

Although this Psalm is ascribed to David, its language shows the <sup>Armenian</sup> influence on the Hebrew language which characterized the post-exilic period. In form it does follow the Psalms of David.

It is a theological Psalm, dealing primarily with the doctrine of God. So the composer was clearly seeking to teach.

However, as in all truly Biblical Theology, there is a strong practical emphasis as the prayer in the last two verses show.

The Psalm deals with three attributes of God:

- Nowhere are these attributes of God seen in the vicinity to be seen.*
- (1) God's omniscience (vv. 1-6).
- (2) God's omnipresence (vv. 7-12).
- (3) God's omnipotence - as evident in the birth of the Psalmist (vv. 13-18).

Because of this the Psalmist prays in the last section (vv. 19-24):

- (a) For the overthrow of God-less men, and for his deliverance from them (vv. 19-22).
- (b) For the searching and leading of God in his own life (vv. 23, 24). The Psalm ends as it begins: "O Lord, thou hast searched me ... Search me..."

This would be an excellent Psalm to read every morning and every night. Aben Ezra, one of the greatest of all Jewish scholars called this as the greatest of all the Psalms. This would be hard to say, but at least it points out its value.

(139:1) The Psalm is a prayer, addressed to JEHOVAH. There are three different names for God used in the Psalm as v. 1, 17, & 19 show.

"Thou hast searched me" - תִּשְׁפַּחַת. This is a mining expression. "The primary idea lies in boring and digging" (See., 340). The same verb is used in v. 23.

This is a statement of fact. The prayer in v. 23 indicates it has the Psalmist's approval. MacLaren says, "He knows us each, altogether; whether we like it or not, whether we try to hinder it or not, whether we remember it or not" (Vol. 3, 360). Cf. Gen. 17:9, 10.

God is ~~thoroughly~~ aware of all that goes on ~~within~~ us. ALL THAT FOLLOWS CAN ONLY EMPHASIZE DETAILS.

This applies to "me" personally as well as to all men generally. Cf. John 2:23-25. Cf. also God's searching of Adam, of Cain, etc.

"And known (me)" - וְיָדָה. "me" is not in the original, and the verb is actually more forceful without it. This means "to perceive, to come to know" (See., 379).

The first verb describes the process; the second, the result.

If this is a post-exilic Psalm, this could point to the effect of trials and sufferings during the exile.

WHAT GOD KNOWS IS EXPLAINED IN THE FOLLOWING VERSES.

(139:2) "my downsitting" - מִשְׁבֵּת, שִׁבְעָת. This describes "the act of sitting" (See., 1034), usually for rest. This can refer to the close of

the day when one's strength is gone, and he needs rest.

"my uprising" -  $\rightarrow \text{בָּרְאַת}$ . This would speak of getting up to begin the day. In Heb fashion we have evening, and then morning.

"Show knowest" - emphatic.

He knows our purposes, our objectives, our confidence, etc. Also our needs, problems, etc.

These expressions include the whole day.

Cf. Psa. 127:2.

"Show understandest" -  $\rightarrow \text{בְּרִית}$ . God is able to distinguish, discern.

"my thought" -  $\rightarrow \text{בְּזֶה}$ . This is Chaldean and includes wishing, willing, striving, and thinking. Cf. Lange, Vol. 5, 647.

"afar off" -  $\rightarrow \text{בְּרֵד}$ . This is from a distance, i.e., heaven. Cf. Psa. 138:6. Eliaphaz in Job 22:12-14 falsely accused Job of saying that God could not see them on a cloudy day.

(139:3) "Show compassest" -  $\rightarrow \text{בְּרִיךְ}$ , means to winnow, and to sift - so as to know. It is an expression similar to "search" in v. 1 under a different figure of speech. It speaks of personal acquaintance. Cf. Gen., 287.

"my path" -  $\rightarrow \text{בְּרַכְתָּה}$ . This speaks of "manner of life and conduct" (Gen., 86). It would be a synonym for walk.

"my lying down" -  $\rightarrow \text{בְּרַכְתָּה}$ . Every part of a person's day and all that it includes are in vv. 2, 3.

"Art acquainted" -  $\rightarrow \text{בְּרִית}$ . Here is the idea of familiarity "from the idea of dwelling together in the same tent or house" (Gen., 722).

"All my ways" - אֶת־מְדֹעַת־חַיִּים. He refers again to the way one lives.

(139:4) God even knows the words we will speak before they rise to our tongues. Browne (II, 439) suggests, "For before a word is yet on my tongue."

