

The Dialectical Interplay of Seeing and Hearing in Psalm 19 and Its Connection to Wisdom

SHERI L. KLOUDA
CRISWELL COLLEGE

The paper attempts to establish through exegetical analysis of the Hebrew text a plausible literary framework for Psalm 19. A careful study of the psalm suggests that the psalmist draws on the basic concepts of seeing and hearing in the construction of this poem. In a skillful reversal of roles, visual terminology conveys verbal ideas while verbal vocabulary describes visual phenomena. As a result, the visual and verbal revelation of Yahweh are at once contrasted and compared in the text. Together they sustain a complementary relationship, comprising one complete revelation of Yahweh.

Furthermore, the interplay of seeing and hearing may account for the wisdom features present in the psalm. The Ancient Near East traditionally viewed wisdom as derived from the observation of the natural world. The superior nature of genuine wisdom, appropriated by Israel however, comes from Yahweh's verbal revelation. Wisdom acquired through visual testimony becomes assimilated under the auspices of wisdom as defined by Torah. Yahweh's word provides the only source of wisdom for interpreting the witness of the external world properly. Ultimately, both Yahweh's works and words testify to the glory of the Creator.

Key Words: Psalm 19, wisdom, seeing, hearing, Torah

INTRODUCTION

Despite current trends addressing biblical texts from a literary perspective, the literary framework of Psalm 19 has been neglected. The thematic diversity of the psalm and the putative incongruity of its sections dominate contemporary literary contributions. The studies that attempt to apply the rubric of literary analysis to the passage tend to terminate the process at the level of the function of words and lines. Consequently, the extant text does not receive the synthetic reading which it deserves.

Psalm 19 exhibits a masterful play of contrasts and similarities, of implied paradox and resolution. At once, the psalmist juxtaposes wisdom acquired from creation and wisdom derived from Torah, then joins the two together as complementary constituents comprising Yahweh's divine revelation. Furthermore, visual communication which transmits a silent yet comprehensible message is placed in opposition to verbal communication described in terms of visual language. When the two aspects are combined, seeing and hearing comprise the counterparts of holistic perception.

A careful examination of the psalm reveals a governing structure of dialectical interplay between concepts associated with seeing and hearing. The interchange between visual or verbal concepts and illusionary language highlight the unique nature of genuine wisdom as opposed to the generally accepted form of wisdom typical of the surrounding ancient Near Eastern culture. In addition, the specific terminology selected by the psalmist further substantiates this interplay of seeing and hearing.

I. SEEING AND HEARING IN CONNECTION TO WISDOM

The Hebrew terms רָאָה (*rā'â*) "seeing" and שָׁמַע (*šēma'*) "hearing" frequently occur as word pairs in the scriptural text.¹ Experience through one sense expands and informs the other. On numerous occasions, the terms figuratively describe "understanding" or "comprehension."² The relevance of the terms apply particularly to the context of Psalm 19, which focuses specifically on knowledge and instruction received through the revelation of Yahweh, and appropriates terminology descriptive of these senses. The psalm boasts a number of wisdom elements and allusions with established connections to the theme of revelation through nature and the Torah.³ Both nature and law attest to the same divine origin. Furthermore, Scripture often associates Torah with light,⁴ perhaps explaining the psalmist's emphasis on the sun, the chief source of light both physically and metaphorically.

1. Deut 4:6, 36; 5:24; 29:4; Isa 1:15; 6:9-10; passim.

2. Deut 4:6; 5:1; 6:3-4; 9:1; 11:13; 26:17; Prov 2:2; 4:1; 5:1; Qoh 4:3; 8:17; Job 13:1, passim.

3. See for example, Prov 3:3-20; 8:22-31; Job 28; Psalm 119, passim.

4. The psalmist cleverly draws on a dual connotation for light. Light often figuratively refers to "understanding" received from studying and obeying the Torah. The Torah "enlightens" the mind of the reader (Ps 119:18, 105) and provides the "light" which guides the faithful in righteous living (Prov 6:23). Note the comments of Rabbeinu Bahya, *Bei'ur al ha-torah* (3 vols.; ed. C. Chavel; Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1966) 24-25; and D. Qimhi, *Ha-peirush ha-shalem al tehillim* (ed. A. Davon; Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1974) 47-48.

While the two concepts of seeing and hearing stand in a complementary relationship, they may also be understood in some contexts as diametrically opposed.⁵ Israel constantly sought reaffirmation of the presence and providence of Yahweh through physical manifestations of his person or by demonstrations of his power.⁶ When the Israelites received the law at Sinai, however, they were intentionally prevented from seeing the form of Yahweh.⁷ The veracity of Yahweh's words relied upon the incontestable character of God and superceded the testimony of visual representation. The authority of Yahweh's word had to be grounded in the nature and attributes of Yahweh, rather than relying on visual phenomena as the primary means of authentication.⁸ The source of genuine wisdom depended upon the divine authority of the covenant, or Yahweh's words, thereby distinguishing itself from the visual and experiential nature of traditional wisdom originally practiced among neighboring peoples.

