

Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Wisdom Psalms Genre

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Bruce Waltke examines the Wisdom Psalms genre within the Book of Psalms, defining Hebrew wisdom (hokmah) as masterful skill and highlighting its intrinsic connection to righteousness. He provides a structural and canonical analysis of Psalm 19 as a pivotal Torah-Wisdom psalm that bridges natural revelation in creation with special revelation in God's Law. Waltke offers detailed exegesis of Psalm 19, defending key translational choices such as rendering zadim as "insolent men" rather than "presumptuous sins." Furthermore, he demonstrates the unifying logic between creation and law through epistemological frameworks in Job 28 and Proverbs 30, showing that God's comprehensive knowledge undergirds divine revelation.

Outline

I. Introduction to Wisdom Literature and the Wisdom Psalms Genre

- A. Overview of Wisdom Psalms previously covered
 - 1. Psalm 49: Wisdom refrain and rhetoric regarding wealth and mortality
 - 2. Psalm 73: Liturgy and the sanctuary experience resolving envying the wicked
- B. Definition and scope of Hebrew wisdom (hokmah)
 - 1. Core meaning: Masterful skill, expertise, and technical/artistic mastery
 - 2. Broad applications: Craftsmanship (Bezalel/Hiram), magic, government, diplomacy, and war
 - 3. Specific meaning in Wisdom Literature: The skill of living in the way of eternal life
- C. Correlative relationship between wisdom and righteousness
 - 1. Neutrality of wisdom: Can be subtle or crafty (arum), requiring moral protection
 - 2. Interchangeability: Possessing wisdom implies righteousness and vice versa
- D. Forms and pedagogical functions of wisdom literature
 - 1. Positive admonition and instruction (trusting/fearing the Lord, tongue control, promises)
 - 2. Negative warning and theodicy (confronting prosperity of the wicked, guarding against materialism)
- E. Classification and relationship of Wisdom and Torah Psalms
 - 1. Torah Psalms as catechetical instruction (Psalms 1, 19, 119)

2. Positive admonition Psalms (Psalms 78, 112, 127, 133)

3. Negative admonition Psalms (Psalms 37, 49, 73)

II. Macro-Structure and Canonical Function of Psalm 19 in the Psalter

A. Canonical arrangement of Psalms 1–24

1. Introductory Psalms (Psalms 1–2)

2. Davidic laments and praises (Psalms 3–14)

3. Chiastic structure of Psalms 15–24

a. Entrance liturgy frame: Psalm 15 and Psalm 24

b. Songs of trust: Psalm 16 and Psalm 23

c. Prayers for deliverance: Psalm 17 and Psalm 22

d. Royal Psalms: Psalm 18, Psalm 20, and Psalm 21

B. Psalm 19 as the central pivot of the collection

1. Placement at the center of the chiastic structure

2. Role as a core Torah Psalm reinforcing Psalm 1's introduction

III. Exegesis and Translation of Psalm 19

A. Stanza 1: General Revelation in Creation (Verses 1–6)

1. Silent, non-verbal, universal witness of the heavens/firmament (Verses 1–4a)

2. Metaphor of the sun: Bridegroom, champion runner, and all-pervading heat (Verses 4b–6)

B. Stanza 2: Special Revelation in the Law/Torah (Verses 7–10)

1. Sixfold praise of the Law's character and effects (reviving, making wise, rejoicing, enlightening)

2. Equating the Law with "the fear of the Lord" as objective moral revelation

3. Value and delight: Desirable above fine gold and sweeter than honey

C. Stanza 3: Personal Response, Petition, and Warning (Verses 11–14)

1. Janus transition (Verse 11): Connecting warning/reward with petition

2. Defense of translating *zadim* as "insolent men" rather than "presumptuous sins" (Verse 13)

a. Grammatical identification: Masculine substantival adjective (the insolent/proud)

b. Concordance survey: All 12 other Biblical occurrences denote arrogant people rejecting God

c. Exegetical meaning: Prayer for protection from corruptive influence of insolent people

3. Closing petition: Words of mouth and meditation of heart acceptable to God, my Rock and Redeemer

IV. Unifying Logic and Epistemology of Creation and Law

A. Scholarly models for stanza transitions

1. Movement of speakers: Heavens -> Law -> Psalmist (Fishbane)

2. Movement of words: Word about God -> Word from God -> Word to God (Meinhold)

3. Contracting movement: Vast skies -> Law -> Individual worshiper (Broyles)

B. General vs. Special Revelation (Immanuel Kant's starry heavens and moral law)

C. Wisdom Epistemology: Comprehensive knowledge required for absolute certainty

1. Practical illustrations of incomplete knowledge (Westminster Seminary radon gas incident)

2. Theological application: Creation displays God's comprehensive vision, validating His moral Law

D. Biblical parallels in Wisdom Literature

1. Job 28: Inaccessibility of wisdom to creation; God alone possesses comprehensive knowledge

2. Proverbs 30 (Agur's Epistemology): Five confessions of human ignorance, divine omniscience, and flawless revelation