

What Is Man That You Mindful Of Him?

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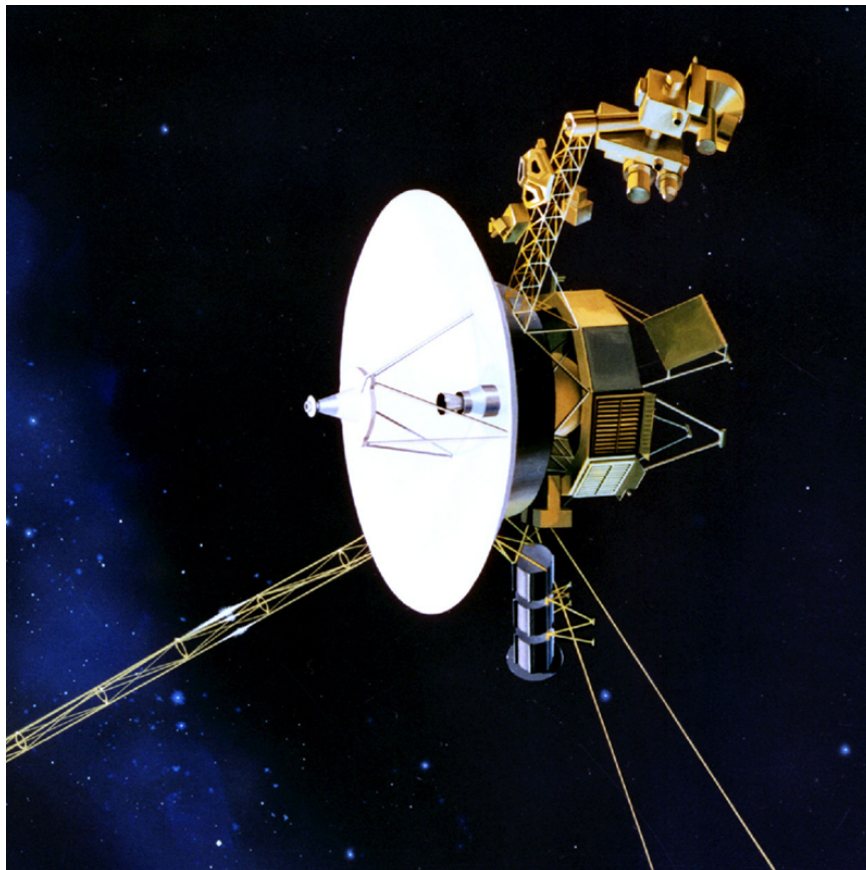
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Space exploration was in the news in August 2023 and it prompted this sermonette based on Psalm 8.

Space exploration was in the news in August 2023. First the Russian Luna 25 crashed into the Moon and then the Indian spacecraft successfully landed near the Moon's south pole.

Over that last couple of months the spacecraft Voyager 1 was in the news a few times. The scientists had accidentally sent it an incorrect alignment instruction that resulted in the space craft's high gain parabolic dish antenna pointing 2 degrees away from earth and effectively severing communications.

