

THE HEAVENS DECLARE GOD'S GLORY

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Psalms 19 is one of the memorable compositions in that collection of 150 inspired songs of praise that adorns the pages of the Old Testament. According to the superscription, it is a psalm of David. The superscriptions are not inspired, but they do reflect an ancient conviction. One might surmise that this psalm recalls the awe David experienced while observing the stars during those nights he worked as a shepherd lad. The song very naturally falls into three sections: (1) God has abstractly revealed himself in nature (1-6); (2) Jehovah has concretely made himself known by verbal communication, i.e., his Law (7-10); and (3) The practical value of the Law is to regulate human activity (11-14).

In this article, we wish to discuss three implications of the initial portion of this psalm, namely, the testimony of the heavens to the Creator. Consider the following: (1) the heavenly splendor declares the existence of a Maker; (2) the magnificent Universe asserts the power of God; and (3) the intricacies of the heavenly mechanisms affirm the wisdom of the Divine Mind.

THE HEAVENS AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Where did the Universe come from? Every thoughtful person has pondered this query. Actually, there are but three possible explanations for the existence of the Universe.

1. Some speculate that the Universe has existed forever. This view is not consistent with the known facts of science. One of the most widely recognized laws of science is the Second Law of Thermodynamics. This law suggests that whenever matter is changed from one form to another, its potential for work always is decreased. Energy transfer is a degenerative process. The Universe is growing old; it is wearing out. One of the implications of the Second Law is that at some point in the past, the Universe had a beginning. Thus, it is not eternal. Robert Jastrow, one of America's most respected scientists (and an agnostic), wrote: "Modern science denies an eternal existence to the universe" (1977, p. 15).

2. The current atheistic speculation is that the Universe created itself from nothing. Edward Tryon, professor of physics at the City University of New York, wrote, "In 1973, I proposed that our universe had been created spontaneously from nothing (*ex nihilo*) as a result of established principles of physics." He went on to suggest that "our universe had its physical origin as a quantum fluctuation of some pre-existing true vacuum, or state of nothingness" (1984, pp. 14-15). If you happen to understand that statement, do not boast about it because it makes no sense whatsoever. There is absolutely no scientific basis for such a wild hypothesis. If matter has the ability to create itself from nothing, there should be some evidence that matter is being created. But there is no evidence of this. The First Law of Thermodynamics, in fact, asserts that matter is **not** being created. It therefore is perfectly reasonable to conclude that matter cannot create itself, and thus the Universe is not self-created.

3. The only remaining logical conclusion is that the Universe was created by something, or someone, other than itself. Since the Universe is characterized by order and design, and since design implies intelligence, it is reasonable to acknowledge that an intelligent someone was responsible for the birth of the cosmic community of which we are a part. The Bible reveals that the Someone as God.

THE HEAVENS AND THE POWER OF GOD

The power of the Creator is seen in the vastness of the great Universe that He fashioned. Though its limits have not been measured, it is estimated that the Universe may be some 20 billion light years from "border to border." That is actually the distance that light would travel in 20 billion years at a speed of a little more than 186,000 miles per second—a speed that is really beyond our comprehension.

The Sun is our nearest star. It is 93 million miles from Earth. Do you know how far away our nearest star-neighbor is? Suppose we attempted to draw a crude map of the Universe on a blackboard. Let us place a dot in the center of the board. This will represent the Earth. One inch away, we will place an-

other dot. This will represent the Sun. Our map scale will be: 1 inch = 93 million miles. If we wanted to place yet another dot, identifying our next-nearest star, the blackboard would need to be four and one-half miles long! Remember—each inch of that distance would represent 93 million miles. If we desired to extend our map just to the center of our own “little” star-community, the Milky Way galaxy, the blackboard would need to be 25 thousand miles long, each inch of the way being the equivalent of 93 million miles. It is an understatement to suggest that the Universe is “vast.”

It is a fact of human experience that when something becomes commonplace, it ceases to retain its mystery, its enchantment. The curious human mind never will lose its fascination with the sublime Universe. We will ever be challenged to contemplate the power of him who made it all. Arthur Harding, in his textbook on astronomy, asked:

Who can study the science of astronomy and contemplate the star-lit heavens with a knowledge of the dimensions of the celestial bodies, their movements and their enormous distances, without bowing his head in reverence to the power that brought this universe into being and safely guides its individual members? (1940, p. 386).

THE HEAVENS AND THE WISDOM OF GOD

The wisdom of the Creator is evinced in the brilliant precision characteristic of the Cosmos. Incidentally, *kosmos* (order), is the name the Greeks gave to the Universe. They perceived that it was like a great machine. Balbus, a Stoic philosopher, asked: “Can one behold heaven, and contemplate what passes there, without discerning with all possible evidence, that it is governed by a supreme divine intelligence?” (as quoted in Rollin, 1854, 2:580). We live in a **Universe**, not a **multi-verse**! Jeremiah was quite deliberate and accurate when spoke of the “ordinances” of the heavens (31:35).

Consider the mechanics of our own solar system. The Earth is spinning on its axis at the rate of a thousand miles per hour (at the equator). In addition, it is traveling in an elliptical orbit around the Sun at the speed of 72 thousand miles an hour. It takes 365.25 days to make a complete trip. As the Earth makes its way along its charted orbital route, the course is slightly altered—one-ninth of an inch every eighteen miles. If the alteration were as much as even one-eighth of an inch, we would swing so close to the Sun that we would burn up. If the curvature was as slight as one-tenth of an inch, we would be so far out in space as to freeze (*Science Digest*, 1981, p. 124). “Someone” programmed it just right!

In addition to the intricacies of our own planetary system, the entire solar system (the Sun with its nine planets, moons, etc.) is moving in a giant orbit within the Milky Way galaxy. It is estimated that we are being propelled through space at the speed of approximately 600 thousand miles per hour. It is remarkable that David spoke of the Sun going in “his circuit” (19:6) according to the divine scheme of things.

Why these heavenly bodies behave the way they do remains a mystery. Great Britain’s premier astronomer, Sir James Jeans, was correct when he suggested some years ago:

The ultimate realities of the universe are at present beyond the reach of science, and may be—and probably are—forever beyond the comprehension of the human mind. It is *a priori* probable that only the artist can understand the full significance of the picture he has painted, and that this will remain **for ever impossible** for a few specks of paint on the canvas (1929, p. 318).

When we survey skies on a clear night, and reflect upon the existence, power, and wisdom of the grand Architect of the Universe, surely we must ponder, as David did elsewhere, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man that thou hast visited him?” (Psalm 8:4). With Paul we acknowledge, “For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

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