Although ancient Israel was repeatedly forbidden to craft statues or idols for worship of any kind, the nation's tendency to embrace idolatry represented a continuous struggle between the traditional form of wisdom, based on visual phenomena, and the genuine wisdom of Yahweh's words. The biblical text underscores the importance of Yahweh's words as superceding any visible representation of Yahweh. For example, the book of Deuteronomy reinforces the prohibitions against idolatry and worldly wisdom (deriving ultimate knowledge from and participating in worship directed to what is seen), by warning against solicitation to idolatry, even if it is accompanied by signs and wonders (13:15).

The book equally defines and expands on Israel's obedience to the spoken words of Yahweh, describing the outward praxis of genuine wisdom, manifested by proper living in relationship to God and to

5. For example, Deut 4:12; also, 1 Kgs 10:6-7, where simply hearing reports of Solomon's wisdom was unpersuasive, but seeing that these reports were true caused the Queen of Sheba to believe them.

6. For instance, the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage and numerous accounts of provision in the book of Numbers (chaps. 11; 14; 20).

7. Originally, the people heard the sound or voice of Yahweh speaking with Moses, but out of fear they would not approach the cloud of the divine presence and asked Moses to report to them what God said (Exod 19:9; 20:18-21; Deut 5:5, 23-31). Deut 4:12 and 15 verify that Israel never beheld the "form" of Yahweh.

8. For instance, Exod 19:16, 18; 24:9-11, 15-18; passim. In none of these texts do we read of visual manifestations of Yahweh's "form." Also see the interesting discussion of Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 161-66, for an extended discussion of the theological dialectic presented by Yahweh's accessibility and freedom and Israel's desire for reassurance. It is Israel's yearning for cultic certitude and assurance through seeing, as equated with knowing, which stands in tension with Yahweh's freedom and sovereignty to manifest himself freely on his own terms.

one another. The poetic text of Psalm 19 sustains a number of parallels to Deuteronomistic concepts. In fact, there is no inherent reason not to assume that the sage derived his ethical standards from the covenantal law, if this was already formulated.⁹ The psalmist, then, appropriates a concept concerning wisdom and Torah reminiscent of the tradition of Deuteronomy.¹⁰

The customary approach to wisdom in the ancient Near East was experiential. Wisdom, piety, and knowledge were generally sought from the observation of the natural world. The sages taught their students based upon their own experiences and pointed to the cosmos as the source of wisdom. While international wisdom relied on the lessons of a visual world,¹¹ traditional wisdom has been replaced in the experience of Israel by a "new" kind of wisdom, now absorbed and identified with the covenant in the form of the Torah.¹² Ancient Israel, then, could apprehend genuine wisdom and "fear of the Lord" by keeping and studying the Torah.¹³ The divine authority of the Torah relied on the unquestionable establishment of the covenant as wisdom yet attempted to retain the link to nature while accepting the new covenant orientation totally.¹⁴

Concomitantly, rather than perceiving God as an abstract being present in the natural elements, the eyes of other nations see the immanence and personal relationship of Israel's God through Israel's careful observance of the covenant.¹⁵ The authority of traditional

9. Richard L. Schultz, "Unity or Diversity in Wisdom Theology? A Canonical and Covenantal Perspective," *TynBul* 48 (1997) 296.

10. See the section on wisdom in Moshe Weinfeld's, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972; repr., Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992).

11. Stephen A. Geller ("Fiery Wisdom: Logos and Lexis in Deuteronomy 4," *Proof-texts* 14 [1994] 45) writes, "The sages of all nations shared a common goal: to uncover the hidden principles of order in the cosmos. Specifically, they endeavored to demonstrate the correspondence of natural and moral law, the inner harmony of things external to man's mind and internal to it."

12. Stephen A. Geller, "Where Is Wisdom: A Study of Job 28 in Its Settings," in *Judaic Perspectives On Ancient Israel* (ed. J. Neusner, B. Levine, and E. Frerichs; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 176.

13. The "fear" of Yahweh reflects a loyal response to the covenant (Deut 6:2, 13, 24) and is closely identified with wisdom. It also designates observance of the Torah, Ps 119:63; Qoh 12:13-14. The apocryphal books further support the connections of wisdom and Torah, Sirach 24; Bar 3:9-4:3. According to Schultz (*Unity or Diversity*, 295), the phrase the "fear of the Lord" may not only describe a common Israelite attitude toward God but also imply covenant obedience. See further, Roland E. Murphy, "Religion's Dimensions of Israelite Wisdom," in *Ancient Israelite Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 452-53.

14. Stephen A. Geller, "Nature's Answer: Wisdom, Creation, and Piety in Late Biblical Religion" (unpublished article) 20.

15. Deut 4:5-7.

wisdom derived from nature alone recedes and becomes incorporated with the auditory nature of genuine wisdom emanating from Yahweh. Nature itself is removed from the place of prominence and subsumed by Torah.¹⁶

This understanding suggests the possibility that the interplay between the concepts of seeing and hearing contribute to the wisdom overtones and teachings of Psalm 19. Although wisdom terminology and ideas in the psalm promote the underlying assumption that the text belongs to the genre of wisdom psalms, such a claim is far from irrefutable.¹⁷ The available criteria used to evaluate such poems lack consistency and objectivity. Simply restricting the presence of wisdom in the pericope to a genre indicator proves to be short-sighted, since it readily appears that the passage resists a rigid form-critical classification. Labeling Psalm 19 a wisdom psalm does not explain the purpose of wisdom elements in the passage. Perhaps obsession with the search for uniformity in genre categorization denies the poetic license of creativity. In any event, a myopic approach to the service of wisdom in the psalm overlooks the subliminal function of wisdom in the composition in relation to the literary structure.

Wisdom functions as a major component in the structural schematic of the passage. Psalm 19, when interpreted against the background of the wisdom tradition, reveals a connection between the purpose of wisdom in the poem and the concepts of seeing and hearing. The paradoxical relationship wisdom sustains to creation and Torah (or covenant) is interwoven in the fabric of the composition.¹⁸ The petitioner's search for piety based on covenant wisdom in the closing lines of the psalm forges a solid link to the preceding context,

16. Geller, "Where Is Wisdom," 176.

17. For issues in the debate, see Roland Murphy, "A Consideration of Classification of Wisdom Psalms," in *Congress Volume: Bonn, 1962* (VTSup 9; Leiden: Brill, 1962) 156-67; Avi Hurvitz, "Wisdom Vocabulary in the Hebrew Psalter: A Contribution to the Study of Wisdom Psalms," VT 38 (1988) 41-51; R. N. Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament* (BZAW 135; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974) 152-60; J. Kenneth Kuntz, "The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel: Their Rhetorical, Thematic, and Formal Dimension," in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James E. Muilenberg* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974) 186-222; J. L. Crenshaw, "The Method in Determining Wisdom Influence upon Historical Literature," JBL 88 (1969) 132; and Donald Berry, *An Introduction to Wisdom and Poetry of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1995) 107; and most recently, J. A. Burger, "Psalm 1 and Wisdom," *Old Testament Essays* 8 (1995) 333.

18. Such an interrelationship between wisdom and creation is scripturally documented—for example, Prov 8:22-31; Job 28:1-28, passim. The connection between Torah and wisdom is well established throughout the biblical corpus—Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs, etc. Schultz (*Unity or Diversity*, 303) comments that "creation actually represents a second and complementary theological root in addition to the theological root of Israel's covenant faith." Further, consult the work of Leo Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994).

which illustrates the apprehension of wisdom from visual and verbal revelation.

Although wisdom subliminally operates beneath the surface of the text and contributes to the broader literary structure, wisdom is not the theological epicenter. The key to the literary construction and theological development of the psalm relies on the consanguinity of wisdom, creation, and Torah, and their fundamental connection to the concepts of "seeing" and "hearing" as two complementary aspects of one comprehensive revelation of Yahweh.

Seeing and hearing comprehensively describe the form of Yahweh's self-revelation to his people throughout history.¹⁹ Israel's trust in visual phenomena decrease, while faith in the life-giving utterances of Yahweh increases over the course of the nation's history.²⁰ Samuel Terrien, in his definitive work *The Elusive Presence*, states that

The visual faculty of man, the symbol of his sensorial and rational ability to know is enlisted in a primary way. Sight is submitted to hearing. Man never sees God, but his word is heard. The eye is closed, but the ear is opened. Hebraism is a religion not of the eye, but of the ear.²¹

The rehearsal of Yahweh's marvelous works and the teaching of the Torah synthesize God's revelation. The physical demonstrations by Yahweh, rooted in Israel's historical past are clarified and expanded by Yahweh's verbal revelation. Together, they were then taught to succeeding generations and recalled during the celebration of cultic festivals.²²

II. THE TERMINOLOGY OF SEEING AND HEARING

The carefully selected vocabulary of Psalm 19 substantiates the appropriation of seeing and hearing, and seeing and hearing construct the literary framework of the psalm. The first five verses of the psalm describe visual revelation using terminology normally associated with hearing, while vv. 5c-7 concentrate on visual phenomena alone. The physical witness of creation communicates an inaudible

19. Exodus 15; Psalms 77 and 78; Neh 9:5-37.

20. The physical manifestations of Yahweh decreased as biblical history progressed. See Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Disappearance of God* (Boston: Brown & Little, 1995).

21. Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) 112. For a contrasting view, see Michael Carasik, *Theologies of the Mind in Biblical Israel* (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1996) 47-53.

22. The propagation of the faith depended upon the education of succeeding generations (Deut 6:6-9; 11:18-21). The deliverance of Israel's firstborn from slaughter and the people's subsequent escape from Egyptian bondage are remembered during the Passover celebration and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exod 12:21-27; 13:6).

yet perceptible message to humanity. This visual communication becomes universally understood, or "heard."²³ The psalmist employs language customary of verbal communication to express revelation received through sight.²⁴

The psalmist personifies the display of the heavens, which continually נגד (nāgad) "declare" and ספר (sāpar) "proclaim" their message.²⁵ He figuratively portrays day and night as אומר ('ōmer) "speaking," and the universe itself as having a קול (qōl) "voice" which is שמע (šāma^c) "heard." Humanity then "hears" or "understands" these silent מליהם (millêhem) "words,"²⁶ as providing comprehensible testimony to the glory of God through visual observation. Although vv. 5c-7 do not describe the sun in terms of "hearing," the visual testimony conveyed by the regular course of the sun relates God's glorious presence and power as well. Verses 6 and 7 revert to figurative language descriptive of visual phenomena, drawing attention to the inescapable effects of God's glorious presence as displayed by creation and pervading every corner of the earth like the sun, which God has placed in the sky.²⁷ Likewise, these verses compare to vv. 12-14, where the penetrating effects of studying the Torah illuminate the spiritual recesses of the individual, making him aware of his sin.²⁸

The semantic blending of seeing and understanding have been inextricably conjoined through light imagery which metaphorically conveys the abstract concept of knowledge. The common association of light with knowledge and the Torah proves foundational to the

23. So J. A. Barr ("Do We Perceive the Speech of the Heavens: A Question in Psalm 19," in *The Psalms and Other Studies* [ed. Jack Knight; Cincinnati: Forward Movement, 1990] 11) clarifies the essence of the textual message, conveying that "although there is not speech or wording in the heavenly declaration of God's glory, and no sound of that declaration is heard in the manner of phonetic utterances, it does not follow that the message the creation declares is unintelligible."

24. In his *Guide for the Perplexed* ([trans. M. Friedlander; London: Routledge, 1928] 2.5), Maimonides points out that the verbs נגד "to declare" and ספר "to relate" when joined together are, in Hebrew, only used of intellectual beings.

25. Participial forms frequently indicate uninterrupted action; *GKC* 116a.

26. The root מלל rarely occurs in narrative but is commonly used in poetic texts and found frequently in Job (KB 2.594).

27. See Job 34:21-22, where God's eyes are upon every step of man, and iniquity cannot be hidden from him. The pervasive omnipresence and omniscience of God is further described in Ps 139:1-12.

28. Note the usage of the word נזהר (nizhār) "warn, instruct, or illumine," in both vv. 7 and 13. The dual usage of the term may describe the instruction and warning of the Torah as well as the light or "understanding" provided by the word of Yahweh. In v. 7, the term primarily emphasizes the inescapable presence of the light of the sun. By analogy the creature too is unable to escape the presence of Yahweh. The nuances of the word blur the distinctions in meaning, effectively coalescing the ideas of light and instruction.

psalm.²⁹ The multiple function of light imagery describes not only the sun but its Creator and the law as well.³⁰ The associations between God's glorious presence and "light" cannot be overlooked.³¹ The next section of the psalm (vv. 8-14) express the verbal revelation of Yahweh's Torah primarily in terms of "seeing." The psalmist thoughtfully employs a number of words modifying Torah which evoke sun and light imagery. The concept of "seeing" often denotes "comprehension" or "discernment." For example, the precepts of Yahweh מְשַׂמְּחֵה (mēsammēhê) "cause rejoicing" or makes the heart "shine,"³² while the commandments of Yahweh are בָּרָה (bārā) "clear,"³³ "enlightening" מְאִירָה (mē'îrat) the eyes of the individual in v. 9.³⁴ The psalmist illustrates the "fear of Yahweh" in v. 10a as טְהוֹרָה (tē'hôrâ) "ethically clean," a rare adjectival form from the verbal root טָהַר (tāhar) meaning "clean" or "pure."³⁵ Verse 11 compares Yahweh's verbal revelation to the color and value of gold and honey.³⁶ The petitioner seeks נִזְחָר (nizhar) "illumination" or "instruction" from the Torah in v. 12. The psalmist wants to "see" or "discern" his hidden sins through the light of the Torah. Thus, seeing or understanding characterize the results of studying the verbal revelation of Yahweh.

29. Prov 6:23; Ps 90:8; 119:18, 105; 139:1-11; Job 34:21-22.

30. Steven G. Sager, "Sun and Light Imagery in Psalm 19," in *Jewish Civilization: Essays and Studies* (Philadelphia: Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, 1979) 34. Supporting works include Nahum Sarna, *On The Book of Psalms* (New York: Schocken, 1993) 70-97; Harold Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988) 120-27; Jonathan T. Glass, "Some Observations on Psalm 19," in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms* (JSOT Sup 58; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987) 169-84.

31. Isa 60:1; Ezek 43:2, etc.

32. Jonas Greenfield ("Lexicographical Notes II," *HUCA* 30 [1959] 141-51) recognizes that שָׂמַח (śamah) cannot always be successfully translated as "to rejoice" or "to be happy," and when used with לֵב (lēb) "heart" the root שָׂמַח (śamah) can also mean to "shine or beam" (Ps 97:11; see also Prov 13:9, which pairs שָׂמַח, with "light" and "lamp").

33. KB 1.153. The term בָּרָה (bārā) "clear" derives from the root בָּרַח (bār) meaning to "make shining" or "polish." Umberto Cassuto ("Biblical and Canaanite Literatures," *TARBIZ* 14 [1943] 9, points out the parallelism of the two phrases "rejoicing the heart" and "enlightening the eyes" and compares them with the Amarna Letters (142:7-10; 144:14-18).

34. KB 2.818. See for instance, Num 15:24, where the phrase "without the eyes" figuratively denotes "without knowledge or unknowingly." Other examples include Isa 6:9-10; Ps 119:13.

35. J. Eaton ("Some Questions of Philology and Exegesis in the Psalms," *JTS* 19 [1968] 605) interprets the adjective טְהוֹרָה as "brilliant, clear shining, or radiant" in keeping with the psalmist's allusions to sun imagery. He cites Aramaic טִיְהָרָא (tēhara') as supporting evidence. J. L. Palache (*Semantic Notes on the Hebrew Lexicon* [Leiden: Brill, 1959] 35) maintains that טָהַר (tāhar) is closely related etymologically to a group of verbs with הָרַח (hār) which all carry the connotation of brightness or lightness. He concludes that the initial meaning of טָהַר was "translucent, bright or shining" as found in Exod 24:10 and that the meaning of ethical and ritual purity were developed afterwards.

36. Prov 3:14-16; 8:10, 19; 16:16; Ps 119:72, 103, 127; Job 28:15-16.

The suppliant prays in v. 15 that his spoken and unspoken words and thoughts be acceptable in the "sight" of Yahweh. He appeals to the testimony of Yahweh's mighty works of deliverance by employing two epithets "my Rock" and "my Redeemer."³⁷ Both of these appellations find root in physical displays of Yahweh's salvation in history.

The first term, צִוּרִי (*sûri*) "my Rock," alludes to terminology prevalent in the accounts of the wilderness wanderings. In Deuteronomy 32, the designation צִוּרִי (*sûri*), derived from the root צִוַר (*sûr*) "to form or fashion" metaphorically describes the "God who established his covenant with Israel."³⁸ The epithet צִוּרִי "my Rock" frequently occurs in poetic texts, and its significance, according to Knowles, is "attested by the number of times the term occurs at the beginning or ending of a psalm. The image is evocative enough to introduce psalmic themes or to provide resolution to the psalm."³⁹

While the term צִוּרִי metaphorically describes Yahweh as refuge, stability, or strength, the metaphor functions differently in Deuteronomy 32, where the name of Yahweh is proclaimed, and such a declaration of the name and character of Yahweh follows with the appellative צִוּרִי "rock" placed in parallel to the divine name. Rather than understanding the customary motif of Yahweh as a rock of refuge in this text, the emphasis shifts onto the moral character and righteousness of Yahweh. The explicative parallels of צִוּרִי "rock," according to Knowles, are not "'refuge,' 'stronghold; etc. but refer rather to the perfection of his work, the justice of his ways, and his faithfulness, righteousness and upright character."⁴⁰

Likewise in Psalm 19, divine attributes similar to those enumerated in the Deuteronomic text are ascribed to the Torah, following which, at the conclusion of the poem, Yahweh is addressed as "my Rock."⁴¹

37. This is a common feature in biblical poetry, particularly in laments and victory songs. For example, Exod 15:1-10; Deuteronomy 33; Psalms 18; 28; 77; *passim*.