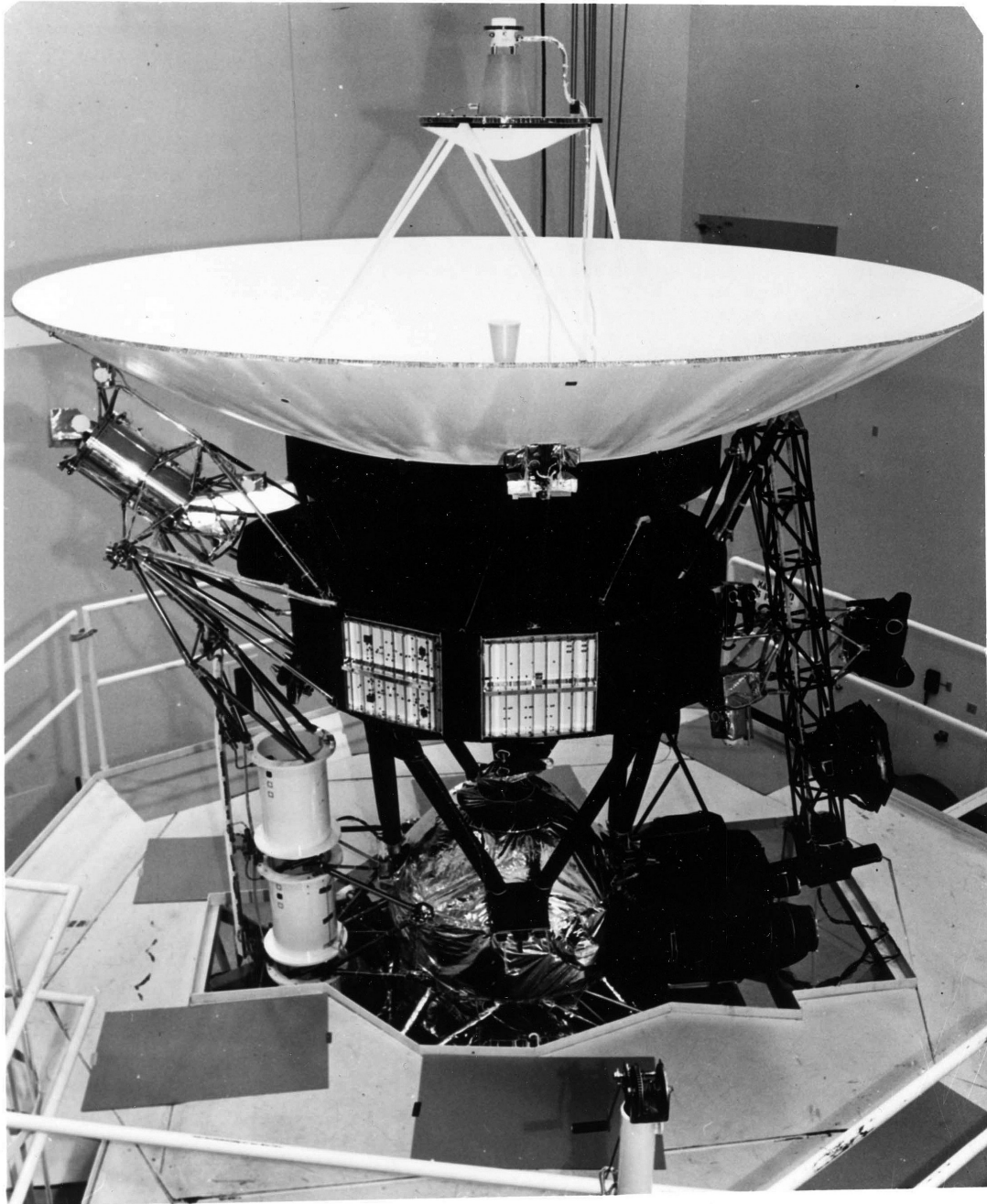
They managed to resolve the problem. Using the very large and powerful deep space communication dish antenna in Australia they sent the correct codes to the Voyager 1 space craft multiple times in the hope that it would still receive them and make the correction. The only problem was that it currently takes over 22 hours for the radio signals to go from earth to Voyager 1 and another 22 plus hours for the spacecraft's response to be received back on Earth. But it worked, and communication was restored. So what is Voyager 1, where is it and what has that got to do with God's Word? Today I want to tie Voyager 1's mission in with what King David wrote in the Psalms and put some perspective on the insignificance of humanity and the stupidity of the problems we create for ourselves.



Artist's impression of a Voyager spacecraft in space (NASA)

The Jet Propulsion Lab in California had a mission to study planets in our solar system. When a young PhD student discovered that the planets Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune would soon align in their movement around the sun in such a way that it was possible for a spacecraft to pass close to all of them they decided to design a mission to do just that. Calculations showed that this alignment only occurs every 176 years, so there was some urgency to do this.