(139:5) "Thou hast beset me" - אָתָּה תִּצְבֹּא. This is like a besieged city. The people were shut in by the presence of God. HERE IS THE TRANSITION TO OMNIPRESENCE, not developed until v. 7 ff.

"Behind" - גַּם־זַהֲרֵךְ. This speaks of that which is behind the Psalmist.

"Before" - בְּפָנֶיךָ, or in front.

"Thou hast laid" - שָׁלַטְתָּ, from שָׁלֹט, to put or place. Gesenius says that this is for protection (p. 1058).

(139:6) The Psalmist uses two words to describe this truth: "too wonderful" and "high."

"Too wonderful" - מְאֹד־חַדְשָׁה. It is hard to understand. These are thoughts which do not arise from man, neither are they thoughts which man can understand.

"It is high" - מְאֹד־עֶלְיוֹן. It is inaccessible to man apart from divine revelation.

"I cannot attain unto it" - מְאֹד־חַדְשָׁה־עֶלְיוֹן, from עֶלְיוֹן. There is a truth which the Psalmist felt he could never master.

Cf. Rom. 11:33.

Here we see that the Psalmist feels that the knowledge which God possesses of us is "so all-penetrating, all-comprehensive" (Del., III, 346)

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that he know he will never be able to understand it fully.

(139:7) v. 7 contains two rhetorical questions; vv. 8-12, the answer. The Psalmist now shifts his thinking from the omniscience of God to the OMNIPRESENCE! Remember that we are six expressions in this Psalm from a post-exilic date.

The thought seems to be this: IN ORDER TO KEEP GOD FROM KNOWING ALL ABOUT ME, WHERE CAN I GO TO KEEP HIM FROM KNOWING SO MUCH?

Notice: He is still talking to the Lord.

Man finds the nature of God incomprehensible. "Thy Spirit" - תַּרְבּוֹת. Our Lord said, "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24), and "a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39). And yet one of His last words was, "And, lo, I am with you always" (Mt. 28:20). IF A MAN IS TRYING TO RUN AWAY FROM, WHERE WILL HE GO?

"Thy presence" - lit., from thy face.

Cf. Jonah 1:3.

TO ILLUSTRATE THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD, THE PSALMIST USES TWO EXTREME CONTRASTS:

(1) Heaven and Hell.

(2) Light and Darkness.

(139:8) "Ascent up" - פָּעֵל. This is the only time that the word פָּעֵל is used in the OT. Heaven is God's dwelling place, where you would expect to find him - AND HE IS THERE!

Cf. Psal. 2:4; 103:19; 115:3; 123:1; 2 Chron. 6:25, 33, 35, 39. But cf. also 2 Chron. 2:6; 6:18; 1 K. 8:27.

"make my bed" - מִבְּנֵי שֶׁלֶת, sleep fit for Yah, "to spread down... as a bed" (Isa. 4:17).

"Hell" - גָּאַת. This is the place of the dead. It is equivalent of saying, If I die! Cf. Psa. 30:3 where Sheol is translated "grave." See also Psa. 89:48; Gen. 42:38; Job 7:9.

Some men feel that death will separate them from God, but the Psalmist declares, "Behold, thou art there." The Psalmist uses an interjection, H!, suggesting wonder and amazement.

Cf. Psa. 23:4.

The word Sheol is from a word which means asking or demanding, referring to the demands which Sheol, "a hollow subterranean place" (Isa. 10:22), makes of everyone.

Cf. Rev. 6:16,17.

(139:9) The rest of this paragraph (through v. 12) has to do with this second contrast: light and darkness.

Here the thought of fleeing is introduced again.

"The wings of the morning" - The morning flies from east to west, travelling about 1,000 miles per hour, and it is described here as ending "in the uttermost parts of the sea."

He is talking about a situation where there would be no night - i.e. establishing heavenly conditions on earth (cf. Rev. 21:25).

This is no speed at all for today's travel in space, but the principle still applies.

(139:10) If such a condition as described in v. 9 could be realized, how would it affect our relationship with God?

"Even there" - The thought sounds like the Psalmist has found a way to get away from God.

"Shall thy hand lead me" - from 177]. The same verb is used in v. 24. We may try to get away from God, to get ahead of him, but He is always ahead of us! Cf. Psa. 23:3.

"Thy right hand" - 77, 77. This is not only an evidence of God's power, but of the fact that God leads in right ways - as opposed to the wrong. Cf. Isa. 41:10; 62:8.

"Shall hold me" - 178, 177. God holds us fast, claims us for Himself, and will not let us go. Cf. John 10:27, 28.

