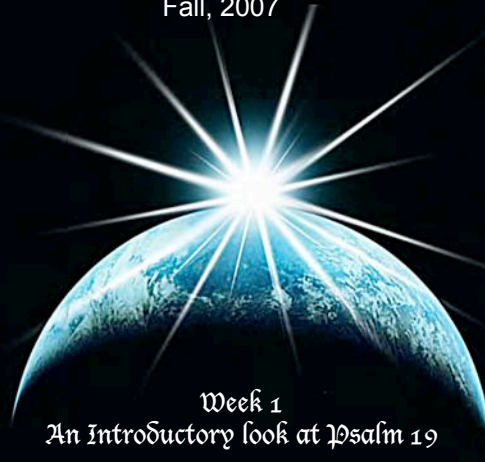


Science and the Bible

A Course of Study
by
Dr. David C. Bossard
Fall, 2007



This is a course of study in Science and the Bible. In a sense this course is an extended personal testimony about my belief in the full inspiration of God's Word, and my equally strong belief that the natural world is a true and accurate proclamation of God's Works. I am convinced that the Book of God's Word and the Book of God's Works are in complete harmony when they are correctly read. Both testify to the true God, and each gives unique and confirming insight into the nature of God and of his Creation.

An Introductory look at Psalm 19

Verses 1-6: The Book of God's Works

"God" = El, Elohim = God the Creator
- The Name used in Genesis 1



Verses 7-13: The Book of God's Words

"God" = Yahweh = God the Redeemer
- The Name used in Genesis 2-3
(start of the redemption story)



Our study takes its cue from Psalm 19. It has two parts.

Verses 1-6 describe the Book of God's Works.

The word for God is "El" or its plural, "Elohim". This is God the Creator, the name used throughout Genesis 1. This is usually indicated in your Bibles by the name "God".

These are the verses which begin in the King James version with the glorious statement , "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork."

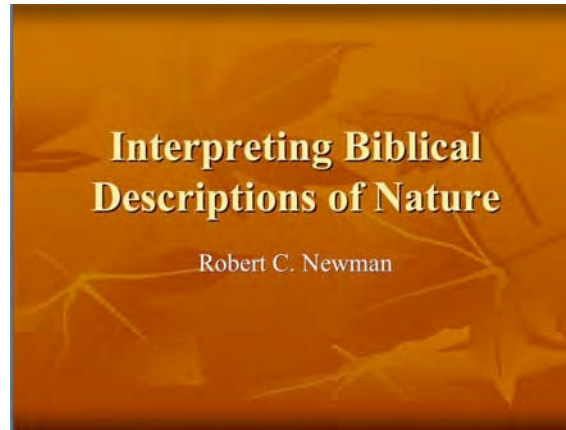
Verses 7-13 describe the Book of God's Words, using a number of descriptive terms: Law, Statutes, Precepts, Fear, Ordinances.

The word for God is "Yahweh" which is indicated in your text by "LORD" in capital letters. Older translations may use the word "Jehovah". This is God the Redeemer, the name used in Genesis 2-3 which describes the Fall and its consequences, ending in the promise of a redeemer in Genesis 3:17. It is appropriate that the redeemer is the giver of the law, which points the way to salvation -- something that the Book of God's Works could never do.

Let us now read Psalm 19.

An Introductory look at Psalm 19

•The Use of Images and figures of speech

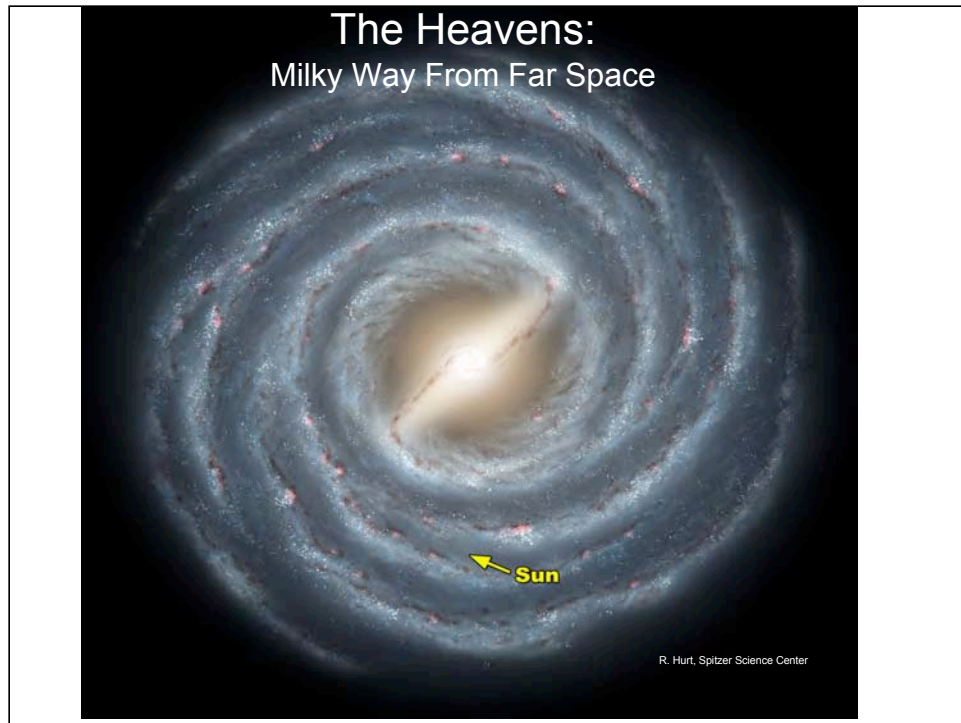


I plan to spend a little time on this Psalm, particularly verses 1-4. But today I would like to consider how the Bible uses images and figures of speech, especially when things of the natural world come up for discussion.

