

## THE RISING OF DAWN – AN INVESTIGATION OF THE SPATIAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF “DAWN” IN PSALM 139:7-12

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### ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the meaning of *shaḥar* ( ) in Psalm 139:7-12. A comparison will be made between Psalm 139:7-12 in the Old Testament and mythological imagery in the ancient Near East to get a better understanding of the religious background of *shaḥar* in this text. The investigation of the religious background of “dawn” helps to understand how the negative feeling of the one praying in Psalm 139 is transformed into positive imagery. Like the flying deity *Shahar*, YHWH is not bound to one realm, emphasizing that one cannot hide from YHWH. The same image can be used for the one praying in Psalm 139. Using spatial orientation in Psalm 139:7-12, the idea is further illustrated by concluding that God is present in all the realms. Ancient Near Eastern vertical and horizontal orientation will be utilised to illustrate how the focus in the psalm falls upon YHWH’s omnipresence.

### INTRODUCTION

*The Hound of Heaven – Francis Thompson*

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
Up visitaed hopes I sped;  
And shot, precipitated,  
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,  
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
But with unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbèd pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy  
They beat – and a Voice beat  
More instant than the Feet –  
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.'*  
(Blaklock 1977:130)

Jeremiah 23:24 speaks about man’s accessibility to YHWH. In Psalm 139:7-12, where verse 7-12 forms the second strophe of this Psalm, a related theme is discernible. The one praying in this psalm comments on his or her unsuccessful attempt to hide from YHWH (cf. Hossfeld & Zenger 2008:719; Allen 2002:328). According to Blaiklock (1977:129) it is this theme in Psalm 139:7-12 that inspired Francis Thompson to write his poem “The Hound of Heaven”.<sup>1</sup>

This paper will focus on one of the key Hebrew words in Psalm 139:7-12 is *shaḥar* (שַׁחַר), which means “dawn”, “tomorrow”, and also “the morning star” (Parker 1999:754). A comparison will be made between Psalm 139:7-12 in the Old Testament and mythological imagery in the Ancient Near East to get a better understanding of the religious background of *shaḥar* in this text. Also the vertical and horizontal spatial orientation of the ancient Near East will be applied to this text.

In the Hebrew Bible, *shaḥar* occurs 23 times in a variety of prosaic and poetic texts. The etymology of *shaḥar* in the Hebrew Bible shows that it is a primary noun (Ruppert 2004:576).<sup>2</sup> The following texts help to define the meanings that have been given to *shaḥar*:

<sup>1</sup> Only the first strophe of the poem is given in this article, as the full poem consists of 182 lines.

<sup>2</sup> According to Ruppert (2004:576) the etymology of “Heb. *šāḥar* is a primary noun. The Akk. *šēru(m)* II and Assyr. *šīāru(m)*, ‘morning,’ militate against a verbal derivation, since the substantival form *pirās* generates only primary nouns; moreover, OSA *šaḥar*, ‘dawn, daybreak,’ does not indicate a causative. Forms occurring in Qumran include Middle Heb. *šāḥar* (1QH4:6: *kšḥr*, ‘like the dawn’; 11QPs 26:11: establishment of the dawn [*kwn* hiphil]; 4Q487 36,1 *lšḥr*, uncertain); Jewish Aram. *šāḥrā*, ‘morning dawn, early morning’; Moab. (fem.!) *šḥrt*; cf. *mbq’ hšḥrt*, ‘from daybreak’; Ugar. *šḥr*, ‘dawn, daybreak,’ *šḥr* par. *qdm*, ‘east wind’; *šḥr lmt*, ‘from this morning to eternity’; as the twin gods *šḥr wšlm*, ‘morning and evening star,’ and *m šḥr wšlm šmmh*, ‘to *šḥr* and *šlm* in heaven’; Arab. *saḥar*, ‘time before daybreak, early morning, dawn.’ The ancient Arabic god *saḥar*, ‘dawn, daybreak,’ is portrayed in reliefs with the symbol of the dragonhead. The form *šāḥar* also appears as a *nomen divinum* in personal names, including Ugar. *ilšḥr*, ‘*šḥr* is (my) god’; Phoen. *bdšḥr*, *šḥrb l*.”

