



# What is Man?

Psalm 8



## How Majestic!

- ❑ The psalmist (identified as David) begins by praising God. Read Psalm 8.
- ❑ The psalm begins, “LORD (*Yahweh*), our Lord ( *’ādōnāy*) ...” *Yahweh*<sup>1</sup> is the personal name of God, while *’ādōnāy* basically means “lord,” “master,” or “governor.”
- ❑ As David considers the God of creation, he exclaims “how majestic is your name!” David is deeply impressed by God’s glory and power over all creation, which is visible for all to see.
- ❑ Verse 2 indicates the way of *true* strength, which is God-given.<sup>2</sup> True strength is realized in those who recognize their dependence on God. God uses the weak to establish *his* strength. Thus God uses the humble and “weak” to silence the arrogant and “strong.”

## How Insignificant

- ❑ After reflecting on the greatness of creation and the majesty of God, David considers the status of human beings (*vv. 3-4*).
  1. In verses 3-4, how is man<sup>3</sup> viewed relative to God and creation? Why is it surprising that the Creator of the universe would be mindful of man and care for him?<sup>4</sup>

### *Reflection Question*

2. If human beings were not created by God, what is the basis for human significance?<sup>5</sup>



## How Important!

- ❑ Of course, David knows the status of man because God has revealed it (*vv. 5-8*).
  3. In what way is mankind special among God’s creatures? (*see verses on next page*)

<sup>1</sup> ‘Yahweh’ comes from YHWH or y<sup>h</sup>wāh, based on an assumed pronunciation (which is debated). ‘Yahweh’ is God’s self-revealed name which signifies his special self-revelation to his covenant people (Exodus 3:13-17).

<sup>2</sup> Where the NIV84 translation says ‘ordained praise,’ the NIV and other translations say ‘established strength (*or* a stronghold).’ The ‘children and infants’ symbolize humility, weakness, and dependence on the majestic God, while God’s enemies symbolize arrogance and human strength. But *true* strength (God’s strength) is established in the humble (Matthew 21:16). Verse 2 anticipates verses 3-8, which consider the basis of man’s status and significance.

<sup>3</sup> ‘man’ (*’ēnōš*) – *’ēnōš* is often used in poetic passages to describe weakness and frailty; ‘son of man’ (*ben-’adam*) – *’adam* is the general word for man; ‘son of man’ calls attention to man’s fragile mortality, much like *’ēnōš*.

<sup>4</sup> Human beings are much, much smaller than the heavens; and the heavens are much ‘smaller’ than God. Humans are like puny specks (tiny, weak particles) in an infinite universe – a universe that God made with his ‘fingers!’

<sup>5</sup> If there is no Creator, then meaning, purpose and significance are based in humanity. However, humans are mere puny specks in the universe, who exist by chance. As Darwinian paleontologist George Gaylord Simpson once said, ‘Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind’ (George Gaylord Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution*, revised edition [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967], p. 345).

- 📖 God “made [man] a little lower than the heavenly beings<sup>6</sup> and crowned him with glory<sup>7</sup> and honor” (*Psalms* 8:5, *NIV84*)
- 📖 “So God created man in his own image,<sup>8</sup> in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (*Genesis* 1:27).
- 📖 “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground’” (*Genesis* 1:28, *NIV84*).
- 📖 “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (*Genesis* 2:15, *NIV84*).

4. God created humans “in his own image” to reflect him. How should this affect our sense of purpose, values, ambitions and goals? What kinds of things should we be doing?<sup>9</sup>
5. God made mankind “ruler of the earth.” In order to fulfill this responsibility properly, what do we need to remember?<sup>10</sup>



## How Majestic!

- ❑ The psalm ends like it begins. Read Psalm 8:9.

### Reflection/Application

- How would *you* answer the questions “What is man?” and “What is mankind’s significance (meaning, importance)?” What is the *basis* for your answers? Compare your answers to the Bible’s answers. Are you truly satisfied with your answers? Why or why not?
- Christian, do you *daily* consider your purpose and role as God’s image-bearer? What changes are needed in *your* life to better reflect God in a world that desperately needs to know Him?
- ❑ Does it seem like something has gone wrong with man? It has! To be continued in Lesson 3.

<sup>6</sup> ‘heavenly beings’ (*’elohim*). The precise meaning of *’elohim* in this context is uncertain. Thus there are different translations – ‘heavenly beings’ (*NIV84, ESV*); ‘God’ (*NASB*); ‘angels’ (*NIV, NKJV; Septuagint; Hebrews 2:7*). Whatever the case, it is a high position!

<sup>7</sup> ‘glory’ (*kabod*) is most often used to describe the glory of God, but because of man’s relationship to the Creator, and his/her role assigned by God, humans may share in God’s glory.

<sup>8</sup> The ‘image of God’ is commonly described as the reflection of God’s communicable attributes (those qualities of God for which at least a partial counterpart can be found in his human creations). This includes spiritual life; moral consciousness; ability to think abstractly, appreciate beauty; creativity; capacity to relate to God and other humans, and to represent God. In some contexts (including *Genesis* 1:26 and *Psalms* 8), the emphasis is man’s responsibility to exercise dominion over the earth, as God’s vice-regents. As God’s image-bearers, humans are to make known what God is like. Human beings are special, and given a status and role superior to all other visible creation. The biblical concept of man is perfectly consistent with man’s propensity for knowledge, discovery, invention, progress, development, beauty, art, etc.

<sup>9</sup> To reflect God, we need to learn what He is like, and follow His instructions. We need a relationship with Him, in which He can teach us and change us. We need God-centered lives instead of self-centered lives. Practical actions include Bible study, prayer, fellowship, service, and dedication to live according to His will in all of our activities. Of course, the first step is to be united with Christ, ‘the image of the invisible God’ (*Colossians* 1:15), through faith.

<sup>10</sup> We must remember that God is still in charge. He owns the earth! Human authority is derived from the authority of God, so we are directly responsible to Him. We are caretakers of God’s earth, which means we must not abuse it.