Dr. Bob Newman has a powerpoint on this subject, and perhaps that would be a good place to begin.

After listening to his powerpoint, I'd like to go through Psalm 19 and discuss the use of images and figures of speech in this Psalm.

[View *Interpreting Biblical Descriptions of Nature*]



Our Sun and its planets are in the Milky Way. We see the Milky Way as a milky-colored band across the sky. It is a spiral galaxy made up of about 175 billion stars. The philosopher Democritus correctly judged that the Milky Way is "a cluster of small stars very close together." He wrote this around 400 BC. He is also the earliest person to write that all matter is made up of atoms, which he named, appropriately, "atoma"

Our Sun is on the edge of one of the spiral arms.

The stars we can see with the naked eye are all from the Milky Way. The Andromeda galaxy, which is itself billions of stars, is faintly visible to the naked eye in the Andromeda constellation. It is, I believe the only visible (to the naked eye) night sky object that is outside the Milky Way in the Northern Hemisphere. In the Southern Hemisphere the Magellanic clouds include two visible nearby galaxies.

Figures of Speech in Psalm 19:1-4a

Verse 1: declare, proclaim, hands,
skies above (?)

Verse 2: pour forth, speech,
display knowledge

Verse 3: ?? Speech, language,
voice, heard

Verse 4a: voice, words, ends of
world



Returning to Psalm 19, let's first go through it verse by verse and consider the figures of speech used in the Psalm.

For now, let's include possible figures, and later we may prune down the list somewhat.

Verse 1:

Verse 2:

Verse 3:

Verse 4a:

Figures of Speech in vss. 1 to 4a ...

- What is the "firmament" or "sky above?"



I Kings 4:33 [Solomon] described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish.

We will say more about verses 1 to 4a another time, but I would like to make just one observation.

The "scientific" description of the cosmos is something that would characterize the Greeks rather than the Hebrews. The person in this figure is characteristic of the Greek philosopher: trying to figure out what goes on behind the scenes, mostly by philosophical reflection. I don't think this picture fits the Hebrew philosopher.

I don't think the Hebrew mind was inclined to be so analytical. They were practical people. If something was beyond their comprehension, they were content to see it as part of God's wonderful creation, and let it go at that. The Bible describes God's creation, but does not try to analyse it, as the Greeks did.

The best examples of scientific investigation in the Bible are the studies of King Solomon -- who made a systematic study of plants and animals. But no part of the Bible is devoted to speculating about the cosmos in the way that the Greeks did. All that we have are statements of fact about what can be observed, and the unexplainable marvels are described using figures of speech.

A general rule of thumb is that such observations are always expressed from the point of view of a person standing on the earth. In contrast to

Figures of Speech in vss. 4b to 6 ...

•Do verses 4-6 say *anything* about David's "cosmology?"

-- No ... they are poetic descriptions of the marvels of God's heavens.



Sun God Helios



Orion, Taurus and Canis

Did the Greeks really believe that their constellation maps or their pantheon were "real"? Not likely!

Consider next the imagery in verses 4b to 6.

Should we assume that David had a primitive notion of the Sun, or is it just a poetic description?

Along a similar vein, what are we to make of the elaborate Greek myths about the gods? What about their fanciful construction of the constellations?

It is likely that these were mostly fanciful, poetic images used to describe "unworldly" things.

Today we use descriptive terms that do not imply anything about our scientific understanding of things -- the sun rising and setting. The leaden skies.

We often personify inanimate objects -- "the computer is being stubborn today."

When referring to such things as this Psalm, it is best to just understand what the poetic intention is, without reading into it a statement of their understanding of how things are.

Figures of Speech in Psalm 19:4b-6

Verse 4b:

Verse 5:

Verse 6:

Returning to Psalm 19, let's first go through it verse by verse and consider the figures of speech used in the Psalm.

For now, let's include possible figures, and later we may prune down the list somewhat.

Verse 4b:

Verse 5:

Verse 6:

Figures of Speech in Psalm 19:7-11

Verse 7:

Verse 8:

Verse 9:

Verse 10:

Verse 11:

Returning to Psalm 19, let's first go through it verse by verse and consider the figures of speech used in the Psalm.

For now, let's include possible figures, and later we may prune down the list somewhat.

Verse 7:

Verse 8:

Verse 9:

Verse 10:

Verse 11:

Figures of Speech in Psalm 19:12-14

Verse 12:

Verse 13:

Verse 14:

Returning to Psalm 19, let's first go through it verse by verse and consider the figures of speech used in the Psalm.

For now, let's include possible figures, and later we may prune down the list somewhat.

Verse 12:

Verse 13:

Verse 14: