

What does Paul mean when he talks about ascending and/or descending in Romans 10:6-7?

When determining the meaning of Romans 10:6-7, as is important with any biblical text, we have to look at context. The whole of Romans 10 is centered on Israel's need for righteousness and their inability to find it solely through the law. So these two verses, 6 and 7, have to be understood within that context. Paul is not talking about people going to heaven or hell. He is instead using personification to explain his point. Paul is attempting to demonstrate that the faith needed for righteousness is not found in the law but rather it is found in Jesus Christ. Verse 8 helps to unlock the meaning to this verse by saying that "the word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart". Therefore, based on the fact that verse 8 is a counterpoint to verses 6 and 7 and speaks of the word being close to our mouth and hearts, we can infer that what Paul is doing is trying to explain that one does not have to search long and hard for righteousness that comes from faith. God has not hidden that from us or made it difficult to find. John MacArthur, in his study bible, has a footnote that sums this up well. It says:

"Paul speaks of the righteousness based on faith as if it were a person and puts in its mouth a quotation from Dt 30:12,13. His point is that the righteousness of faith does not require some impossible odyssey through the universe to find Christ."¹

Paul is saying that the truth regarding the righteousness required by God is found in the word preached about Jesus Christ. One does not have to search high and low for it. All they must do is "confess with [their] mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in [their] heart that God raised Him from the dead, [and they] will be saved" (Romans 10:9, NASB).

1. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), p. 1680