

**INTERLUDE**

**JOB 28**

## Man, explorer and builder

Having completed the third cycle of speeches and the third act of the drama, the author pauses to offer a magnificent hymn to inaccessible Wisdom. Though this chapter can stand on its own and make sense, there is no need to see it as a separate piece slipped into the work at this point. It makes sense where it is as part of the whole argument. It is spoken by the author, or perhaps chanted by the chorus, by way of an interlude, offering an opportunity for reflection. It prepares the audience for God's self-revelation.

It opens with a description of man's amazing ability to carry out the divine command to continue God's creative work by using his intelligence to bring order out of chaos. Amazing as this is, he will later make the point that wisdom does not lie here.

- <sup>1</sup>There is a smelter for silver,  
and a place for gold to be refined.  
<sup>2</sup>Iron is extracted from the earth,  
and copper is smelted from ore.**

Silver and gold are central to commerce. Iron and copper are central to manufacturing.

- <sup>3</sup>Man pushes back darkness,  
and explores the deepest caves, the darkest caverns.  
<sup>4</sup>He opens up shafts in a valley;  
unable to descend on foot,  
he hangs suspended, remote from where people live.  
<sup>5</sup>The land, out of which comes bread,  
is shaken by an underground fire:  
<sup>6</sup>Deposits of sapphires are in its rocks,  
and its dust contains gold.**

- <sup>7</sup>No bird of prey knows what man is up to,  
not even the falcon's eye has seen it.  
<sup>8</sup>The proud wild animals have not trodden it;  
the lion has not passed over it.**

- <sup>9</sup>Man puts his hand to the flinty rock,  
and uproots mountains.  
<sup>10</sup>He cuts tunnels into the rock,  
looking for any precious thing that catches his eye.  
<sup>11</sup>He explores the rivers to their source,  
and brings to the light whatever lies hidden there.**

<sup>12</sup>*Where shall wisdom be found?*

*And where is the place of understanding?*

Other wisdom literature (for example Proverbs 16:16) encourages us to pay whatever it costs to obtain wisdom. Nothing can compare to its value. The implication is that wisdom is accessible even if we give everything to obtain it. See Proverbs 3:13-16:

Happy are those who find wisdom, who acquire understanding,  
for her merchandise is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold.  
She is more precious than pearls, and nothing can compare with her jewels.  
Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour.

The point being made in this passage of Job is that wisdom is simply inaccessible. He will go on to state in verse 23 that it belongs to God alone.

<sup>13</sup>**Man has no idea of its price,  
it is not found in the land of the living.**

<sup>14</sup>**The Ocean says, 'It is not in me,'  
and the Sea replies, 'It is not in me either.'**

<sup>15</sup>**It cannot be obtained for gold,  
and silver cannot be weighed out to purchase it.**

<sup>16</sup>**It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,  
in precious onyx or sapphire.**

<sup>17</sup>**You cannot pay for it in gold or crystal,  
nor can it be exchanged for vases of fine gold.**

<sup>18</sup>**Neither gems nor coral counts;  
the price of wisdom is above pearls.**

<sup>19</sup>**The chrysolite of Ethiopia cannot compare with it,  
nor can it be valued in the purest gold.**

<sup>20</sup>*Where then does wisdom come from?  
And where is the place of understanding?*

<sup>21</sup>**It is hidden from the eyes of all the beasts of the field,  
and concealed from the birds of the air.**

<sup>22</sup>**The Abyss and Death say,  
'We have heard a rumour of its fame.'**

It is not to be found by the living, nor will it be found in the realm of the dead.

<sup>23</sup>**God alone knows the way to it,  
he alone knows where it is to be found.**

<sup>24</sup>**For he looks to the ends of the earth,  
and sees everything under the heavens.**

<sup>25</sup>**When he gave to the wind its weight,  
and apportioned out the waters by measure;**

<sup>26</sup>**when he made a decree for the rain,  
and a course for the thunder and lightning;**

<sup>27</sup>**then he saw it and measured it;  
he searched it out and fixed its place.**

Wisdom is found in communion with God

The following verse concludes by affirming that it is not in man's ability to build and to carry on commerce that he demonstrates wisdom, but rather in his religious veneration of the Lord. Since wisdom belongs only to God it is through communion with God that we can share in divine wisdom.

<sup>28</sup>**And he said to humankind,  
'Truly, to venerate the Lord ('adonay), that is wisdom;  
to flee from evil, that is understanding.'**

We might compare Baruch 3:10 – 4:4, which identifies wisdom with the Law:

She is the book of the commandments of God,  
the law that endures forever.  
All who hold her fast will live,  
and those who forsake her will die.  
Turn, O Jacob, and take her;  
walk toward the shining of her light.  
Do not give your glory to another,  
or your advantages to an alien people.  
Happy are we, O Israel,  
for we know what is pleasing to God.

– Baruch 4:1-4

Compare also the following:

You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

– Psalm 51:6

The fear of YHWH is the beginning of wisdom;  
all those who practice it have a good understanding.  
His praise endures forever.

– Psalm 111:10

The fear of YHWH is the beginning of knowledge;  
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

– Proverbs 1:7