

Job 7:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?

Analysis

What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?

Job's anguished question inverts Psalm 8:4's worshipful wonder ("What is man, that thou art mindful of him?") into bitter complaint. The Hebrew enosh ("man") emphasizes human frailty and mortality, unlike adam (humanity) or ish (individual man). Gadal ("magnify") means to make great or important - Job questions why God pays such intense attention to insignificant humanity.

Sum leb ("set thine heart") means to direct attention, care, or purpose toward something. Job's complaint: if humans are so insignificant, why does God obsessively scrutinize them, especially to inflict suffering? This reflects Job's perception of God as hostile examiner rather than loving Father. The following verses (vv. 18-19) intensify this: God inspects humanity every morning, tests every moment, never looking away even briefly.

Theologically, this passage wrestles with divine attention's double-edged nature. God's care can feel like oppressive surveillance when suffering seems undeserved. Yet the incarnation provides the ultimate answer: God magnifies humanity by becoming human (Philippians 2:6-8), setting His heart upon us redemptively. Christ transforms Job's complaint into gospel wonder - God does indeed magnify humans by granting them dignity, attention, and salvation.

Historical Context

Job 7 occurs in Job's response to Eliphaz's first speech, expressing the sufferer's desperation after losing children, wealth, and health. The question "What is man?" reflects ancient Near Eastern wisdom tradition's contemplation of human significance in the cosmos.

Mesopotamian texts like the "Babylonian Theodicy" and Egyptian wisdom literature similarly ponder human frailty and divine-human relationships. However, Job's bitterness subverts typical ancient worship, where mortals praised deities for noticing them. Job sarcastically reverses this: divine attention brings torment rather than blessing.

Psalm 8's contrasting use of similar language ("What is man, that thou art mindful of him?") shows worship theology where God's attention dignifies humanity despite our smallness - crowned with glory and honor, given dominion over creation. Job's inversion reveals suffering's power to distort our perception of God's character. The New Testament resolution appears in Hebrews 2:6-9, quoting Psalm 8 and applying it to Christ, who was "made a little lower than the angels" to taste death for everyone. God's "setting His heart" on humanity culminates in incarnation and redemption, answering Job's complaint with divine self-giving love.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Job's inversion of Psalm 8 illustrate suffering's power to distort our perception of God's character and intentions?
2. What does the contrast between Job 7:17 and Psalm 8:4 teach us about the different perspectives on divine attention - burden versus blessing?

3. In what ways does the Incarnation provide the ultimate answer to Job's question about why God 'magnifies' humanity?
4. How should we pastorally respond when sufferers express feelings of oppressive divine scrutiny rather than loving care?
5. What does Hebrews 2:6-9's application of Psalm 8 to Christ reveal about God's purpose in 'setting His heart' upon humanity?

Interlinear Text

מָה אָנֹשׁ כִּי תְּגִדְלֶנּוּ אֵלֶיךָ	What is man H3588 that thou shouldest magnify H3588	H4100 H582 H1431	הִכְיָה
תְּנַשֵּׁת אַל לְבָבֶךָ	him and that thou shouldest set H413 thine heart H3820	H7896	

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 2:6 (Parallel theme): But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?

Psalms 8:4 (Parallel theme): What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

Psalms 144:3 (Parallel theme): LORD, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him!