

## Ps 139:7-10, 14, 17

7Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

Whither: where?

In ancient civilizations, pagan gods were believed to wield power over distinct realms. It was thought that a person could take refuge in the realm of one god to be safe from another god who might wish him harm. The Psalmist declares the omnipresent God who governs His creation with an all-encompassing intelligence and love. "Neither by patient travel nor by hasty flight can we withdraw from the all surrounding Deity," writes one commentator. According to IB, the phrase "thy spirit" is used by the Psalmist "for God himself, especially for God as an active presence in the world...."

**flee:** *barach*: chase; drive away; make haste; bolt; flee suddenly; put to flight

**presence:** *paniyim*: presence; face; cherubim's face

8If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*. [not in the lesson]

The word "hell" found in this verse need not imply the traditional description of "hell" as a place of eternal fire and punishment. It represents the Hebrew *sheol*, which has the more neutral meaning of "the abode of the dead," and it appears that in Old English the word possessed the same neutral meaning. Smith suggests simply, "If I make Sheol my bed, thou art there also!" In English, the verb "behold" may often be translated as "look" or "see." But when used as an interjection, it demands the reader's full attention to the information which follows, and means, according to Cruden, "to look on a thing with our eyes," or "to think over a thing in our minds."

**Ascend:** *nacaq*: go up

**Heaven:** *shanyim*: heavens, sky, visible heavens, abode of the stars, abode of God

**Hell:** *showl*: underworld, grave, hell, pit, place of no return, without praise of God; place of exile; extreme degradation in sin

9If I take the wings of the morning, *and* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

McCullough comments in IB, "The figure [literally, 'wings of the dawn'] points to the rapidity with which the light of early morning spreads over the entire sky." Dahood, in AB, suggests that compass points are indicated here—the sunrise meaning "east" and the Mediterranean Sea "west"

to the Psalmist, indicating God's omnipresence.. Even though what lay in those distances was beyond his imagining, he did not doubt that God would be there, holding, leading, and sustaining.

**Wings:** *kanaph*: wing of a bird or an army; an edge or extremity; corner of garment

**Morning:** *shachar*: early light; dawn literally and figuratively

10Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

OT writers use the word "hand" to symbolize power, protection, presence, strength, government—most frequently with reference to God. To an ancient Hebrew, anatomy was more conceptual than physical.

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