38. Michael Knowles, "The Rock: His Work Is Perfect: Unusual Imagery for God in Deuteronomy XXXII," *VT* 39 (1989) 312.

39. *Ibid.*, 307 n. 2.

40. *Ibid.*, 311.

41. *Ibid.*, 314. The mountain imagery of the naming of gods was widespread in the religions of the ancient Near East, where peoples personified outstanding features of terrain as gods; thus, "mountain" was often a synonym for "god" in places such as Syria and Anatolia. It is possible that the rock or mountain imagery was borrowed from current Canaanite usage and may have been appropriated by Israel and redefined to describe a covenant which is rooted in a mountain theophany. Knowles adopts this theory and concludes that the Rock as an appellation for Yahweh "is a rock whose attributes are those revealed in the covenant and the theophany at Sinai." It is Knowles' assumption, therefore, that a combination of natural metaphorical imagery (i.e., strength, refuge) with associations developed from being paired with Yahweh, the God of the covenant (i.e., holiness, upright, perfection) define the conceptual parameters of the term "Rock." The question remains to what extent do Sinai and the covenant underlie the specific message of Psalm 19?

The second epithet, גֹּ'ֶל (*gō'el*), "Redeemer," attributed to Yahweh, finds its source in the mutual responsibility and common duty of Israelites to protect and care for one another. The word itself is peculiar to Hebrew, and there are no known cognates. The term גֹּ'ֶל (*gō'el*), can refer to redemption from bondage, or to the redemption of a field which has been sold due to poverty.⁴² It may also refer to an avenger of blood (Numbers 35) or to redemption by payment of the value of something (Lev 27:13). In Exod 6:6, Yahweh promises to redeem his people from the bondage of the Egyptians with an "outstretched arm and mighty acts of judgment," rescuing them from violence and oppression (Ps 72:14). Other texts depict Yahweh as redeeming Israel from exile; however, the conclusion assumes a preexilic dating of Psalm 19.

The term "redeemer" emphasizes the principles of strength, might, and power, and the application of the term to Yahweh magnifies his omnipotence, particularly in light of his continual deliverance of Israel over the course of biblical history. Clearly, the psalmist concludes the poem with evocative visual imagery, remembering Yahweh's faithful actions of the past by using epithets which concurrently express Yahweh's attributes of holiness and omnipotence.

III. THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF PSALM 19

A possible literary organization of the psalm follows:

- Seeing described in terms of hearing (what is heard and what is unheard)
- (seeing causes hearing, or "understanding"): vv. 2-5
- Seeing: vv. 6-7
- Hearing described in terms of seeing: vv. 8-12
- Hearing causes seeing (or understanding): vv. 13-14
- What is heard and what is unheard: v. 15a
- What is heard is described visually: v. 15b
- Seeing: v. 15c⁴³

The comparatively long lines of vv. 2-7 illustrate the broad scope of cosmological revelation. The vast expanse of the heavens figuratively portrays the immeasurable glory of Yahweh. Yahweh's revelation, apparent to the eye, expresses itself by the outpoured display of

42. Lev 25:26, 33, 48–49.

43. At first glance, this proposed literary structure seems to hint at a possible chiasmic arrangement. However, it would be prudent to avoid manipulating the text to fit any presupposed framework. Rather, we must allow the text to naturally suggest any chiasmic structure. In other words, the text should point to a chiasmic structure, rather than the reader creating a chiasmic framework into which to fit the text.

magnificence spilling from creation. The message is perceptible, even in silence.

Perhaps the spontaneity of the poet's praise for God accounts for the irregularity of the rhythm and length of vv. 2-7. In comparison, six well-balanced phrases followed by a couplet comprise the structure of vv. 8-11. The grammatical structure differs remarkably from the arrangement of the preceding verses. The uniform arrangement of the passage, with the subject consisting of a different synonym for law placed in construct with Yahweh followed immediately by a predicate adjective and a participial noun placed in construct with an absolute noun which serves as a direct object. The six-line strophe then, possesses six synonyms for "law," six predicate adjectives descriptive of Torah, and six different verbs.⁴⁴ The list and order of the synonyms are unique to the psalm, although most of the individual words occur in texts such as Psalm 119.⁴⁵ It has been suggested that the grammatical parallelism in these verses emphasizes the stability and discipline of the Torah, making it comparable to the cosmological order and harmony traditional wisdom discerned in nature.⁴⁶ Whether or not this is the case largely depends on the reader's position on the influence of form on meaning. The quest for true wisdom narrows from the wide scope of nature in the first portion of the poem to covenant wisdom inherent in the Torah.

