

Psalms 8:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

Analysis

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? From cosmic contemplation David turns to anthropological wonder. These rhetorical questions express not skepticism but profound amazement. After considering the heavens' vastness, David marvels that God pays attention to insignificant humanity. The contrast is deliberate and stunning: infinite Creator versus finite creature, cosmic expanse versus tiny planet, eternal God versus mortal humans.

"What is man" (mah-enosh, מְאֹנֹשׁ) uses enosh (אָנוֹשׁ), emphasizing human frailty, mortality, and weakness. The word derives from a root meaning "to be weak or sick." This isn't neutral "human being" but vulnerable, fragile creature. "Son of man" (ben-adam, בֶּן-אָדָם) uses adam (אָדָם), recalling humanity's origin from dust (adamah—Genesis 2:7). Both terms emphasize human insignificance and mortality.

"That thou art mindful of him" uses tizkerenu (תִּזְקְרֵבָנוּ), from zakar (זִכָּר)—to remember, recall, or be mindful. God "remembering" implies active attention and care, not mere cognitive awareness. It's the same verb describing God "remembering" Noah (Genesis 8:1), Rachel (Genesis 30:22), and His covenant (Exodus 2:24). Divine remembering always results in divine action.

"That thou visitest him" employs tifqedenu (תִּפְקַדֵּנוּ), from paqad (פָּקַד)—to visit, attend to, care for, or appoint. This word suggests intimate involvement, personal care, and purposeful intervention. God doesn't observe humanity from cosmic

distance; He visits, engages, and acts on our behalf.

Hebrews 2:6-8 quotes this verse, applying it ultimately to Jesus—the true human who fulfills God's design for humanity. Though Jesus humbled Himself, becoming lower than angels (Philippians 2:7-8), God exalted Him and subjected all things under His feet. What Adam lost through disobedience, Christ recovers through obedient suffering.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern creation accounts typically portrayed humans as afterthoughts—created to serve capricious gods, provide their food through sacrifices, or free deities from manual labor. Babylonian Enuma Elish describes humanity fashioned from the blood of a slain rebel god, existing solely for divine convenience. Against this backdrop, biblical anthropology is revolutionary: humans matter to God not because they serve Him (though worship is appropriate response) but because He chooses to love and care for them.

The questions "What is man?" and "Who am I?" recur throughout Scripture, expressing human wonder at divine condescension. Moses asks, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" (Exodus 3:11). David later asks, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far?" (2 Samuel 7:18). These aren't expressions of false humility but genuine amazement at God's gracious attention to unworthy creatures.

Psalm 8's anthropology balances two truths: human insignificance (when compared to cosmic vastness and divine glory) and human significance (when God chooses to care for us). This balance protects against both arrogant humanism (which ignores our creatureliness) and nihilistic despair (which denies our value). We are dust, yet dust whom God loves, visits, and crowns with glory.

For Christians, this question gains profound depth through the Incarnation. The eternal Son of God became ben-adam—son of man, Son of Adam. Jesus repeatedly used this title for Himself (over 80 times in the Gospels), identifying with human

frailty while revealing human destiny. God didn't just "visit" humanity abstractly; He became human in Jesus Christ.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does contemplating creation's vastness affect your understanding of human significance—does it produce humility, despair, or wonder at God's care?
2. What is the difference between feeling insignificant because of cosmic scale versus recognizing our significance because God chooses to care for us?
3. How do the terms 'enosh' (frail mortal) and 'ben-adam' (son of dust) shape a realistic yet hopeful biblical anthropology?
4. In what ways does God 'visit' humanity today, and how can you become more aware of His active care and attention?
5. How does Jesus's identification as 'Son of Man' transform the meaning of human nature and destiny?

Interlinear Text

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|-------|--------------------|-------|------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|-------|
| מָה | אַנְשָׁה | כִּי | תִּזְכֹּר אֵלֶיךָ | כִּי | אֲנָשָׁה | כִּי |
| H4100 | What is man | H3588 | that thou art mindful | of him and the son | of man | H3588 |
| H582 | | | H2142 | | H120 | |

תִּשְׁבַּח
that thou visitest
H6485

Additional Cross-References

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!

Job 7:17 (Parallel theme): What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?

Psalms 146:3 (Parallel theme): Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.

Matthew 8:20 (Parallel theme): And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

2 Chronicles 6:18 (Parallel theme): But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!

Psalms 80:17 (Parallel theme): Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.

Job 25:6 (Parallel theme): How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?

Luke 1:68 (Parallel theme): Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

Isaiah 51:12 (Parallel theme): I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass;

Psalms 106:4 (Parallel theme): Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation;