

## What Is Man?

### Commentary for August 15, 2011 — Mankind's Importance

The important question "What is man?" is asked by three biblical writers: the Arabian patriarch Job, King David, and the apostle Paul. Each of them asked the same question in a slightly different way. They were asking why were the children of Adam even thought of or noticed by God. Why was man created? Why was he given mortality? How can such an impure creation be pleasing to God? How and why is any person important to God?

#### ***"What Is Man" in Job***

These are important questions of life. Job asked this question when he was undergoing his intense suffering. It was probably the first time such a sentiment was set down in writing:

***"What is man [enosh, mortal], that you should [1] magnify him? and that you should [2] set your heart upon him? And that you should [3] visit [examine] him every morning, and [4] try [test] him every moment? How long will you not depart from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle?"***

• ***Job 7:17–19***

Note the four things Job mentions. Job understood that the pain he was suffering came directly from God. We are told this at the beginning of the Book of Job, and God confirmed this at the end. Note that the word translated "man" is not from the Hebrew word *adam* meaning a human being, but it is *enosh* denoting a "mortal," who is nonetheless human. Job is asking what is so important that God should pay any attention to human beings, God's creation. Perhaps it would be better if God left human beings (and particularly Job himself) alone. Job's anguish is better expressed in the Concordant Literal Version:

***"What is a mortal that You should make a great thing of him, Or that You should set Your heart on him? Or You should note him every morning, And You should test him every moment? How long shall You not heed me, Or not let me relax even until I swallow my saliva?"***

• ***Job 7:17–19, Concordant Literal Version***

Job prayed for deliverance and God did not respond. Job is pleading and almost demanding an answer from God when he asked, ***"How long shall you not heed me?"*** He received a response from God later in Job 38:1–40:2, but in reality Job was given an incomplete answer and not the one he wanted, even though God removed his pain, suffering, and restored much to him that was lost.

Job's unhelpful and mistaken friend Eliphaz asks the same question in chapter 15 as Job did in chapter 7. As Job did, Eliphaz mentions the mortality of man, yet the humanity of *enosh* comes through the phrase ***"born of a woman."*** Eliphaz focused on a different perspective:

***"What is man [enosh, mortal], that he should be clean [made "pure"]? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, he puts no trust in his***

**saints [holy ones]; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinks iniquity like water?**

• *Job 15:14–16*

Eliphaz wonders why God should have requirements of purity and righteousness when mortals are less capable of obedience than the holy ones in the heavens, who themselves are not trusted and are unclean in God's sight, or specifically in Hebrew "in his eyes." For more information regarding the righteousness of beings in the heavens see Job 4:18, 25:5; Psalm 14:3; 89:5–7.

Another of Job's friends, Bildad the Shuhite talks about man's impurity and lowliness:

**"How then can man [*enosh*, mortal] be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shines not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man [*enosh*, mortal], that is a worm? and the son of man [*adam*, human], which is a worm?"**

• *Job 25:4–6*<sup>1</sup>

So again, why does God care about man? In the time of Job, the wisest men of the world (Job and his friends, all of whom believed in God and His righteousness) did not know the ultimate goal of God's creation, nor why God had such a high regard for human beings. They could not know. It was hidden from them at that time (1 Corinthians 2:7–8, 11; Colossians 1:26; Ephesians 3:3–5, 9).

They knew man was created in God's image and likeness. They knew about God's creation of Adam (Genesis 1:26) and that all subsequent human beings were in Adam's image (Genesis 5:3). They knew that man's sin and impurity before God made man unable to relate directly with God. Yet even God acknowledged that Job was one of God's more worthy servants: **"a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and eschews evil"** (Job 1:8, 2:3).

### ***"What Is Man" in Davidic Psalms***

King David of Israel understood the depravity and lowly situation of man:

**"YHWH looked down from heaven upon the children of men [*adam*], to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that does good, no, not one. Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon YHWH.**

• *Psalms 14:2–4*

**"The children of men"** have no knowledge of God because He has not revealed Himself to most people in the world. In David's time only Israel and very few other non-Israelites were

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<sup>1</sup> Again the concordant Literal Version of Job 25:4–6 is more expressive and accurate in Bildad's comparison of man to a worm:

**"How then can a mortal [*enosh*] be righteous before El, And how can one born of woman be pure? If even the moon does not irradiate, And the stars, they are not pure in His eyes, How much less a mortal [*enosh*], that maggot, And a son of humanity [*adam*], that worm."**

See the "Addendum: 'Congratulations, You're Walking Dirt' that I added to Dr. Martin's article "[Figures of Speech and Holy Scripture](#)." I discuss man's dust/dirt composition, and similarity to worms. All this is part of understanding the term *adam*, because each of us is from Adam and he was from the dust.

chosen to know about YHWH as the creator, and even they had deceitful and desperately wicked hearts (Jeremiah 17:9).

