



## Job - Chapter Twenty Eight

### II Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God (continues)

#### II.c Job 26:1-31:40 - Job: the Power of God, Place of Wisdom, and Path of Integrity (continues)

#### Summary of Chapter Twenty Eight

In a magnificent poem that plays on the theme of the dialogues regarding what is hidden and what is revealed, Job reflects on the value, mystery and place of wisdom. The poem is structured around a question that is repeated with slight variation: <<*But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?*>> (v.12 and v.20).

Although man has shown great skill in mining the earth for its hidden and valuable resources (vv.1-11), where is he to look for wisdom, which is beyond measure in its value and outside of the sphere of mere discovery (vv.12-22)? God is the one who knows its place and by whom wisdom is both given and governed (vv.23-28). Interpreters have questioned whether Chapter 28 is actually Job's speech, since it might appear to dampen the weight of God's response in Chapters 38-41. However, even though the poem appears to be self-contained, the description of wisdom in the chapter is consistent with the grounds for Job's lament. It represents what will be shown to be true of him in the end: Job is not reproved because he has promoted folly (unlike his friends) but rather because the inferences he has drawn from wisdom have not properly reflected what he is able to know in light of what he believes to be true.

#### II.c.iii Job 28:1-28 - Interlude: Where Wisdom Is Found

This chapter and its place in the Book of Job is the source of some controversy. Most scholars find it impossible to believe that Job ever recited this poem. They find it quite incompatible with what comes before and after. Yet the poem also seems too calm, too thoughtful and too reflective to be one of Job's friends. Some

scholars think that the poem does not belong to the Book of Job at all and that some later scribe inserted it in the book.

There are two good solutions. The better solution is to simply say that this is indeed Job's work. Why should it surprise the reader if Job, having exhausted all other avenues of protest and inquiry, should all at once slip quietly into a more reflective mood and begin meditating on the source of wisdom? Why should Job not grow strangely becalmed here for a time and contemplate his problems from a more traditional perspective? The other solution is to say that this chapter is the inserted observation of the anonymous author of the Book of Job. Andersen describes this perspective: "Because we think that Job is a story, we find it appropriate that this interlude is spoken by the story-teller. It sums up the case as it stands at this point. It emphasises the failure of the human mind to arrive at the hidden wisdom, and so, far from interfering with the Lord's speeches, it lays the foundation for them by showing their necessity."

Adam Clarke comments, "This chapter is the oldest and finest piece of natural history in the world, and gives us very important information on several curious subjects, and could we ascertain the precise meaning of all the original words, we might, most probably, find out allusions to several useful arts which we are apt to think are of modern, or comparatively modern, invention."

### Introduction to Job 28:1-11

The structure of the Hebrew phrases brings the earth (v.5) and its valuable treasures into focus in this section. Although it takes considerable effort (indicated by the multifaceted references to darkness in v.3, far away locations in v.4, and rock in vv.9-10), human industry has developed ways to mine the earth for its precious elements such as silver, gold, iron, copper, sapphires, or cultivate it for food. In these realms, whatever is hidden is brought out to light (v.11).

- 1 'Surely there is a mine for silver,  
and a place for gold to be refined.
- 2 Iron is taken out of the earth,  
and copper is smelted from ore.
- 3 Miners put an end to darkness,  
and search out to the farthest bound  
the ore in gloom and deep darkness.
- 4 They open shafts in a valley away from human habitation;  
they are forgotten by travellers,  
they sway suspended, remote from people.

## Job 28:1-4

Surely there is a mine for silver. Job considered the way men search for precious and useful metals such as silver, gold, iron, and copper.

