

# SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**PS. 139:1** O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known *me*.

**2** Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.

**3** Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted *with* all my ways.

**4** For *there is* not a word in my tongue, *but*, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.

**5** Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.

**6** *Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot *attain* unto it.

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

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

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

**10** Even there shall thy hand

lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

**11** If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

**12** Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light *are* both alike *to thee*.

**13** For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.

**14** I will praise thee; for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made: marvellous *are* thy works; and *that* my soul knoweth right well.

**15** My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, *and* curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

**16** Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all *my members* were written, *which* in continuance were fashioned, when *as yet there was* none of them.

## NOTES

# Nothing Is Hidden from God

Lesson Text: Psalm 139:1-16

Related Scriptures: Job 42:1-6; Psalm 121:1-8; Matthew 6:5-8;  
Romans 11:33-36; Hebrews 4:12-13

TIME: between 1011 and 971 B.C.

PLACE: Israel

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" (Psalm 139:7).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **THE INESCAPABLE GOD KNOWS US—Ps. 139:1-6**

God had personal, intimate knowledge of David's every movement, thought, and word. He also knows every thought *you* have and every word *you* speak! Nothing is secret from Him.

While God could have used His knowledge of David's life in judgment, God's knowledge was relational and loving (cf. Ps. 51). David even asked God to reveal unconfessed sin in his life so that he could walk more faithfully.

Whether God's intimate knowledge of a person's sins is happy news or haunting news depends on whether that person is walking in repentant faith. In David's life, there were times when God's knowledge was a source of comfort (cf. 41:12). At other times, God's knowledge was a source of discomfort (cf. 32:3-4). The difference is whether someone humbly admits a need for God's forgiveness and grace (cf. 51:1-4).

As David moved from reflection to his response, it becomes clear that he was happy, not haunted, when he wrote Psalm 139 (cf. vss. 5-6). In verse 5, David used a term that usually refers to an army besieging a city (cf. 2 Kgs. 6:24). Being besieged by God would be terrifying for an unrepentant sinner. But a repentant sinner like David would draw comfort from the besieging nearness of God.

The praise in Psalm 139:5-6 was less explicit than it would be later in the psalm, but it started with David's dazzled bewilderment of God's merciful knowledge of his entire life. David mentioned God's knowledge of him three times in verse 6. First, David utilized a concept that described the miraculous. God knowing and still loving sinners who believe His promises is a miracle! Second, David used a word that can mean high and exalted (cf. Isa. 12:4) but can also describe high ground that is used as a military defense (cf. Jer. 48:1). David was safeguarded and fortified in knowing that

He was fully known and yet fully loved. Third, David could not wrap his mind around the extent of God's knowledge. Even what little David knew about how much God knows revealed how little David knew. God's knowledge is incomprehensible!

### **THE INESCAPABLE GOD PURSUES US—Ps. 139:7-12**

Sometimes theology gets a bad reputation for being cold. Psalm 139 presents a beautiful alternative, reflecting on complex and deep truths related to the omnipresent and omniscient nature of God in a worshipful way. God's omniscience leads to wonder (vs. 6). God's omnipresence leads to recognizing God's light (vs. 12). God's creative power leads to praise (vs. 14). Theologians call the nearness of God His immanence.

Human imagination might assume that lofty attributes like omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence would imply a God uninterested in human life. Psalm 139 counters with glorious truth. He is almighty, and He is near!

Verses 7-10 reflect on God's presence with and pursuit of His people. Verses 11-12 respond by declaring the illuminating light that comes from God's presence with *and* pursuit of His people. Whether David was in the heights, the depths, or the farthest reaches of the world, God was there.

Although the New Testament speaks more clearly about the Holy Spirit than the Old Testament does, He is mentioned throughout the Old Testament, including as early as Genesis 1:2. He is mentioned here in Psalm 139:7.

Verse 7 uses two words for movement. The first refers to any basic travel, but the second refers to running and fleeing. The second word is also used in Jonah 1:10, when the prophet fled from God. Whether or not David was running from God, he knew the presence of

God's Spirit was there regardless. The last line in verse 8 is vivid and carries the meaning of "Behold, there You are!" It was as if David were saying to himself or anyone who would run from God, "Surprise! You can't outrun God!"

The Hebrew word "Sheol" is here translated "hell," though the word has a variety of uses. In the Psalms, Sheol can refer broadly to the place of the dead (cf. 6:5) or danger that threatens death (cf. 30:3; 116:3). The psalmists seem to imply that both believers and unbelievers go there (cf. 6:5; 9:17). The word may refer broadly to the place of the dead, not just hell as we understand it today.

That is an example of progressive revelation. Old Testament saints had accurate but incomplete knowledge. Old Testament believers knew life after death was in God's hands (cf. 16:10-11). However, they did not know the specifics of heaven and hell. Stunningly, Psalm 139:8 says that God would be with David even in Sheol.

In verse 8, God was there. In verse 10, God guided David. David also used a word that connotes grabbing hold of someone forcefully (cf. Judg. 12:6). When David ran, God held him tight.

