

WISDOM GAINED

Job 28:12-28

The epic poem we call the Book of Job is thought to be the oldest example of Hebraic writings found in the Bible. It is generally classified as “wisdom literature” along with the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs (Song of Solomon). There are two other works found in the Apocrypha named the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach which is shortened simply to Sirach.) Some sources shorten this list of seven to include only Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. The common themes we find are that these writings focus on basic practical questions about God, humanity, creation, and the nature of evil and suffering. In other words, these writings speak to questions related to our world view.

The word “wisdom” itself is mentioned twenty-three times in the KJV of Job. Sometimes it is used by Job’s friends, sometimes by Job and finally toward the end of the account it is used by God in His replies to Job. In some of the passages, Job mocks his friends for thinking that they really understood what and why things were happening to Job. Some of the comments regarding wisdom in Job sound very similar to verses from Proverbs. This similarity may be an indication that Solomon was familiar with this poem especially the comparisons of the value of wisdom verses that of material wealth.

In Chapter 28 Job pointed out that both wealth and Godly wisdom can be elusive and it may take some effort to discover both. It seemed to Job that his three friends had found earthly wisdom and on that basis they had erroneously concluded that Job’s situation was a result of sins in his life. What was missing in their analysis was a realization that there is more to life than what can be seen on the surface. If all the physical wealth we had was limited to what we can find on the surface of the earth, then we would be extremely limited in what could be accomplished in the physical realm. In order to access the hidden wealth of this planet, man discovered that a lot of effort and innovation had to be expended to find it and extract it.

Job started out with the abilities that people had developed to find physical items that were considered to be very valuable. The description he gave is clear evidence that deep-shaft mining was known and used to find precious metals and gems. When we consider the lack of mechanical equipment and the stage of technology development during this time, we should be amazed that such activity was going on.

Job gave credit where credit was due in that people could and did go to such great efforts and also were willing to expose themselves to such dangers to acquire things of physical value. This was a significant achievement and it makes you wonder just how smart these people were to make observations and to come to a conclusion that iron could be extracted from ore that looked very much like dirt or dust.

Of course, if we extend such observations from that time until now and consider all the things that have been discovered and developed and what people can do to find and use the physical resource of the earth, then what man has accomplished is very impressive. People have gone to the deepest trenches in the oceans and climbed to the highest mountain tops on earth and walked on the moon. Those exploring for oil and gas drill holes several miles deep to extract the valuable fuel from the depths of the earth.

These achievements show the vast capability of man’s knowledge and his ability to apply it to do useful things. People of Job’s time could not even imagine the depth of knowledge that has come about in understanding such things as DNA and RNA and discovering the existence of such

things as viruses and germs and bacteria.

It is truly remarkable; however, such human wisdom, knowledge, and understanding are not able to discover anything outside of the physical realm and see the hidden treasures that are part of the spiritual realm. This inability of man (by his own efforts) has led many to conclude that the spiritual realm simply does not exist. This conclusion is the epitome of prideful arrogance that says “if I can’t see it, then it doesn’t exist.”

Godly wisdom cannot be discovered by exclusive human endeavor. In other words, you cannot mine wisdom as you can mine gold and silver.

Valued – 28:12-19

¹²“But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?” ¹³“Man does not know its value, Nor is it 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“Pure gold cannot be given in exchange for it, Nor can silver be weighed as its price. ¹⁶“It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, In precious onyx, or sapphire. ¹⁷“Gold or glass cannot equal it, Nor can it be exchanged for articles of fine gold. ¹⁸“Coral and crystal are not to be mentioned; And the acquisition of wisdom is above that of pearls. ¹⁹“The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it, Nor can it be valued in pure gold. Job 28:12–19 (NASB95)

There are two issues or concerns regarding wisdom that are raised in these verses. The first has to do with “where” can wisdom be found. The second is related to the “worth” or value of wisdom.

Not everyone is actually searching for wisdom because they do not realize its value. Those who do search will typically read and contemplate what other people have written. Those who had written about their ideas of how things work together across the physical and spiritual realms are labeled “philosophers.” The earliest philosophers essentially observed behaviors and the consequent results and tried to make sense of what they saw in their limited culture. These observations were influenced by whatever world view they had and what they observed and interpreted helped to modify their world view. This is somewhat like the person who was responsible for blowing the loud whistle at noon at the local factory calling the local radio station five minutes before noon to ask “what time is it” only to find out that the radio station set its clocks by the noon whistle. What is missing from most of the wisdom of the world is absolute truth which Job observed is not found “in the land of the living” which is a euphemism for “this physical world” and particularly is a reference to “humanity.”

I’m not sure that we should try to make a distinction between “wisdom” and “understanding” that we see in verse 12. This may be nothing more than parallelism that is used in Hebrew poetry that makes a statement or asks a question in two similar ways. However, there is certainly a distinction to be made between knowledge and wisdom. A quote from Charles Spurgeon is useful in this regard. “Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as the knowing fool. But to know (properly understand) how to use knowledge is to have wisdom.” We could logically substitute the word “understand” for “know” in the last sentence of that quote and better see the connection among knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Wisdom is evidenced when we apply appropriately understood revealed truths to everyday living experiences.

Regarding the worth of wisdom, we sense a dilemma in that we just don’t know how to put a value on it in an absolute sense although we know it is worth more than anything in the physical realm. We might even say that its value is incomparable (cannot be compared or measured by) to physical things.

Hidden – 28:20-22

²⁰“Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of understanding? ²¹“Thus it is hidden from the eyes of all living And concealed from the birds of the sky. ²²“Abaddon and Death say, ‘With our ears we have heard a report of it.’ Job 28:20-22 (NASB95)

In verse 20 we see the question of verse 12 repeated in a slightly different way. The first question was with regard to the location and the second was with regard to the source of wisdom. In the last section we concluded that wisdom cannot be found in the physical realm, so we might conclude that it can be found only in the spiritual realm. That fact explains why (see verse 21) that mankind that possesses only physical life cannot see it because the spiritual realm cannot be comprehended by that which is carnal or totally physically based. In a bit of poetic hyperbole, we are told that having the best physical sight known (such as that possessed by an eagle) is not adequate. Going beyond that, even some entities in the spiritual realm (death and destruction) cannot grasp Godly wisdom even though these may be aware that it exists. This is the implication of verse 22. The answer is finally revealed in the next verse and we find that God understands the origin of wisdom and knows where wisdom resides. This conclusion is logical since God knows and sees all things physical and spiritual.

Found – 28:23-27

²³“God understands its way, And He knows its place. ²⁴“For He looks to the ends of the earth And sees everything under the heavens. ²⁵“When He imparted weight to the wind And meted out the waters by measure, ²⁶ When He set a limit for the rain And a course for the thunderbolt, ²⁷ Then He saw it and declared it; He established it and also searched it out. Job 28:20-27 (NASB95)

It was by or through wisdom that God created everything. We see a reference to some of the parts of creation in the mention of the wind and its force, the nature of water and how it was designed to behave in a beneficial way to allow life on the earth, and even the interaction of static electricity in the water cycle of evaporation and rain.

In verse 27 Job tells us that God recognized the value of wisdom and that the evidence of God using wisdom is seen in all that has been created. Wisdom was incorporated (established) throughout all God has done and this was done because the results (works) of wisdom were examined by God and had been proven to be essential for the effective functioning of His creation.

Offered – 28:28

²⁸“And to man He said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.’ ” Job 28:28 (NASB95)

Some commentators have suggested that Job was telling his friends that it is not possible for man to know all that God knows in His unhindered access to wisdom, but we are granted access to all the wisdom we need to live our life in this world as indicated in verse 28. This access is gained by an appropriate fear (reverence) of the Lord. The benefits of this access to wisdom that God has established are enjoyed when our behavior and the path in which we walk separates us from evil.

The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom is the starting point for humanity to discover and benefit from appropriate application of the knowledge that is available. This quality or characteristic was in the description that God had of Job (1:1, 1:8, 2:3). According to Matthew Henry “*the fear of the Lord* is the spring and summary of all religion.”

We have heard that the proper fear of God is simply “reverence.” Henry noted three types of fear. One is a “slavish” fear of God, springing from hard thoughts of God, which really shows a lack of wisdom. This is the kind of fear that the slothful servant had of his master in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:24-25 and is typical of pagan religions and the ideas they have regarding

deities. His excuse for not being diligent to faithfully invest what had been entrusted to him was that he knew that the master was a “hard man” and so he was **fearful** and hid the master’s talent in the ground. The second type is a “selfish” fear of God that arises from dreadful thoughts of him, which can be a step toward having a proper relationship with God. This was the emotion that Saul had on the road to Damascus in Acts 9:5. The correct kind of fear that leads to wisdom is described by both Matthew Henry and John Gill as a “filial” (related to family) fear of God, which comes about from great and high thoughts of God, which is the essence of being properly related to God. It is not a fear that paralyzes, but one that energizes. When we have this attitude toward God, then we will be careful to depart from evil as is stated in Proverbs 16:6.

“By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.”

The conclusion that Matthew Henry came to is this: “To be truly religious is to be truly wise. As the wisdom of God appears in the institution of religion, so the wisdom of man appears in the practice and observance of it. It is understanding, for it is the best knowledge of truth; it is wisdom, for it is the best management of our affairs. Nothing more surely guides our way and gains our end than being religious.” A similar observation was made by C. H. Spurgeon: “True religion is sanctified common sense. Attention to the things of heaven does not necessitate the neglect of the affairs of earth; on the contrary, he who has learned how to transact business with God ought to be best able to do business with men.”

We have an excellent resource to which we can go that is readily available and that is the written word of God. When we do recognize the value of wisdom and discovered its location, then there are additional steps to take. Warren Wiersbe noted that Job describes how men work hard and face great danger to find material wealth. They tunnel through hard rock and risk their lives to get worldly riches. Why will men and women not put that much effort into gaining God’s wisdom? The Word of God is like a deep mine, filled with precious treasures; but the believer must put forth effort to discover its riches. It takes careful reading and study, prayer, meditation, and obedience to mine the treasures of the Word of God. The Holy Spirit of God is an absolute necessity in the process. Why are we so negligent when this great wealth lies so near at hand?

The real problem is that most people do not comprehend the value or the price of wisdom and think they can get it cheaply by listening to news in the media, reading pithy statements on social media, or taking courses in holistic health. Any thing purporting to be wisdom must be evaluated by the standards of truth found in the word of God.