

Psalm 139:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

Analysis

If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there—David explores God's omnipresence through cosmic extremes. Heaven (shamayim, שָׁמַיִם) represents the highest heights, God's dwelling place. Hell (sheol, שְׁאֹל) is the grave, the realm of the dead, the lowest depths. The emphatic thou art there (sham attah, שָׁם אַתָּה) brackets both locations—God's presence is not limited by spatial or spiritual boundaries.

Sheol was understood as shadowy separation from God's active presence (Psalm 88:5), yet even there, God is. This anticipates the Christian truth that Christ descended to the dead (1 Peter 3:19). There is literally nowhere—no height of blessing, no depth of despair—outside God's presence.

Historical Context

Ancient cosmology conceived heaven above and sheol below, with earth between. David uses this three-tiered worldview to express God's universal presence. Notably, sheol wasn't hell in the later Christian sense but the shadowy underworld where all the dead went—making God's presence there even more remarkable.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What 'heavenly' highs or 'sheol' lows have you experienced where you felt God's presence was absent—and how does this verse challenge that perception?
2. How does knowing that God is present even in sheol (death, darkness, separation) change how you face your deepest fears?
3. Are you trying to ascend to some spiritual height to meet God, forgetting that He is already wherever you are?

Interlinear Text

אֵם	קָרְבָּן	שְׁמִימָן	שְׁמִינִי	תְּהִלָּה	אָמֵן	וְעַתָּה	אַתָּךְ	יְעַתָּה
H518	If I ascend up	into heaven	H8033	H859		thou art there if I make my bed	H3331	
H5266		H8064						
לֹא	שָׁא	לֹא	לֹא					
in hell								
H7585								
הַנּוּ								
H2005								

Additional Cross-References

Jonah 2:2 (Parallel theme): And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou hearest my voice.

Proverbs 15:11 (Parallel theme): Hell and destruction are before the LORD: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?

Obadiah 1:4 (Parallel theme): Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD.

Job 26:6 (Parallel theme): Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering.

