

Psalm 139:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. This verse appears in the middle of Scripture's most intimate exploration of God's omniscience and omnipresence, specifically within a section celebrating God's intimate involvement in human formation (v.13-16).

"I will praise thee" (אָזֶן/odekha) is emphatic future: "I will give thanks, I will confess." This isn't mere acknowledgment but worshipful response to understanding God's creative work. Recognizing how we're made should produce praise.

"Fearfully" (נָרָא/ nora'ot) means with fear, reverently, awesomely. The same root describes God's awesome deeds (Exodus 15:11, Deuteronomy 10:21). Human creation evokes the same reverential awe as God's mighty works in history. We're not mere accidents but awesome divine craftsmanship.

"Wonderfully made" (נִפְלֵית/ nifleiti) comes from pala, meaning distinguished, set apart, wonderful—describing things beyond human capability. The Niphal form indicates action done to the subject: "I was made wonderful." This isn't self-praise but recognition of God's extraordinary workmanship.

"Marvellous are thy works" (נִפְלָאִים מָשְׁׁבֵך/ nifla'im ma'asekha) applies the same root

to God's works generally. The plural "works" encompasses all creation, but the context emphasizes human formation specifically. The verse preceding describes God "knitting me together in my mother's womb" (v.13).

"That my soul knoweth right well" (תְּאַנְּךָ יְعַנְּפֵשִׁי/venafshi yoda'at me'od) indicates deep, experiential knowledge. Me'od (exceedingly, abundantly) intensifies: "my soul knows full well," "knows abundantly." This isn't theoretical knowledge but lived awareness of God's creative care.

The broader context (v.13-16) details God's intimate involvement: forming inward parts, knitting together in the womb, seeing substance while yet unformed, writing all days in His book before any existed. This isn't deistic clockmaker theology but intimate divine involvement in every detail of human formation.

Historical Context

Psalm 139, attributed to David, reflects mature theological understanding of God's omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence. Whether written during David's shepherd years, his fugitive period fleeing Saul, or his kingship, the psalm expresses profound awareness of God's comprehensive knowledge and care.

Ancient Near Eastern peoples generally viewed creation positively—humans as divine craftsmanship. But pagan cultures attributed creation to various deities, often through violent conflict (Enuma Elish describes Marduk creating humans from slain god Tiamat's blood). In contrast, Genesis and this psalm present purposeful, loving divine formation.

Greek philosophy introduced body-soul dualism, viewing physical creation as inferior to spiritual. Gnosticism (emerging in first-century Christianity) taught the physical body was evil, trapping the divine spirit. Against this, biblical faith affirms the goodness of material creation, including human bodies.

For Israel, this psalm affirmed each person's value regardless of social status. Ancient cultures often viewed slaves, women, foreigners as inferior. But if all are fearfully and wonderfully made by God, all bear inherent dignity and worth. This

had revolutionary social implications.

In Christian theology, this verse supports the sanctity of human life—from conception (v.13-16 describe prenatal development) through natural death. The pro-life movement frequently cites this psalm, seeing God's intimate involvement in prenatal formation as establishing personhood before birth.

Modern science, far from diminishing this truth, amplifies it. DNA complexity, cellular intricacy, neurological sophistication, coordinated biological systems—all reveal staggering design. The Human Genome Project mapped three billion DNA base pairs, each precisely ordered. Such complexity testifies to "fearfully and wonderfully made."

For people struggling with self-worth, body image issues, feeling insignificant or worthless, this verse speaks divine truth: you are God's masterpiece, deliberately crafted, purposefully designed, intimately known, and deeply valued.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does understanding that you are 'fearfully and wonderfully made' affect your view of yourself and others?
2. What does it mean that God was intimately involved in your formation before birth (v.13-16), and how does this establish human value and dignity?
3. How should the truth that we're God's workmanship affect how we treat our bodies and view physical creation?
4. In what ways does modern scientific understanding of human complexity confirm rather than contradict being 'fearfully and wonderfully made'?
5. How does this psalm's teaching on God's intimate involvement in human formation speak to questions about the sanctity of life, abortion, and bioethics?

Interlinear Text

כִּי עַל אֹזֶב	נוֹרָא וֹתְךָ	בְּפָלִילִתִי	כִּפְלָא יָמִים
I will praise	thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made		marvellous
H3034	H3372	H6395	H6381
מְאֹדֶן יְדַעַת נְפָשִׁי גַּם־עַת יְבָשָׁה	מְאֹדֶן יְדַעַת נְפָשִׁי גַּם־עַת יְבָשָׁה	מְאֹדֶן יְדַעַת נְפָשִׁי גַּם־עַת יְבָשָׁה	מְאֹדֶן יְדַעַת נְפָשִׁי גַּם־עַת יְבָשָׁה
are thy works	and that my soul	knoweth	right well
H4639	H5315	H3045	H3966

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 111:2 (Parallel theme): The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.

Psalms 104:24 (Creation): O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches.

Psalms 40:5 (Parallel theme): Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

Job 5:9 (Parallel theme): Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number;

Revelation 15:3 (Parallel theme): And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.