A place for gold to be refined. This and similar phrases are often found in Scripture and can be used to describe how humans are prepared for a righteous life before God: <<*For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried*>> (Psalm 66:10), <<*Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: I will now refine and test them, for what else can I do with my sinful people?*>> (Jeremiah 9:7), <<*Some of the wise shall fall, so that they may be refined, purified, and cleansed, until the time of the end, for there is still an interval until the time appointed*>> (Daniel 11:35), <<*And I will put this third into the fire, refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The Lord is our God'*>> (Zechariah 13:9), and: <<*he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness*>> (Malachi 3:3)

Search out to the farthest bound. Job explained how men diligently sought after these precious and useful metals. They light up dark places, that is: miners put an end to darkness, they search every recess, they dig to break open shafts away from human habitation, and even personally endanger themselves, i.e. they sway suspended, remote from people.

Job has used the phrase deep darkness in various images throughout the dialogue with his friends; refer also to Job 3:5, 10:22, 12:22, 16:16, and 24:17. Here the phrase describes the success of human industry. As the remainder of the chapter makes clear, Job uses the description to question, if not implicitly rebuke, his friends for presuming they have been similarly successful either in discovering wisdom's place in the world or discerning its presence or absence in the heart of another.

Mining practices in the ancient Near East have been neither fully discovered nor studied enough to determine precisely what is being pictured in this verse. The word translated shafts is typically used to refer to the gully of an intermittent stream, just as the word translated channels in v.10 is typically used to refer to either a river or as the proper name 'the Nile'. Archæologists have discovered horizontal mining shafts, some examples of which are also intersected by vertical shafts that were likely used to vent mining operations. Whether it is these vertical shafts that hang in the air or not, the purpose of the images is clear: the threefold description of the remote location of the mine (away from where anyone lives, forgotten by travellers, and away from mankind) further indicates the difficulty and effort involved in humanity's pursuit of precious materials.

- 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 its dust contains gold.
- 7 'That path no bird of prey knows,  
and the falcon's eye has not seen it.
- 8 The proud wild animals have not trodden it;  
the lion has not passed over it.
- 9 'They put their hand to the flinty rock,  
and overturn mountains by the roots.
- 10 They cut out channels in the rocks,  
and their eyes see every precious thing.
- 11 The sources of the rivers they probe;  
hidden things they bring to light.

#### Job 28:5-11

As for the earth, out of it comes bread; its stones are the place of sapphires. Job continued to paint the picture of the earth as treasure house of value and riches for those who are willing to work hard and search diligently for these riches. Yet that treasure was provided by God from the beginning: <<*God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food'*>> (Genesis 1:29).

Neither the birds of the sky (represented by the falcon's eye) nor the animals of the earth (represented by the lion) have any knowledge of endeavours like mining. It is a uniquely human accomplishment and application of skill.

They put their hand to the flinty rock, and overturn mountains by the roots. They cut out channels in the rocks, the sources of the rivers they probe. Job here explained how hard men are willing to work to gain the treasure and wealth that is hidden in the earth.

Job's description of human industry in vv.1-11 is summed up well in the second line of v.11: hidden things they bring to light. Yet it is God who is the true source of revelation: <<*You have heard; now see all this; and will you not declare it? From this time forward I make you hear new things, hidden things that you have not known*>> (Isaiah 48:6), and: <<*Call to me and I will answer you, and*

*will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known*>> (Jeremiah 33:3).

### Introduction to Job 28:12-20

The questions of v.12 and v.20 frame this section, which describes the value of wisdom and the place of understanding as unknown to mankind. The fact that they are unknown is emphasised by the number of negative statements in vv.13-19: e.g. not know, not found, it is not in me, it is not with me, cannot be bought, weighed, valued, cannot equal it, nor can it be exchanged, nor can it be valued.

- 12 'But where shall wisdom be found?  
And where is the place of understanding?
- 13 Mortals do not know the way to it,  
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."

### Job 28:12-14

But where shall wisdom be found? Job here made the point he had built up to in the previous verses. Men search hard and are willing to endure danger for the sake of the riches of this earth; but all of that is easy compared to the search for wisdom: <<*That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?*>> (Ecclesiastes 7:24).

