

JOB

Chapter 28

Job Continues: Where Is Wisdom?

“Surely there is a mine for silver, and a place for gold that they refine. 2 Iron is taken out of the earth, and copper is smelted from the ore. 3 Man puts an end to darkness and searches out to the farthest limit the ore in gloom and deep darkness. 4 He opens shafts in a valley away from where anyone lives; they are forgotten by travelers; they hang in the air, far away from mankind; they swing to and fro. 5 As for the earth, out of it comes bread, but underneath it is turned up as by fire. 6 Its stones are the place of sapphires, and it has dust of gold. 7 “That path no bird of prey knows, and the falcon's eye has not seen it. 8 The proud beasts have not trodden it; the lion has not passed over it. 9 “Man puts his hand to the flinty rock and overturns mountains by the roots. 10 He cuts out channels in the rocks, and his eye sees every precious thing. 11 He dams up the streams so that they do not trickle, and the thing that is hidden he brings out to light. 12 “But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? 13 Man does not know its worth, and it is not found in the land of the living. 14 The deep says, ‘It is not in me,’ and the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’ 15 It cannot be bought for gold, and silver cannot be weighed as its price. 16 It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, in precious onyx or sapphire. 17 Gold and glass cannot equal it, nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold. 18 No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal; the price of wisdom is above pearls. 19 The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it, nor can it be valued in pure gold. 20 “From where, then, does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? 21 It is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the air. 22 Abaddon and Death say, ‘We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.’ 23 “God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. 24 For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. 25 When he gave to the wind its weight and apportioned the waters by measure, 26 when he made a decree for the rain and a way for the lightning of the thunder, 27 then he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out. 28 And he said to man, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.’”

28:1–28 Job’s friends’ application of traditional wisdom to human suffering has been even more unsatisfactory than Job’s untraditional response. Both attempts to penetrate the mystery have failed, and the dialogue has come to an unsatisfactory conclusion. Therefore Job, or perhaps the unknown author of the book, inserts a striking wisdom poem that answers the question, “Where can wisdom be found?” (v. 12; see v. 20). The poem consists of three parts: (1) precious stones and metals are found in the deepest mines (vv. 1–11); (2) wisdom is not found in mines, nor can it be bought with precious stones or metals (vv. 12–19); (3) wisdom is found only in God and in the fear of him (vv. 20–28). The chapter, then, anticipates the theme of God’s speeches (38:1–42:6): God alone is the answer to the mystery that Job and his friends have sought to fathom. (CSB)

Job makes another declaration of faith of similar importance to that in ch 19. (TLSB)

28:1–11 A fascinating, lyrical description of ancient mining techniques. (CSB)

Where did Job get all this information? While we cannot answer that question decisively, we are told in the opening verse of this book that Job was “the greatest man among all the people of the East” (1:3). We can assume that he was not only very wealthy but also well informed. As a big

operator he must have had some knowledge of the mining craft, precious metals, and gems. From archaeology, history, and ancient literature we learn that mining was an ancient occupation. Many centuries before the time of Job the Egyptians engaged in mining. From earliest times they worked the Sinai peninsula as a mining district. There were gold mines in Nubia, the name of which mean “gold country” in Egyptian. (PBC)

28:2 *Iron*. Mining was already an established trade in Job’s day and included ore collection by hand, smelting, and the casting of metal objects. Prosperous mines were in Egypt, Edom, Syria, and the Arabian Peninsula, among other places. (TLSB)

28:3 *puts an end to arkness*. By using an artificial source of light, such as a torch or lamp. (CSB)

While this sounds modern, it is true that also in ancient times the miners had to go beneath the ground to dig out the ore. They must have had some type of lamps or torches. (PBC)

28:4 *away from where anyone lives*. Ancient miners would travel far from inhabited areas in their quest for precious ore. (TLSB)

swing to and fro. Mining, then as now, is difficult and dangerous work. Men will hazard everything to dig the earth’s treasures. (CSB)

Miners—usually slaves—would be lowered by ropes into vertical mine shafts, where they would swing precariously back and forth as they attempted to dig ore from the walls of the shaft. (TLSB)

28:5 *turned up as by fire*. Miners would sometimes build a large fire near the wall of the tunnel, heating up the water in the rocks to make them crack open. (TLSB)

28:6 *sapphires*. A footnote suggests “lapis lazuli,” an opaque blue gemstone that was found in the ancient Near East. Some scholars favor that translation since there is some question whether or not the stone we know as sapphire was found there. (PBC)

28:7 *falcon’s eye*. Despite notoriously good vision, falcons cannot see the paths people dig deep beneath the earth. (TLSB)

28:8 *lion*. Considered the most courageous of beasts. (TLSB)

28:9–11 Unlike the beasts mentioned in vv 7–8, human ingenuity has enabled people to explore the depths of the earth, uncovering amazing treasures that no one could ever dream of finding. But for all their great successes, people cannot find wisdom (v 12). (TLSB)