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- In Isaiah 58:8 the crack of dawn is an image of the inauguration of a new era. It is a symbol of hope (Kraus 1986:114).
  - In Hosea 6:3 the coming of dawn is an image of that which is reliable.
  - The spread of dawn across the hills in Joel 2:2 is an image of an invading hoard.
  - Some mythological context can be seen in Job 3:9, Psalm 139:9 and Isaiah 14:12 (Parker 1999:754-755).
  - YHWH is compared to the dawn in Deuteronomy 33:2, and in Isaiah 60:1-2 *shaḥar* can be viewed as solar language describing YHWH (Smith 1990:31). This image is accentuated in a text such as Ezekiel 43:2 which describes YHWH coming from the east (Wiggins 1996:99).
  - In Psalm 110:3 *shaḥar* has a directional use (Brown 1998:94).
  - The Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XI, 597, ascribes the rousing of dawn to the crowing of the cock (Dahood 1986:55).
  - In Psalm 108:3 temporal and cosmological connotations can be drawn from the waking of the dawn. The dawn was seen as a time of help and relief (Botha 2009:13). Psalm 108 and 110 are connected to each other through various motifs and themes. The motif of dawn in Psalm 110:3 is stated more precisely. In Psalm 110:3 the messianic king is begotten or born from the womb of the dawn. This allows a new interpretation of Psalm 2. Now it is YHWH himself that wages war against the nations, no longer the human king (Zenger 1998:90).
  - Although the text presents difficulties in interpretation, Luke 1:78 could intend a comparison of the Messiah with the rising of the sun. David's house is now presented as the messianic "Dawn from on High" with the canticle ending on notes of peace and light shining on those who sit in darkness. This is comprehensible only as a concrete or tangible result of God's compassion. There is a connection here with Malachi 3:20 (cf. Bovon 1992:76; Douglas 1974:297; Fitzmyer 1986:379,387).
  - At some point *shaḥar* was used as a proper noun and became connected to a deity in the ancient Near East (Keel & Uehlinger 1998:208).
- "Human beings, it seems, have always been mythmakers. Myth is a universal

human phenomenon, which attempts to express ultimate reality through symbols” (Groenewald 2007:17). The religious background (the mythology) behind *shaḥar* can contribute much to the understanding of Psalm 139:7-12. It is therefore important to look at the spatial orientation of *shaḥar* in Psalm 139:7-12, the space wherein the sun rises and sets, and how this fits into the ancient Near Eastern worldview.

### A TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION OF PSALM 139:7-12

In translating Psalm 139:7-12, a decision must be made on how to translate *כַּנְפֵי־שָׁחַר* (“wings of *shaḥar*”) in this text. The following translations provide examples of possible translations for these words:

- KJV (2002:406): “wings of the morning”
- NIV (1984:685): “wings of the dawn”
- The Living Bible (1975:597): “If I ride the morning winds”
- Good News Bible (1986:622): “If I flew away beyond the east or lived in”
- Die Bybel 1933/1953 Vertaling (2008:719): “vleuels van die dageraad”
- Die Bybel 1983 Nuwe Vertaling (1996:577): “Vlieg ek na die ooste”
- Die Boodskap (Van der Watt et al. 2006:780): “Al kan ek so vinnig soos lig beweeg of al gaan ek na die verste plek”
- Nuwe Lewende Vertaling (2006:624): “Vlieg ek met die daeraad na”

After studying these translations one can conclude that most of the translations view *כַּנְפֵי־שָׁחַר* (“wings of *shaḥar*”) as a primary noun, and translate it as “wings of (the) dawn” or similar. By taking the religious background into account, as will be explained later, *shaḥar* will be translated in this paper as a proper noun, and glossed as “wings of Shaḥar”.

אֵנָה אֵלַי מִרוּחְךָ<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your spirit?

וְאֵנָה מִפְּנֵיךָ אֶבְרַח׃ Or where can I flee from your presence?

אִם־אֶסַּק שָׁמַיִם שָׁם אַתָּה<sup>8</sup> If I were to ascend to heaven, you are there!

