

The Unprofitable Routes to Wisdom
Job 28
Part 2 of Job 25-31

Hanging between the two windows on the south wall of my office are five diverse frames. The leg of an old wooden cross separates the upper two frames, while the fifth frame hangs directly below the cross underneath the lower two frames. The upper four frames contain diplomas from institutions of higher learning proclaiming my achievements educationally. The lower frame directly below the cross contains an ordination certificate signed by the elders of my home church setting me aside as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The top four frames remind me of the academic knowledge acquired over the last forty-seven years. The bottom frame reminds me of what I am to do with that knowledge as I serve the King of kings. I am His envoy, His servant proclaiming the Gospel of Christ to the nations.

Nowhere on the wall is there a certificate from an institution of higher learning or a church that proclaims the source of any wisdom I might have acquired over the short span of years lived on this rock we call the earth. While knowledge is important, the wisdom in using that knowledge for the advancement of the Kingdom of God is more important.

Job asks about the source of wisdom in Job 28:12 and 20. He says, "But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? ... From where, then, does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding?" Throughout this chapter, Job describes man's pursuit of material wealth and compares the pursuit to that of wisdom. Exploring the unprofitable routes to wisdom, Job concludes by stating the only sure route to profitable wisdom.

The Mining Industry (Job 28:1-11)

Those of us that live in north central Wyoming are familiar with man's efforts to punch holes in the earth to release the pressure of oil and gas stored there since earth's creation. Scraping the topsoil from the earth, we dig deep craters using machinery the size of large buildings and explosives that rattle the foundations of residential homes miles and miles away. These craters may challenge the depth of near-by canyons in the mountains to the west and east in search of sub-bituminous coal. Sifting through the silt of mountain streams and caves in the surrounding hills, mining companies and rock-hounds look for gold and silver.

Mining is not a new industry dating as far back as the copper mines of 5000 BC. Job, thought to be one of the first books written in the Bible, describes the arduous mining efforts in 28:1-11.

As iron sharpens items,
so a person sharpens his friends
— Solomon

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.

Man searches for gold, silver, iron ore and copper in some of the most out of the way places on earth. If he's extremely fortunate, he will also find sapphires and other precious stones. Overturning the earth, he exposes the darkness of the depths to the light of the sun. Using his manufactured light he looks for metals that will make him a living and just maybe, make him wealthy. At some depths in the earth he will dangle from ropes in vertical shafts while looking for the horizontal veins of minerals to bring to the surface for sale and use.

You would think that extensive exploration of the depths of darkness beneath the earth's surface might reveal the source of wisdom, but that source is not to be found there. Even Job, living millennia before us understood that wisdom does not reside in the depths of the earth. No amount of overturning the upper layers of the globe will reveal the source of wisdom. There is another route to wisdom.

The Commercial Industry (28:12-19)

It is said that anything may be bought for the right price. Homes, cars, clothes, food, medicine, jewels, ivory, minerals, people, animals, sex and drugs. Anything may be purchased at the right price. Job understood the priceless worth of wisdom in 28:12-19.

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.

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- 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.

Any purchase price that man may offer will not equal the value of wisdom. Not only can man not find wisdom in the dark depths of the earth, no matter how much light he shines on the dark crevices, he cannot find wisdom in the land of the living or in the depths of the sea. The source of wisdom is not for sale in these places.

Whether we offer gold or silver, onyx stones, sapphires or topaz, crystal, coral or pearls, we cannot buy wisdom. It is priceless.

Even if we could haggle a purchase price, from whom would we purchase the precious commodity? Governments, kings, philosophers, savvy businessmen, scientists, artists of multiple stripes, theologians, professors? Where do we find the source of wisdom? The commercial industry is not able to satisfy our quest.

The Lands of the Living and the Dead (28:20-22)

While we exhaust the depths of the earth and sea, and the commercial markets, perhaps we should look among the living and the dead. Does wisdom reside in these places?

- 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."

Frustrated by our efforts to mine the depths of the hard rock of the earth and wearied by pursuing wisdom in the market place, post modern man turns to himself and his fellow human beings, and in some cases, to those that walked the earth before us, the living and the dead. We are searching for answers as the source of wisdom.

Books, movies, research journals, philosophies and education all tout that mankind, having made a mess of things, can find within himself the solution to our problems and hope to bring us into a bright new future. In the commencement address delivered at American University in Washington, D.C., on June 10, 1963, President John F. Kennedy said, "Our problems are manmade – therefore, they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man's reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable – and we believe

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they can do it again.”¹ However, whether we are postmodern, modern or pre-modern, historically and biblically, mankind continues to wander aimlessly in this life searching for meaning and truth and wisdom. Our wisdom has not led us to peace. Realizing the folly of the search among the living, many have given up their search for wisdom, not finding wisdom in any acceptable or accessible outlet.

We search for wisdom among the dead in a resurrection of the old religions of the pre-modern world. Idolatry, spiritism, satanism, astrology, reincarnation, philosophy, necromancy. Just as our search among the depths of the earth and the commercial world leaves us frustrated and destitute, so our search into the previous dead generations yields us nothing satisfactorily. We are empty handed paupers with empty heads and hearts. Where do we find wisdom? What is its ultimate source?

Wisdom Resides with God (28:23-28)

The one source that humans strenuously avoid calls to our hearts from nature, from His revealed Word and from the incarnation of His Son. His name is God, the God of the Bible. At the end of the routes explored by Job, he says of wisdom in 28:23-28,

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.”

Yes, wisdom resides with God, not being a separate entity from God. However, if we acknowledge that God is the source of all wisdom, then we would have to submit our lives to His authority, His wisdom and His control. Since the first rebellious act in Eden, mankind refuses to acknowledge that God is the abode of all wisdom. Exhausting our inner resources, the resources of the commercial community and the resources of the earth, we refuse to admit that all wisdom resides with our Creator. No matter the evidence presented before us, no matter how desperate our lives may become, no matter the turmoil we face daily, to bow our knee before God is unthinkable in the lives of many people.

Yet, the final verse of this chapter’s exhausting search for wisdom says,

¹ “Commencement Address at American University, Washington, D.C., June 10, 1963,” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/american-university-19630610>, accessed December 2, 2019.

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Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
and to turn away from evil is understanding.

Three times in the wisdom literature of the Scriptures we hear this phrase repeated: in the preface of Proverbs ([1:7](#)), at the conclusion of Ecclesiastes ([12:13](#)) and near the middle of Job ([28:28](#)).

Our legal system requires two reliable witnesses to establish a fact. Going beyond man's requirements, God presents three reliable witnesses that wisdom resides with Him. Fear God and turn away from evil. This is the beginning of wisdom. When will we start to listen to God? When will we accept the fact that He is the source of all wisdom?

In the throne room scene recorded in Revelation 4:9-11, the apostle John records these words for all eternity.

“And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

‘Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.’”

Amen and Amen.

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