28:9 *mountains by the roots*. A poetic expression emphasizing great depth (cf. Jnh 2:6). (CSB)

28:10 *channels in the rocks*. An eighth-century B.C. inscription found at Jerusalem’s Pool of Siloam testifies to the sophistication of ancient tunneling technology. (CSB)

Same word is used for the Nile River Delta and refers to the network of shafts that miners dig through the earth. (TLSB)

28:11 *streams*. Springs deep within the earth are a source for aboveground streams and rivers. (TLSB)

hidden he brings out to light – An alternate reading is: “He dams up the sources of the rivers.” Kretzmann briefly explains those words: stopping the dripping or the seam of the water which threaten to fill up the pits and galleries of the mines. The skill and achievements of mankind are truly remarkable. And yet the discovery of true wisdom is far beyond human intelligence and skill. (PBC)

28:12 The questions, repeated almost verbatim in v. 20, are answered in v. 28. (CSB)

wisdom. Knowledge and understanding that is not available through exploration or observation, but given only by God. Cf vv 20–28; Is 11:2; 1Co 1:18–25. (TLSB)

28:16 *gold of Ophir.* It is interesting to note that the word “gold” is mentioned five times in these five verses (15-19). It is significant that in those five occurrence Job used four different Hebrew words for “gold.” Each word describes the gold from a particular viewpoint. The “gold of Ophir” is mentioned several times in the OT. Although the location of Ophir cannot be precisely identified, it was famous for its gold. (PBC)

28:17 *glass.* Testimony to ingenuity and power of human invention, glass was highly valued in the ancient world. Egypt and Phoenicia were both famous for glassware. (TLSB)

28:18 *the price of wisdom is above pearls.* Cf. the value of a “wife of noble character” (Pr 31:10), who fears the Lord (Pr 31:30) and is therefore wise (see v. 28). (CSB)

Job has listed some of the most precious metals and gems. Yet none of them, not even all of them together, are of sufficient value to acquire the true wisdom of which he is speaking. (PBC)

28:19 *Ethiopia.* The upper Nile region, south of Egypt. (CSB)

Hbr *kush*; the Upper Nile region of East Africa, named after Noah’s grandson (Gn 10:6). (TLSB)

28:20 *From where, then, does wisdom come?* After arraying all of the world’s riches (vv 15–19) and all the hard work dedicated to finding them (vv 1–11), Job declares wisdom to be greater and more elusive than all riches. (TLSB)

28:21 *concealed from the birds.* As are precious stones and metals (see v. 7). (CSB)

If the sharp-eyed birds of the air cannot see the hidden elements beneath the earth, how much more is wisdom hidden from their view! (TLSB)

28:22 *Abaddon and Death say.* Personification. (TLSB)

Delizsch remarks in his commentary: “No creature, whether in the realm of the living or the dead, can help us get wisdom.” (PBC)

28:23 *it.* Wisdom (v 20), which is known and given only by God. (TLSB)

28:25–27 Wisdom has been with God from the time of creation itself (see Pr 8:22–31). (CSB)

28:25 *its weight.* Describing the wind’s ability to bend trees and fill the sails of ships. (TLSB)

28:27 *He saw it.* God does not discover wisdom as though He previously did not know where to find it. Rather, Job juxtaposes the keenest vision of the great birds (vv 7, 21) with God’s all-seeing eye. Cf 2Ch 16:9; Pr 15:3. Wisdom is virtually given a “bodily” form: not only was wisdom present at creation (v 25), but God saw it (as if wisdom were visible) and He established it (i.e., gave it a firm position). Some scholars compare v 27 to Pr 8:22–31, where wisdom again is described in substantive, personified terms. (TLSB)

declared. Hbr *saphar*, “count,” “proclaim.” Word is also used to form “scroll,” on which reports were written. The Lord prepares for humankind His report on wisdom, delivered in v 28. (TLSB)

28:28 *fear of the Lord ... shun evil.* See the description of Job’s character in 1:1, 8; 2:3. (CSB)

God reveals that which cannot be discovered by any human effort. Wisdom is not merely scientific knowledge or technological ability. cf Ps 111:10; Pr 9:10; Is 11:2. *Lord.* Hbr *’adonai*, “master,” commonly used of God, but occurs only here in Jb. (TLSB)

that is wisdom. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps 111:10; Pr 9:10; see Pr 1:7). (CSB)

Ch 28 People cannot find wisdom by their own reason or strength. God alone can give it through His declaration—His Word. St Paul calls Christ Jesus “our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1Co 1:30). Christ, our Wisdom, was revealed to us in the manner described by Job here: God the Father has revealed Him to us in His powerful declaration (v 27), the Scriptures, so that we may “fear” Him. • All-knowing Lord, grant me wisdom through Your Son, my Savior and the only source of true wisdom. Amen. (TLSB)