וְאִצְעִיעָה שְׂאוֹל הַנֶּגֶד׃ And if I were to make my bed in Sheol, you are

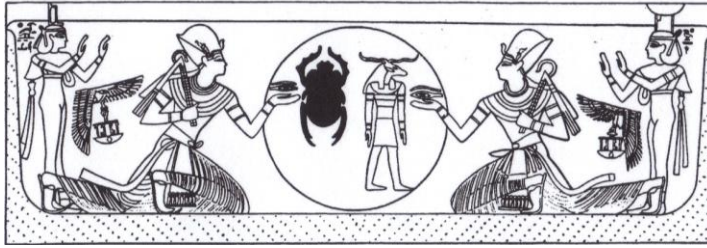
	there!
אֲשָׂא כַנְפֵי־שָׁחַר <sup>9</sup>	If I take the wings of Shaḥar
אֲשָׁכְנָה בְּאַחֲרֵית יָם:	and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
גַּם־שָׁם יָדְךָ תִּנְחֵנִי <sup>10</sup>	Even there your hand would lead me,
וְתִאחֲזֵנִי יְמִינְךָ:	and your right hand hold me fast.
וְאָמַר אֲדַחֲשֵׁךְ יְשׁוּפְנִי <sup>11</sup>	And I said: “If only darkness would grasp me
וְלֵילָה אֹרֶךְ בַּעֲרָנִי:	And the light around me become night!”
גַּם־חֹשֶׁךְ לֹא־יַחֲשִׁיךְ מִמֶּךָ <sup>12</sup>	But even the darkness is not dark to you
וְלֵילָה כִּיּוֹם יֵאָרֶךְ	and the night is as bright as the day,
כַּחֲשִׁיכָה כְּאוֹרָה:	for darkness is as light to you.

Most scholars interpret Psalm 139:7-12 as referring to the omnipresence of God. The question that arises is whether such interpretations take the religious background and spatial implications of this text into account. Weiser (1962:803) states that the poet is pondering the omnipresence of God in a series of hypothetical statements. The poet’s own experience of God influences his thoughts on God and that leads him to the questions “where can I go from your spirit?” and “where can I flee from your presence?” The poet’s reaction may be one of a sinner or of a man who trembles at the greatness of God. God is “everywhere, in the topmost height of heaven as well as in the nethermost depths of the underworld, in the remotest east, where the dawn rises, as well as in the distant west” (Weiser 1962:803). Weiser makes use of the spatial implications of the ancient Near East worldview, but he does not take the religious background of *shaḥar* and the spatial implications of this imagery for the text into account. In Anderson’s (1972:907-908) interpretation of this text he notes that the metaphor in verse 9 possibly derives from some mythological story, but concludes that the myth itself may not have had any significance to the psalmist. Dahood (1970:289) makes the connection to mythological imagery, but uses it to illustrate the distance between east and west. Kidner

(1979:465) also links the reference to the distance between east and west, but does not make the mythological connection. Allen (2002:329) notes that there is a mythological concept underlying this imagery, but states that the psalmist uses it as a vivid metaphor. Allen therefore does not explain the religious background any further. According to Brueggemann (2005:83), the focus of Psalm 139:7-12 is not the pervasive immanence of YHWH, but YHWH’s dangerous inescapability. The rest of this paper will focus on the religious background and spatial orientation of *shaḥar* in Psalm 139:7-12 in an attempt to show the importance of the imagery for interpreting this text.

## **THE RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF *SHAḤAR* IN PSALM 139:7-12**

To get a better understanding of Psalm 139:7-12, one must consider the religious background of this text with specific focus on the background of *shaḥar* (שַׁחַר). It is important to note that *shaḥar* also referred to a deity, Shaḥar (Parker 1999:754), who formed part of the Canaanite mythology. Some aspects of the personification of this Ugaritic deity can be seen in biblical texts such as Job 3:9, 41:18 and Psalm 139:9 (Gray 1962:303). In Psalm 57:9 something of the original mythic configuration of the dawn as the power (or goddess) that bears life day after day, and the celebration of it, can be seen (Hossfeld & Zenger 2005:74-75). This is illustrated in Figure 1. Hossfeld and Zenger (2005:73) describe it as follows: “The world of heaven and earth. (The heavens, like a roof, rest on the two ends/borders world-mountains.) The space between earth and heaven is ‘filled’ by the sun disk with scarab (= morning sun) and ram-headed figure (= daytime or evening sun). The pharaohs kneeling to the left and the right of the sun offer the regenerative Udjat eye and thus, like the praying/praising figures behind them, contribute to the sun’s rising and to the development of its life-giving power. In Psalm 57 the petitioner, with his Psalm, assumes this function.”



**Fig.1.** Tomb painting, Valley of the Kings, Ramses X – 11th century CE  
(Hossfeld & Zenger 2005:73)

It is important to note that the details concerning this specific deity surface from widely separated cultures over a long period of time. Therefore, one must be cautious in assuming that the resulting picture represents a specific time (Meier 1992c:1150).

The story of the birth of Shaḥar and his brother Shalim was discovered in the early years of the excavations at Ras Shamra (Pardee 1997:274). The text was written in a single column on both sides of the tablet CTA 23 that was discovered in 1930 (Gibson 1978:28). The following quotation is a section of the tablet, telling the story of the birth of Shaḥar and Shalim. The translation of Gibson (1978:125-126) is used.