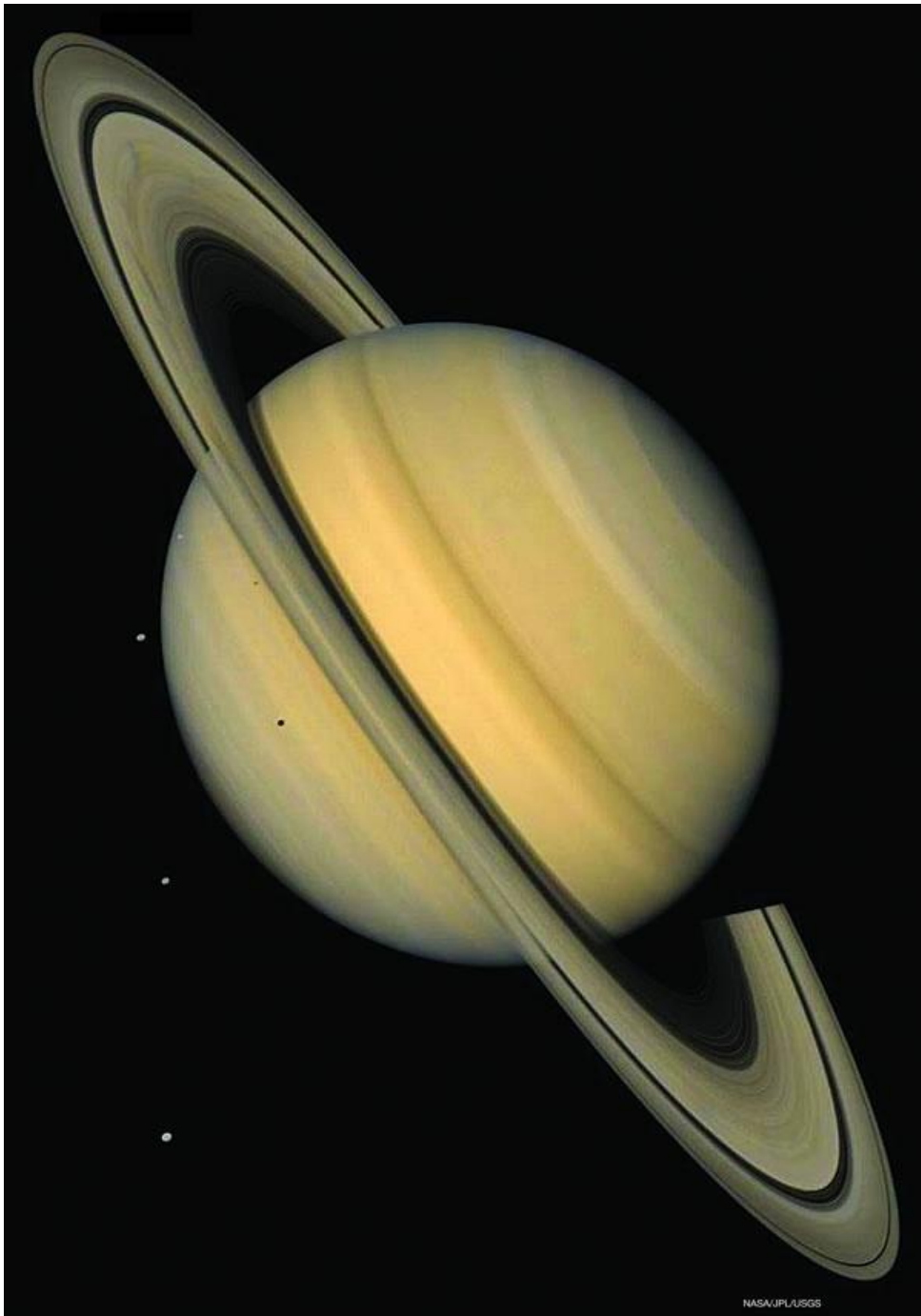
Two Voyager spacecraft were assembled, along with partially assembled test designs. I was just 22 years old when these spacecraft were launched in 1977. That's a long time ago in human terms!