David responded by declaring the light of God's presence. Verse 11 imagines darkness surrounding David. Sometimes the Psalms use darkness to indicate despair (88:6), danger (143:3), or judgment (107:10-12). But God's presence is a light even in darkness. Some people only feel God's presence when life feels light, but He is in our darkness too.

Unlike other ancient Near Eastern people who assumed that gods had limited, local influence (cf. 2 Kgs. 17:26), David knew that the one true God was everywhere.

Ancient Near Eastern people assumed that when one army defeated another, the victors' gods defeated the gods of the defeated army (cf. Isa.

37:12). God's people in exile would likely have wondered whether the Babylonian gods had defeated the Lord, whether the Lord was with them in exile, and whether they ought to go ahead and appease the gods of their captors (cf. Dan. 3:1-30). Praying through Psalm 139 would have answered those questions. God remains in control, and He is with His people no matter where they go or what happens to them.

### **THE INESCAPABLE GOD FASHIONED US—Ps. 139:13-16**

Verses 13-16 reflect on God's creation of each person. Psalm 139 assists Christians in finding biblical self-worth. Since God carefully made all people, each person matters. Everyone we meet matters and is worthy of dignity and respect, because every human is made by God. God knows everything about His people, and He gives them His light because He created them.

By describing God's molding of him the womb, David emphasized that God's care for him stretched back before his first breath.

David reflected on four truths (not necessarily in this order). First, God made his internal organs (vs. 13), which is the sense of the phrase "possessed my reins."

Second, God made his "substance" (vs. 15), a rare word that seems to refer to bones. Notice that in verse 13, the first line refers to internal organs, then the second line uses the word "me." In verse 15, the first phrase refers to bones, then the second phrase uses the word "I." David equated his physical body with himself. Some people assume the soul is the real self and the physical body is less important. David would disagree.

Third, God's formation of David's body is described as a knitting or weaving project (Ps. 139:13, 15). David was amazed at how personal God has always been.

Fourth, David reflected on God's omniscient plan for his life (vs. 16). God knew all of David's days before they unfolded, and that truth made the future less daunting.

David responded in praise (vs. 14), although it interrupted His reflection rather than concluding it. The basis of David's praise was twofold. First, the forming from verse 13 was fearful and wonderful. Second, David said the work of God in making him was wonderful. Both reasons for David's praise use a Hebrew word related to the one in verse 6 that describes miracles. The way God makes humans is miraculous! And that calls for praise.

—Matthew Swale

## **QUESTIONS**

1. What determines whether God's knowledge of us is comforting or disquieting?
2. How did David feel about God's knowledge when he wrote Psalm 139?
3. How did David describe God's knowledge of him?
4. What is the main point of verses 8-10?
5. What did David say to anyone trying to escape God?
6. What can the Hebrew word "Sheol" sometimes mean?
7. What might David have been implying when he said that God is a light in the darkness?
8. What is one reason that every human life is precious?
9. When did David say God began caring for him?
10. What four truths did David reflect on regarding God's presence with him in his mother's womb?

—Tom Greene

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We can take comfort in the fact that God knows us completely (Ps. 139:1-6).
2. We can take comfort in knowing that God is with us wherever we go (vss. 7-10).
3. Even the darkest circumstances are not difficult for God (vss. 11-12).
4. Life begins at conception and should be celebrated (vs. 13).
5. No matter our physical features, we can praise God for a wonderfully designing us. We should not mock people for things like their physical appearance (vss. 14-15).
6. We can take comfort in knowing that God has a plan for our lives (vs. 16).

—Tom Greene

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. If God knows all our thoughts before we speak, why pray?
2. If God is everywhere, why does He sometimes feel distant?
3. How should we respond to the fact that God knows everything and is everywhere?
4. How are these verses comforting in times of difficulty?
5. What are the practical implications of God knitting us together in our mother's womb (vs. 13)?
6. If all God's works are wonderful (vs. 14), how should that impact the way we view those we consider exceptionally sinful people?
7. What practical implications should knowing that God has a plan have on our lives (vs. 16)?

—Tom Greene

## Golden Text Illuminated

**“Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” (Psalm 139:7).**

There is no hide-and-seek with the God of the universe. By virtue of His *omnipresence* (presence everywhere) and His *omniscience* (perfect knowledge of all things), there is nothing God does not see.

That brought David comfort in his afflictions. In the midst of enemies, David found solace in the attributes of God. One gets the sense his questions in verse 7 were less for God than for himself. He marveled at God, whose Spirit is in every part of the universe. David models for us how a theology of God's character soothes the soul in troubled times. Below is a brief exposition of Psalm 139:7 accompanied by practical insights.

**First, the question.** David asked one question in two different ways. David was not seeking information but expressing astonishment. David could not help but exclaim back to God the glory of His own immensity. He could ascend into the stratosphere, and God is there; he could descend into the earth, and God is there too (vs. 8). Were he to travel across the whole ocean, God would lead him there (vs. 10). The presence of God is among the greatest comforts for a believer.

**Second, the comfort.** David's comfort was knowing that God did not observe his plight from a distance. Rather, God was present to bless, strengthen, comfort, and satisfy David's longings. These realities supply the believer assurance amidst fears, comfort amidst trials, and fellowship amidst loneliness.

—Jerod A. Gilcher