In addition, the corresponding predicate adjectives modifying the synonyms for Torah give depth to the composition. Strategic word selections draw on the light imagery/mental understanding that prevails in the first half of the psalm. The creation and Torah both mirror the unique nature of God as Creator and Lawgiver. The artist's choice of terminology intentionally synthesizes the psalm under the rubric of seeing and hearing.⁴⁷

44. Leo Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1972) 296.

45. Eight of the terms used in Psalm 19 occur in Ps 119:1-8. Jon Levenson ("The Sources of Torah: Psalm 119 and the Modes of Revelation in Second Temple Judaism," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Cross Moore* [ed. P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987] 61-62) observes that D. H. Müller maintained that Psalm 119 was an expanded version of the Torah doxology of Ps 19:8-11. A. Deissler responds by stating that the presence of five of the eight synonyms for law in Psalm 119, although occurring in Ps 19:8-11, are best explained by reason of the identity of the subject matter and not by literary dependence (*Psalm 119[118] und seine Theologie* [Münchener Theologische Studien 1/11; Munich: Karl Zink, 1955] 68-70).

46. Geller, "Nature's Answer," 20.

47. Walter Harrelson ("Psalm 8 on the Power and Mystery of Speech," in *Tehilla le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg* [ed. M. Cogan, B. L. Eichler, and J. H. Tigay; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997] 70-71) seeks to establish a connection between creation's silent utterances of praise and the verbal praise of human beings. Only human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, are qualified to use the gift of speech to praise God and speak the divine name throughout the universe.

CONCLUSION

The psalmist seeks enlightenment and piety through the efficacious nature of Yahweh's instruction. Although the creation visually proclaims wisdom concerning God, the Torah relegates the nature of covenant wisdom to a superior stature by incorporating creation as part of one unified revelation of Yahweh.⁴⁸ Wisdom gained through visual observation is preempted and insinuated under the auspices of covenant wisdom.

Seeing and hearing are integrally connected to the idea of genuine wisdom. The expanded revelation of the Torah reinforces and synthesizes Yahweh's self-disclosure in creation. The testimony of creation and the Torah provide two incontrovertible witnesses which corroborate the message of a unified revelation. The two senses of seeing and hearing, when understood as synonyms for "comprehension," relieve the tension between the poles of traditional wisdom, grounded in visual stimuli, and genuine wisdom based upon the spoken word of Yahweh.

The dialectical interplay between seeing and hearing not only provides a plausible organizational framework for the poem but also accounts for the wisdom overtones of the psalm. Creation attests to the spectacular glory of God.⁴⁹ Yahweh's words portray his magnificence even more excellently. The psalmist seeks the wisdom of Yahweh by appealing to the light of the Torah. The author also looks expectantly to Yahweh's acceptance of his prayers based upon the physical demonstrations of Yahweh's faithfulness throughout Israel's history.

The text of Psalm 19 affirms that the visual revelation of nature and the verbal revelation of the Torah share in a complementary relationship. The universe and the Torah both comprise one unified self-declaration of Yahweh. Both are authoritative sources of revelation. The psalm also underscores the tensions of two opposing concepts. While creation physically expresses knowledge concerning the nature of God, Torah expands and interprets that revelation. Genuine wisdom encompasses not only the verbal testimony of Torah but wisdom discerned from the contemplation of nature as well. Knowledge acquired from visual phenomena must be interpreted by the teaching of Yahweh's Torah.

48. Job 12:8-9; Ps 97:6; 145:10.

49. See the insightful perspective of Alan Cooper, "Creation, Philosophy, and Spirituality: Aspects of Jewish Interpretation of Psalm 19," in *Pursuing the Text: Studies in Honor of Ben Zion Wacholder on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. J. Reeves and J. Kampen; JSOTSup 184; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) 15-33.

A literary analysis of Psalm 19 furnishes several key observations. First, the literary genre of the psalm defies classification. A comparison of the poem with the usual form-critical criteria reveals that the poem contains one or more features characteristic of hymns, laments, Torah, and wisdom psalms. Many scholars categorize the psalm as a wisdom psalm based on the presence of wisdom language and sapiential concepts in the passage. While this study recognizes the use of wisdom elements throughout the text, the lack of objective criteria for evaluating wisdom psalms makes the task more difficult. Consequently, an assessment of the psalm's genre underscores the unique qualities of this particular poem, placing the psalm outside the parameters of traditional genre designations. Studies of the psalm pursue the issue of the presence of sapiential terminology and ideas no further, restricting the purpose of wisdom features to a genre indicator. Further investigation of the psalm in this paper suggests that wisdom concepts contribute to the broader literary structure of the passage.