The two women (became) wives [of El],  
 wives of El even for ever.  
 He stooped (and) kissed their lips;  
 behold! their lips were sweet,  
 sweet as pomegranate[s].  
 In the kissing (there was) conception,  
 in the embracing (there was) pregnancy;  
 they travailed (and) gave birth to Shaḥar and Shalim.

The story begins with El, the supreme god of the Canaanite pantheon, taking a walk along the sea-shore. He sees two women who are busy washing their clothes over a basin. While they are doing this they are calling out to their father and mother. This arouses El and he removes the women to his house. He uses his staff like a javelin and shoots down a bird, which he roasts over a fire. In a

seductive tone of voice he asks the women to tell him when the bird is ready, saying that if they address him as husband, they shall become his wives. If they address him as father he will treat them as his daughters. When the bird is ready they both cry out “Husband” and become his wives. He then bends over and kisses them and they conceive and give birth to two children. They are named Shaḥar which means “dawn” and Shalim which means “sunset” or “dusk” (Gibson 1978:28-29).

A number of traits of the deity Shaḥar contribute to our understanding of Psalm 139:7-12. The first characteristic to take note of is the gender of Shaḥar. In the story of this deity’s birth one can discern that the deity is male. The Hebrew noun *shaḥar* is masculine. But in Psalm 110:3 *shaḥar* is personified as female, for the offspring of dawn’s womb is the dew. Therefore, one must be prepared to see variable gender in the deity associated with the dawn (Meier 1992c:1151). Further feminine characteristic traits of Shaḥar are that she was seen as a winged goddess (Psalm 139:9), she had beautiful eyelids (Job 3:9), and she was the mother of the Day Star, Venus (Isaiah 14:12). In a Greek myth about “dawn”, she spent her nights asleep in the ocean bed and had to be awakened by another goddess (Rogerson & McKay 1977:44).

Another characteristic trait of Shaḥar can be taken from the birth tale of Shaḥar and Shalim. Shaḥar nurses at the breast of the Mother goddess, but his hunger is never stilled. It is described as “one lip to earth, one lip to heaven, the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea entering their mouths”. This shows that there is no satisfying his dietary needs (Meier 1992c:1151). This leads to a negative image of this deity, further accentuated by the skill associated with Shaḥar namely the ability to cause disaster and to disturb the overall order of the world (Keel & Uehlinger 1998:208). The negative imagery connected to Shaḥar can contribute to the understanding of the negative feeling of the one praying in Psalm 139 as portrayed by Zenger (1996:31-32):

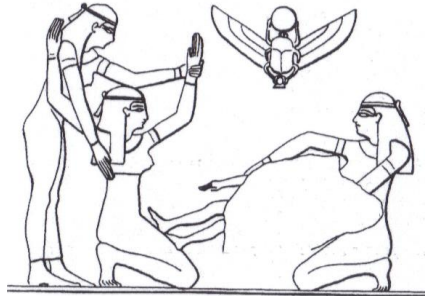
The four parts constitute two parallel pairs: the actions of YHWH (vv. 2-6, 13-16) and the reaction of the one praying (vv. 7-12, 17-22). In a certain sense the two pairs are even antithetically related: the attention of YHWH described in verses 2-6 is experienced by



the one praying as almost like a ‘siege’ (vv. 5a), and a burdensome ‘obligation’ (vv. 5b) from which she or he wanted to escape and with ‘one heart’ still would like to, even though this is impossible – because of YHWH (vv. 7-12)!

Instead of the one praying who struggles with the evil and wicked, order is to be found in YHWH. Thus the negative imagery is transformed into positive imagery.

The last characteristic of Shaḥar that is of importance is that Shaḥar had wings, as founded in Psalm 139:9 – כְּנִפְי־שָׁחַר (cf. Burden 1991:133; Dahood 1970:289-290). To get a better picture of this, a comparison can be made with the birth of the god-king in Erment, as portrayed in Figure 2. The scarab (= morning sun) with wings and the sun is shown at the top of the figure.<sup>3</sup>



**Fig.2.** The scarab (morning sun) with wings (Keel 1978:251).

In Old South Arabic, *shaḥar* is often found in collocation with *athar* and with a “dragon’s head” as associating symbol. Shaḥar (dawn), like the sun, has links both with the heavens and the underworld (Parker 1999:754). Psalm 139:8-9 states that even at the topmost height of heaven or in the depths of the underworld, or where the dawn rises in the east and sinks in the sea in the west, there God will be. Heaven and the underworld were originally regarded as the

