

Explore the Bible: Wisdom Gained

June 8, 2021

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for June 27 focuses on Job 28:12-28.*

As a child, I kept my hard-earned money in a small green Velcro wallet. And when I say, “hard-earned,” most of my income was the result of few chores and the annual gift-giving occasions. Right after one such occasion—my birthday—my savings swelled to \$50. And then the unthinkable happened—I lost my little green Velcro wallet! I was so very sad, looking everywhere around the house. Inside that wallet was not only my financial savings, but pictures, a few special notes and my very own library card. I was devastated. I looked and looked, but couldn’t find the wallet anywhere.

Treasure hunt

When we lose something of value, we look for it. When we know that there is something worth having that we can work hard to achieve, we often set our minds to making sure this thing becomes ours. In our text this week, Job begins with a precise question: “But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?” (Job 12:12).

Here is Job’s theme for this beautiful and mysterious work of Hebrew poetry. In *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, Carol A. Newsom, calls Job 28 “one of the most exquisite poetic compositions in the entire Bible.” She goes on to say the symbolism of the precious metals and gems that are described in the poem are like the poem itself; it is beautifully crafted and full of mystery to be searched at great length.

With the theme spelled out, the poet gives us two rounds of explanation on

wisdom and how one can make this precious discovery. Verses 13-19 offer the imagery of miners and metal workers seeking precious gems, jewels and minerals of great worth.

In any quest, one must know what they are looking for in order to know when they have found it. For Job, he is considering the human pursuit of two things: *wisdom* and *understanding*. When these two words are used together, they point to the greatest form of knowledge, universal knowledge "...into the nature and meaning of the cosmos." (Newsom, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol. III*, p. 187) Something of this magnitude is beyond human comprehension. Job knows this; yet his current situation fills his life with no answers, only questions.

Looking for answers?

Not only are the answers Job is seeking not to be found in the earth, even the personified depths of the earth respond with a resounding "No!" when given opportunity to respond. John Goldingay writes in *Job for Everyone*, "[S]uperhuman effort can be rewarded by the discovery of precious metals, superhuman effort does not establish the location of insight. To make things worse, the other is that insight is actually much more valuable than the precious metal in which miners invest so much effort. You can't use it to buy insight." (p. 134) In verse 13, we see the blunt reality that this quest of wisdom and understanding will not be successful like the work of the miner or artesian.

No mortal comprehends its worth: "it cannot be found in the land of the living" (Job 12:13).

With all the money, jewels and wealth the world can muster, wisdom and understanding cannot simply be bought.

As the poet repeats the thesis in verse 20, we start to see the imagery

getting even greater, stretching out beyond the earth. Just as verse 14 gives us “the deep” and “the sea” speaking, now we have “*Abaddon*” (“Destruction” in the NIV) and “death” speaking up—and their response is not much better. The ultimate physical end of life has only heard a whisper of an answer. There must be someone who can speak with authority and insight and answer this question—the one who created this world in the first place. As the one who put every living thing in its place, who set the world into motion, God alone has the answer. While a bird can see from the sky (verse 21), God sees from even greater heights.

Fear the Lord

In verse 28, we find the golden nugget at the end of the poem—the powerful message that God has declared: “The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.”

When Job describes God in vv. 25-27, we see a God who is responsible for all creation. Newsom concludes: “God’s acts are cosmos-creating acts, and God perceives and establishes wisdom in the midst of that activity. The human actions of true piety – fearing God and turning from evil – those too are acts of creation. ...not as acts of physical creation but as acts of moral creation. One cannot possess wisdom; one can only embody it.” (*The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Vol. III*, p. 190).

Therefore, “to fear the Lord” is the mindset of one who embodies wisdom. James 1:5 reminds us this too is a gift, not something we can achieve. It is God who offers this gift and like we see throughout Scripture, God is a gracious, generous gift-giver.

The final word in Job 12:28 is the exact description of Job found in the first verse of this book. The wisdom and understanding to why the world is not the way Job wants it to be is found in the character Job already embodies. Pain and suffering can come at any time and can come to anyone, even

those who are considered righteous. This is not the answer Job wants, nor is it the one we expect. To gain wisdom and insight, we must start with God and our willingness to submit to him, following obediently, and turning from evil and seeking righteousness, just as Job had done from the beginning.

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