SO REGARDLESS OF HOW FAST WE GO, OR HOW FAR WE GO, OR HOW HARD WE TRY TO ESCAPE FROM GOD, WE CANNOT!

(139:11) What about the "darkness" then? Is the child of God left to the mercy of the "darkness"?

The last part of this verse reads in the ASV: "And the light about me shall be night."

"Darkness" represents "an overwhelming mist of gloom ... trouble" (Tansut, III, 394).

Cf. John 3:19; Eph. 5:8; Isa. 9:2; Prov. 4:19; Job 15:22

"Shall cover me" - 179. This is the same verb used 2x in Gen. 3:15. It means "to injure by rubbing; to bruise, to crush, to break or dash in pieces" (Kes., 1045). Cf. Job 9:17.

Cf. Mt. 6:23 on the latter part of this verse

(139:12) "Hideth not from thee" - 177, 178 - &c. This is the cognate verb of darkness.

Our light may become darkness, but God cannot be ~~darkened~~, be made obscure. We need not worry as long as nothing can separate us from God.

GOD CAN TURN THE NIGHT INTO THE DAY BECAUSE THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE IN RELATION TO HIS PRESENCE.  
"The night would give out light from itself, as if it were the day; for the distinction of day and night has no conditioning influence upon God, who is above and superior to all created beings" (Delitzsch, III, 348).

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**139:13** "Thou didst form" (ASV), "thou hast possessed" (KJV) — נָתַן, from נָתַת, "to found, to create" (Gen., 430).

"my reins" — נְזִנָּה. This is used of man's inward part, mind, soul, <sup>as</sup> the seat of the desires, affections, passions" (Gen., 470).

Delitzsch says that "the reins are made especially prominent in order to mark them, the seat of the tenderest, most secret emotions, as the work of Him who trieth the ~~heart~~ and the reins" (III, 349).

"Cover me" — נְסֹלֶת. This speaks of the network of muscles, veins, etc. (Del., III, 349). Some even include the bones. All of this was done before birth: "in my mother's womb."

"I will praise thee" — by pointing out each detail with the hand extended.

**139:14** The proper understanding of God's creative power leads to praise.

"Fearfully" — נִתְּנַחַת, from נָתַת, that which would cause man to fear, tremble, reverence, trust God.

"and wonderfully" — נִתְּנוּנָה, from נָתַת, or נִתְּנוּנָה. The uniqueness of man seems to be the idea here — distinct from all other creatures. AND THE PSALMIST IS VERY AWARE OF THIS.

**139:15** "my frame" — נָשָׁבֵע. Now the Psalmist considers the bone structure. The idea of strength is here. "Curiously wrought" — like a beautiful work of embroidery.

"In the lowest parts of the earth" — This parallels the reference to "my mother's womb"

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individual  
differences

in v. 13. It speaks figuratively of the mystery surrounding the development of a human body and man.

(139:16) "my substance, being yet imperfect" -  
 ↗? The ASV: "mine unformed substance." This is a mass rolled together.

The power of God goes back beyond our birth, even to the time when life was there but not fully developed.

"In thy book" - Cf. Ex. 32:32, 33. This probably does refer to salvation, but it also speaks of the purpose of God.

"which in continuance were fashioned," or ASV: "even the days that were ordained for me." "Ordained" - ↗? \*, to form or to fashion. Here the Psalmist recognises that the length of our lives, each day, is carefully laid out by the Lord.

Even "the steps" are too. Cf. Psa. 37:23.

ALL OF THIS IS CAREFULLY LAID OUT BY AN OMNIPOTENT GOD! Amazing!

Cf. Eph. 1:18, 2:4 ff.  
 (139:17) "Precious" - treasured, prized, dear, from ↗? Could anything be more precious than the truth that we have here?

"Thy thoughts" - ↗? These are expressive of His will, desire (Isa., 986), His purposes.

"O God" - ↗? This is <sup>the</sup> name of God which denotes "strength, might, power" (Isa., 49). Cf. Isa. 9:7.

"Great" - ↗? He is referring to the many in number which constitute strength, giving

proof that they are true!

(139:18) Cf. Psa. 40:5. This is the Psalmist's way of saying that something cannot be calculated. NO COMPUTER MADE BY MAN CAN COUNT THE PURPOSES OF GOD.

"When I awake" — This expression seems almost out of place. BUT THE DANGERS OF THE FINAL SECTION SHOW THE REASON. Cf. Psa. 121:1-4, esp. v. 4. Also, Psa. 127:2.

Cf. 139:11, 12.