<sup>3</sup> Keel (1978:251) describes the image as follows: “Here the woman in labour is shown not enthroned but in realistic kneeling posture. The newborn child is seen coming forth from the womb. The scarab (*hpr* = ‘to become, to come into being’) with the sun indicates that a new ‘sun’ has come into being.”

abodes of different deities. That means that one can be located in the realm of one god and be safe from a god in/of another realm (Weiser 1962:804). *Shaḥar* has wings and links with heaven and the underworld that enable her to fly from one realm to another. This means that she can move from east to west and to the topmost part of heaven and into the depths of the underworld. This helps to understand that in Psalm 139:8-9, like *Shaḥar*, YHWH is not bound to one realm and can go anywhere, it accentuates that one cannot hide from YHWH. The same image can be used for the one praying in Psalm 139: if only he or she could fly from one realm to another, like *Shaḥar*, to escape from YHWH. It would not help, because YHWH would be there. This idea will be illustrated more clearly in light of the spatial orientation in Psalm 139:7-12 discussed below.

### **SPATIAL ORIENTATION OF *SHAḤAR* IN PSALM 139:7-12**

To gain a better perspective on the meaning of *shaḥar* in Psalm 139:7-12, the worldview (the theoretical reconstruction of the cosmos) of the ancient Near East must be taken into consideration with specific regard to spatial orientation. Two aspects of this spatial orientation will be considered: vertical (Psalm 139:8) and horizontal (Psalm 139:9).

The vertical can be seen in three parts: heaven, earth and the underworld (see Exodus 20:4). Heaven (above) is the traditional home of YHWH (or the realm of the gods). In that realm YHWH is already present (Hossfeld & Zenger 2008:723). To go “up” was to enter heaven (Wyatt 2001:40). Earth is the home of the humans. Earth is in the centre of the horizontal sphere. Above, below and around this, lies the cosmic ocean (Prinsloo 2009:8). The heaven is supported by the huge mountains at the “ends of the earth” (Isaiah 41:5), which form the extreme of the circular horizon (Job 26:10). When God is in battle with Chaos, God churns up the sea to its very depths, the foundations of the mountains and the earth are laid bare (Psalm 18:7, 15). The boundary between light and darkness is at the extreme horizon of the mountains which form the foundations of the heavens. It is there where the gates of the morning brightness and the

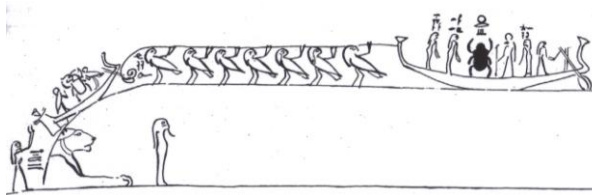
evening gloom (Psalm 65:8) can be found. The seventh district (lower right, destroyed), according to the Babylonian Map of the World, is where the “morning shines from its habitation”. To get a better picture of this, a comparison can be made with an Old Akkadian cylindrical seal (Figure 3). On the left side of the bird the sun god Utu (Akkadian Shamash) can be seen with a sickle-shaped saw. The god rises between the Mountains of the World in the East (Seybold 1990:194).<sup>4</sup>



**Fig.3.** Picture from an Old Akkadian cylindrical seal – 2200 BC  
(Seybold 1990:195)

According to Keel (1978:22-23) the sun god emerges from the mountains through two gates (Psalm 19:4-6); these are opened wide and adorned with lions, as seen in Figure 4. “The edge of the earth is often delineated by lions. It was a dangerous region. In Egypt, however, the lion, like the night, was understood not only as a destructive power (‘yesterday’), but also as a power of rebirth (‘tomorrow’)” (Keel 1978:25). The underworld or Sheol is the realm of the dead. Although to go down is associated with death the springs of the underworld are seen as “the source of the renewal of the earth and the replenishment of life” (Wyatt 2001:40). YHWH’s presence is not expected in Sheol (Bratcher & Reyburn 1991:1125).

<sup>4</sup> According to Seybold (1990:194) Utu rises between the Mountains of the World in the East and “the gods approach him, on the right Enki, God of (fresh) water and wisdom, with his two-faced messenger, and on the left presumably the ‘Lady of Heaven’, Inanna and a divine hero (Gilgamesh?)”