In Psalm 8 David asks the question **“What is man?”** and then he gives us more information by introducing the phrase **“the son of man,”** meaning “the son of *adam*,” thereby using both terms, *enosh* and *adam*, to give us further information about God’s interest in man:

**“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have ordained; What is man [*enosh*, mortal], that you are mindful of him? and the son of man [*adam*, human], that you visit him? For you have made him a little lower than the angels [*elohim* in Hebrew], and have crowned him with glory and honor. You made him to have dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet: ...”**

• **Psalm 8:3–6**

David connects “mortal” with “adam” (“**son of man**”), but he does not go much beyond connecting the two terms. Of all the marvels and wonders of creation, why is man part of God’s creation at all? Yet David indicates that man is very important to God. Man (*adam*) was created in God’s image and likeness. In Psalm 144 David reverses order of the usage of the two terms, putting *adam* first before *enosh*:

**“YHWH, what is man [*adam*, human], that you take knowledge of him! or the son of man [*enosh*, mortal], that you make account of him! Man is like to vanity [a breath of wind, a vapor]: his days are as a shadow that pass away.”**

• **Psalm 144:3–4**

So, here is how these verses read when put out in a table:

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
<b>Job 7:17</b> Job speaking	<b>“What is man [<i>enosh</i>, mortal], that you should magnify him?”</b>	<b>and that you should set your heart upon him?”</b>
<b>Job 15:14</b> Eliphaz speaking	<b>“What is man [<i>enosh</i>, mortal], that he should be clean?”</b>	<b>and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?”</b>
<b>Psalm 8:4</b> David speaking	<b>What is man [<i>enosh</i>, mortal], that you are mindful of him?</b>	<b>and the son of man [<i>adam</i>, human], that you visit [examine] him?”</b>
<b>Psalm 144:3</b> David speaking	<b>“YHWH, what is man [<i>adam</i>, human], that you take knowledge of him!</b>	<b>or the son of man [<i>enosh</i>, mortal], that you make account of him!”</b>

No one in David’s time would have made such a table of verses, although they would have noticed the repeated questions in Job and in two of David’s psalms, and that David used two different terms, *adam* and *enosh* to ask the same question. Why is man special to God?

Connecting the thoughts in column 3 tells us more information: **“What is man [*enosh* or *adam*]?”: “that you should set your heart upon him?” ... “he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?” ... “the son of man [*adam*, human], that you visit [examine] him?” ... “or the son of man [*enosh*, mortal], that you make account of him!” God’s heart is upon man, yet He desires man to be righteous. He examines and studies man. God takes account of man. This comes from God’s love for man (John 1:7, 3:16–17, 12:32; 1 Timothy 2:4,**

4:10; Titus 2:11, 3:4; 1 John 4:9), which shall be accomplished according to the purpose of God's will (Ephesians 1:11).

## ***New Testament, the Book of Hebrews***

The apostle Paul in chapter 2 of Hebrews gives us the answer to the question **"What is man?"** He applies David's passage of Psalm 8:4 and makes an identification. The "man" spoken of is not only mankind in general (and each human being individually), but Paul directly identifies who is being spoken of, who is the prime subject of the verses above, and who is the object of God's love. Paul applies the text of Psalm 8 to Jesus Christ, the Son of God:

**"But one in a certain place testified, saying** [quoting Psalm 8:4–6],

**'What is man, that you are mindful of him? or the son of man, that you visit him? You made him a little lower than the angels [*aggelous*, in Greek]; you crowned him with glory and honor, and did set him over the works of your hands: You have put all things in subjection under his feet.'**

**For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.**

**But we see Jesus, who was made 'a little lower than the angels' for the suffering of death, 'crowned with glory and honor'; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."**

• ***Hebrews 2:6–10***

**"What is man?"** The man Christ Jesus answers that question. The Son of Man is the Son of God and He is the Christ, the Messiah. He is the archetype of all humanity. He is the second man, the last Adam:

**"And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."**

• ***1 Corinthians 15:45–49***

Christ emptied Himself of His glory to become flesh; God glorified Him again. We shall participate in His glory (Philippians 2:5–11). So **"What is man?"** In the future you and I and all human beings (all who ever lived or will live) shall be full children of God, as Christ is now:

**"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons [children] of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure."**

• ***1 John 3:1–3***

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