Mortals do not know the way to it. The mysteries of wisdom are unfathomable to humans unless revealed by God as were the treasures of the Kingdom of God until revealed by Jesus: <<*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it*>> (Matthew 13:44-46).

The deep says, "It is not in me." Job spoke here of how rare wisdom is, making it all the more valuable among men. Indeed, <<*it cannot be bought for gold*>> (v.15), and is therefore worth more than all of those precious metals. The logic of saying in one breath, "It is not there, but, even if it were, you could not buy it," is often found in the Bible.

- 15 It cannot be bought for gold,  
and silver cannot be weighed out 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 chrysolite of Ethiopia cannot compare with it,  
nor can it be valued in pure gold.
- 20 ‘Where then does wisdom come from?  
And where is the place of understanding?’

### Job 28:15-20

These verses contain multiple references to gold and to other precious stones such as blue sapphire (lapis lazuli), black or white onyx, opaque shiny crystal, bright coral, and yellow chrysolite (topaz). All are expensive and difficult to obtain, yet none are comparable to the value of wisdom.

Where then does wisdom come from? Job explained how hard it was to find wisdom and then asked the logical question, knowing that it comes from the Lord: <<*His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?*>> (Job 9:4 NIV). Job knew that he needed this precious wisdom and he certainly knew that his friends needed it as well. Charles Spurgeon comments, “He seems to say that, though men should explore the deep places of the earth with all the diligence of miners seeking gold and silver, though they should exert all their mental force, as miners use all their muscular vigour, and though they should employ all the machinery within their reach, as men do who pierce through the rocks in search of precious treasure yet it is not within the range of human labour and skill to attain unto wisdom. That can only be found by another and a higher method; it must come to us by revelation from God, for we cannot find it by our own efforts.”

- 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 rumour of it with our ears.”

## Job 28:21-22

In contrast to the earlier description about ‘the paths’ of mining and industry in vv.7-8, the place of wisdom is hidden from the eyes of all living creatures on the earth, including humans, as well as from the birds of the air.

The reference to Abaddon and Death here is likely playing off Job’s earlier description of them as a realm that is also hidden from human observation; refer to Job 26:5-6. These two names may be simple personifications, or they may use ideas from pagan myths, e.g. with Death, Hebrew *mawet*, corresponding to the Canaanite deity Mot, to show that these other powers cannot find wisdom.

## Introduction to Job 28:23-28

The closing section of the chapter makes it clear that only God understands and knows wisdom and how it is acquired (v.23). He is the only one before whom both the earth and the heavens (v.24) are fully revealed because he is the one who created them (vv.25-27). Wisdom is thus given by God for it came through his speaking, and is defined in relation to him (v.28): the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom (refer to Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10), and to depart from evil is understanding (Proverbs 3:7 and 16:6). Job may be rebuking his friends for their treatment of him, implying that they have not acted in a way consistent with the fear of the Lord, i.e. the way that the book characterises Job himself in Job 1:1.

- 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 out the waters by measure;
- 26 when he made a decree for the rain,  
and a way for the thunderbolt;
- 27 then he saw it and declared it;  
he established it, and searched it out.
- 28 And he said to humankind,  
“Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;  
and to depart from evil is understanding.”

### Job 28:23-28

God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. Job knew the answer to his own question; he knew that God understood wisdom and its source.

When he gave to the wind its weight, and apportioned out the waters by measure; he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the thunderbolt. The same God who masters the natural world has the riches of wisdom at his disposal. He has demonstrated his own wisdom and power through the design of the natural world.

Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding. Job concluded this great speech by coming back to the touchstone of revelation. Since true wisdom comes from God, it is found by being in a right relationship with him, i.e. the fear of the Lord, and it is shown by a life that does depart from evil. The psalmist wrote: <<*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practise it have a good understanding. His praise endures for ever*>> (Psalm 111:10).