**Fig.4.** This Egyptian figure shows where the mountaintops are replaced by the forequarters of a lion (Keel 1978:25)

The vertical and horizontal orientation of east, west, south and north can be seen in Job 23:8 (Hossfeld & Zenger 2008:723). East is the direction of the rising sun and is the direction that is before or in front of one. East is the direction one faced in order to get one’s orientation (Drinkard 1992a:248). West is the direction of the setting sun and the direction behind one. West is also the direction of the Western Sea (also called the Great Sea), which today is called the Mediterranean Sea (Drinkard 1992d:908). When east and west stand in contrast to one another they show a totality of direction through the use of the rising and setting sun. In the ancient Near East, north is not the primary direction for orientation. North is on the left or the left-hand side. North is associated with the direction from which invaders come (Jeremiah 1:14-15, Isaiah 14:31). There is also reference to God’s home in the far north in Isaiah 14:13 (Drinkard 1992b:1135-1136). North is also associated with a large mountain in Syria, *dshebe*, later called Mons Casius. This mountain is the seat of the Canaanite god Baal Zaphon (Childs 1962:608). South is on the right or the right-hand side. God often appears from the south as seen in Habakkuk 3:3 and Deuteronomy 33:2 (Drinkard 1992d:171).

In the centre, where the horizontal and vertical cross, lies the cosmic centre of the universe, which is seen as a mountain. On this mountain is the temple of God (for Israel this would be the temple in Jerusalem). This is the meeting point between God and humans (Prinsloo 2009:9). To be in the temple is to be in direct or immediate presence and contact with God, as if to be in heaven (Wyatt 2001:40). To be at the far end of the East, West or in Sheol will mean that one is out of the presence of God. This helps to understand the importance of the image that is used in Psalm 139:7-12. God is present in all the realms. He is

present everywhere, not only in heaven, but also in Sheol and at the ends of the earth where the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Even the image of YHWH's right-hand shows this, as it symbolises the presence and the far reaching capability of YHWH (Hossfeld & Zenger 2008:723).

Something that must be taken into consideration is the east-west orientation that can be seen in the temporal dimension. Wyatt (2001:39) describes it as follows: "On the temporal axis, the remote past is where mythic events 'happened', providing patterns for present belief and behaviour. Rituals reactualize ('represents') the mythic realities now. Mythic time is said to be 'the eternal present', because it determines the present." In other words, east, that is in front, is the past, and west, that is behind, is the future. A person "literally moves backwards towards the future, with the past receding in front of him/her" (Prinsloo 2009:8). Mediterranean men and women are therefore people who strongly bind themselves to the present. Then the past follows. The past, however, directly influences the present. Only after this does the future follow. This means that when a man has a problem and does not know how to proceed, he will look for direction in the past. In other words the light from the past (east-dawn) clarifies the present (Malina et al. 1996:101). In Psalm 139:7-12 the problem of the one praying is being given light in the past (east-dawn). The answer is in the presence and order of YHWH. It does not matter where he goes – past, present or future, the focus will fall on YHWH. He is in control and He is a universal God.

## CONCLUSION

This paper shows the importance of understanding the spatial and religious background of *shaḥar* (שַׁחַר) in Psalm 139:7-12. The image of the rising dawn in Psalm 139:7-12 can be seen as one of the key words in understanding this strophe. A comparison between Psalm 139:7-12 in the Old Testament and mythological imagery in the Ancient Near East contributes to the understanding of the religious background of Shaḥar in this text. The investigation on the religious background of "dawn" shows that even though the deity Shaḥar has

some negative connotation, it could help to understand the negative feeling of the one praying in Psalm 139, yet order is to be found within YHWH, transforming the negative imagery into positive imagery. Like the flying deity *Shahar*, who has the freedom to move from realm to realm, YHWH is not bound to one realm, emphasizing that one cannot hide from YHWH. The same image can be used for the one praying in Psalm 139.

Using the vertical and horizontal spatial orientation found in Psalm 139:7-12, the idea is further illustrated by concluding that God is present in all the realms. He is not only present in heaven, but also in Sheol and at the ends of the earth where the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. As the rising dawn’s light shines into your eyes, it forces you to turn your eyes away, to turn around, still focussing on the past, to see the total, universal and inescapable presence of God.

In understanding the spatial and religious background of *shahar* in Psalm 139:7-12, it helps one to grasp the importance of the imagery used to describe the presence of YHWH in Psalm 139. It shows that the one praying realizes that the presence of YHWH is not bound to the normal understanding of his or her worldview.

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