(139:19) In this fourth stanza (vv. 19-24), the second part of this verse is spoken to "the wicked"; all the rest is spoken to God — as is the rest of the Psalm.

~~Although~~ Gesenius (p. 62) makes **DIS** "a particle of wishing, oh if! would that! oh that!" ~~etc., etc.~~ THE THREEFOLD CONTEMPLATION OF GOD MAKES THE PSALMIST DESIRE THAT THE EARTH COULD BE RID FOREVER OF THOSE WHO NOT ONLY DO NOT BELIEVE IN OR LOVE SUCH A GOD, BUT WHO HATE AND BLASPHEME HIM (cf. Delitzsch, III, 352).

"The wicked" — **VUET**. This points to the disturbance, the noise, the upheaval that sinful men cause on the earth as compared with "good men... gentle and quiet" (~~Gesenius~~, 998).

"O God" — **DIS**. This name emphasizes God's power (as in vv. 13-18). A God who can create surely has the power and the right to control and to dispose of his creatures as He sees fit.

It is the nature of evil and evil men to

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contaminate the good, but the righteous, in dependence upon the "God" who is ~~right~~  
can command evil men to "depart."

Cf. Psa. 119:115.

In other words, the man who knows his God will realize that he is not at the mercy of wicked men, but with the authority of God can withstand their evil designs.

"Bloody men" are men who have shed blood.  
The fearlessness of the righteous is seen here — THE ONLY WORDS IN THE PSALM SPOKEN TO MEN.  
The righteous may die for their faith, but they need not be defiled!

(39:20) Here we see the true nature of sin. IT IS AGAINST GOD!

The gist of this verse is this:

- (1) The wicked contradict the Word of God, and
- (2) They use God's <sup>name</sup> to back up the wickedness which they seek to encourage. THIS LATTER IS A VIOLATION OF THE THIRD COMMANDMENT — TO USE THE NAME OF GOD TO CONFIRM A LIE!

Cf. the false prophets in <sup>Jeremiah's</sup> ~~Jezebel's~~ day, & in many places in the OT.

(39:21) Under such conditions the Psalmist can make no compromise.

We cannot love those who hate God. His enemies (v. 20) become our enemies too! All the wickedness of men is ultimately against God.

"Grieved" — The main idea here is nauseated. So great is the Psalmist's knowledge of God that godlessness in any form makes him sick instead of being a temptation.

"Rise up" - the same word as used in v.2 for "uprising." IT SUGGESTS (in context) NOT JUST AN ACT, BUT A WAY OF LIFE.

(139:22) His "hatred" could hardly be more complete. It is "perfect hatred." Note what the knowledge of God has done in the heart of the Psalmist with respect to sin. WHAT A COMMENTARY ON Psalm 119:11!

N.B.

Then, apparently realizing the self-deception of sinful men and the self-deceptive effects of sin, THE PSALMIST PRAYS! We have praise, adoration, worship - but now PETITION.

(139:23) "Search me" - the same verb as in v. 1, גַּדְלָנִי. (See v.1 for explanation.)

"O God" - תְּ, the emphasis being on the might of God.

"Know" - יְعַדֵּ. "It comprehends the action of knowing, both as inchoative (beginning) and completed" (Gesenius, 379). The Psalmist would hold nothing back from God.

"My heart" - This is the inner man - his thoughts, his emotions, his will (purpose, determination). It is here that all outward behavior is fashioned. A man's wisdom and understanding comes from the heart.

WHAT IS IN OUR HEARTS? (Get verses on the heart.)

"Try me" - טְעַמֵּנִי. This means to put to the test (see., p.122). Cf. Job 23:10.

"My thoughts" - דְּבָרָי. Here we have the idea of thoughts as branches - the way in which one thing leads to another. Cf. Psa. 94:19.

Jesus, he says bear the inner life to the complete knowledge - from beginning to end - of God Himself.

(139:24) "And see" - וְשִׁירָה. This amplifies the knowing of v. 23 and also the truth as stated in vv. 1-6.

"Wicked way" - וַיְלֹא־תַּדְּבֵר. Here the idea is of that which would grieve or cause pain to God.

"Lead me" - יְנַדֵּחַ. This is from נַדֵּחַ. Cf. v. 10. Also Psa. 23:3 - as a shepherd guides the sheep. Cf. Gen. 24:27.

"Way everlasting" - וְלֹא־תִּזְמַנֵּה. This is literally the everlasting way. There are no changes in the ways that are pleasing to God - for he never changes. That which has pleased Him in the past will please Him now - and forever!