Second, a careful exegetical analysis of the Hebrew text uncovers the importance of light imagery in the psalm. The adjectives describing Torah in the latter portion of the poem often encompass two or more unrelated meanings. The first definition, and usually the most obvious, describes the purity, perfection, integrity, or certainty of Torah. A second definition of the same term denotes a characteristic normally associated with light. For example, the term *בָּרָה* (*bārâ*) "pure" in v. 9 can also mean "shine" or "polish," and the term *טְהוֹרָה* (*těhôrâ*) "clear" in v. 10 may also mean "brilliant."

Furthermore, the psalmist cleverly draws on a dual connotation for light to advance his message. Light often figuratively refers to "understanding" received from studying and obeying the Torah. The Torah "enlightens" the mind of the reader⁵⁰ and provides the "light" which guides the faithful in righteous living.⁵¹ The inescapable effects of the sun described in vv. 5c-7 may be compared to God's glorious presence pervading every corner of the earth. Likewise, the penetrating effects of studying the Torah illuminate the spiritual recesses of the individual, making him aware of his sin.⁵²

Third, the dialectical interplay between the concepts of "seeing" and "hearing" construct the literary framework of the passage. The first five verses of the psalm describe visual revelation using vocabulary normally associated with hearing, while vv. 5c-7 center on visual phenomena alone. The physical witness of creation communicates an

50. Ps 119:18.

51. Prov 6:23.

52. Ps 90:8; 139:1-11; Job 34:21-22.

inaudible yet perceptible message to humanity. The psalmist personifies the heavens, which "declare" and "proclaim" their message. He figuratively portrays day and night as "speaking," and the universe itself as having a "voice" which is "heard." Humanity then "hears" or "understands" this silent and comprehensible testimony to the glory of God through observation. Although vv. 5c-7 do not describe the sun in terms of "hearing," the visual testimony conveyed by the regular course of the sun relates God's glorious presence and power as well.

The next section of the psalm expresses the verbal revelation of Yahweh's Torah primarily in terms of "seeing." The concept of "seeing" often denotes "comprehension" or "discernment." For example, the commandments of Yahweh are "clear," "enlightening" the "eyes" of the individual in v. 9. The psalmist illustrates the fear of Yahweh as "pure" in v. 10. Verse 11 compares Yahweh's verbal revelation to the color and value of gold and honey, while in v. 12 the petitioner seeks "illumination" or "instruction" from the Torah. The psalmist wants to "see" or "discern" his hidden sins through the light of the Torah. Thus seeing or understanding characterize the results of studying the verbal revelation of Yahweh.

The suppliant prays in v. 15 that his spoken and unspoken words be acceptable in the "sight" of Yahweh. He appeals to the testimony of Yahweh's mighty works of deliverance by employing two epithets, "my Rock" and "my Redeemer." Both of these appellations find root in physical displays of Yahweh's salvation in history. The psalmist concludes with visual imagery, remembering Yahweh's faithful actions in the past.

Finally, a literary study reveals that wisdom functions as a major component in the literary structure of the psalm. Psalm 19, when interpreted against the background of the wisdom tradition, reveals a connection between the purpose of wisdom in the poem and the concepts of seeing and hearing.

The interchange between visual and verbal revelation in the psalm contrasts the distinctive nature of covenant wisdom as opposed to the commonly accepted form of wisdom practiced in the ancient Near East. Traditional wisdom sought to apprehend knowledge from the observation of nature. Genuine wisdom as defined by the covenant distinguishes itself from the visual and experiential nature of traditional wisdom. The wisdom of Israel, and the immanence of their God, displayed itself by Israel's careful observance of the covenant. The tendency of Israel toward idolatry represented a continuous struggle between conventional wisdom, based on visual observation, and the covenant wisdom of Yahweh's Torah. The covenant, Yahweh's words, replaced the traditional wisdom as the source of genuine wis-

dom. The revelation of nature becomes absorbed under the auspices of covenant wisdom and interpreted by it.

In conclusion, the visual revelation of nature and the verbal revelation of the Torah share in a complementary relationship. The universe and the Torah both comprise one unified self-declaration of Yahweh. Both are authoritative sources of revelation. While creation physically expresses knowledge concerning God, Torah expands and complements that revelation. The two together comprise one revelation of Yahweh. Genuine wisdom encompasses not only the verbal testimony of Torah but wisdom discerned from the contemplation of nature as well. Knowledge acquired from visual phenomena must be interpreted by the teaching of Yahweh's Torah.