Voyager spacecraft undergoing vibration testing (NASA)

The Voyager spacecraft were state of the art in 1977. They were powered by a plutonium heat source and thermocouples giving 470 watts of continuous energy that would last for many years. They had heaps of sensor to detect all sorts of things from magnetic fields to solar wind, and they were fitted with the best electronic cameras that could be built at the time.

The amazing thing is that the Voyager 1 and 2 spacecraft have been going strong for about 46 years (at time of writing in 2023). It would be nice if our home appliances lasted that long. The Voyager spacecraft were propelled out of Earth orbit by rocket engines, but it was the gravitational pull of Jupiter that sped them up and made it possible for them to slingshot close to Jupiter and then on to Saturn.



Actual picture taken by Voyager 2 as it approached Saturn in 1981 (NASA)

The mission was so successful that it was decided to manoeuvre Voyager 2 so that it would be propelled on to Uranus and Neptune. Both Voyager 1 and 2 have exited the solar system where the Sun's magnetic field and solar wind cease and Voyager 1 is now 24 billion kilometres from earth and travelling at 61,500 kilometres per hour. That's more than 17km/s.



Voyager 1 took this image just after it passed by Saturn. Note that the image show Saturn casting a shadow of the Sun's rays over it's rings, something impossible to see from Earth (NASA)

These journeys and images taken by the Voyagers were amazing, but I want to go back 33 years to February 1990. The Voyager 1 spacecraft had accelerated around Saturn and one of it's moons and proceeded to move in a direction heading above the plain of the planets. By 1990 it was 6 billion kilometres from Earth and all the planets from Neptune to the Sun were stretched out before it. The spacecraft had no further need for its cameras, so before turning them off permanently to save power, it was decided to take a series of shots with it's long distance camera to form a family portrait of our Solar System.



Image of Earth from 6 billion kilometres away, a tiny dot halfway down the image in a streak caused by the reflection of Sunlight off parts of the Voyager 1 spacecraft (NASA, from Earth Poster)

The small blue dot was all that was visible of Earth from past Neptune, 6 billion kilometres away. Earth is just a spec of rock, not even visible from the edge of our solar system and beyond where the Voyager spacecraft are today. We are just a spec of dust on this barely visible rock.

Psalms 8V3 When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

V4 What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

V5 For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

V6 Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:

V7 All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;

V8 The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

V9 O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

We are as dust on a spec of rock in the vastness of God's creation. How puny are our goings on. Yet as King David marvelled, God the Father has us in mind. Not only does He have us in mind, He sent His Son to visit us, to become one of us. To be made lower than the angels, to be made human and subject to death, but to also be raised up and crowned with Glory and Honour. God gave His Son, Jesus Christ, to have dominion over all creation.

While our Earth appears as a tiny blue dot from just 6 billion kilometres away, from the rest of the universe it is invisible, but not to God. He is intently interested in what is going on here.

Matthew 10V29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

V30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

V31 Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

Christ noted that while sparrows are not worth much, the Father knows when even one dies. But we, as human beings are worth more than sparrows, so God know even the hairs on our head, even if we lose a few or a lot like me.

God is intently interested in humanity.

Hebrews 2V1 Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

V2 For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward;

V3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;

V4 God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will?

V5 For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.

V6 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?

V7 Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands:

V8 Thou hast 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.

V9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

V10 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.

V11 For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,

V12 Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.

V13 And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me.

How great is God. His plan of salvation doesn't depend on size or visibility, but rather on His love of all humanity. He is the beginning and the end. He will bring all things to fruition.