

The Book of Job
Session 17: Conclusion of the Dialogues Series,
Wisdom Interlude Chapter 28

By John Walton

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 17, Conclusion of the Dialogue Series, Wisdom Interlude Chapter 28.

Review [00:25-1:54]

Now we want to talk about this interlude chapter, the hymn to wisdom in chapter 28, but let's review a little bit where that has brought us here so that we can have our bearings going into it. The dialogue section is complete. Job has finished with his friends. That conversation is over. Job has not been seduced by the prospect of renewed benefits. Even though that's been the pressure, he basically has concluded that the system known as the retribution principle is broken. That was series two in the dialogues. He has refused to admit wrongdoing as the cause of his calamity. That was series three, cycle three, in the dialogues.

He has proven that his righteousness is not founded on the expectation of reward, and in so doing, he has served well as the star witness for the defense of God's policies. He has demonstrated that there is such a thing as disinterested righteousness. So, the Challenger's claim that God's policy of rewarding righteous people was counterproductive and even subversive has been cast aside. The friends who represented the Challenger's case had been silenced--case dismissed.

Hymn to Wisdom (Job 28) – Narrator's Intermission [1:54-2:47]

But now we make our transition through the wisdom interlude to the discourse section. Chapter 28, again, as we talked about, when we discussed the structure of the book, chapter 28 does not actually introduce a different speaker. Therefore, it's easy to conclude that somehow Job continues to speak. As I mentioned back in that segment, the problem is that the things being said in chapter 28 don't reflect very well at all on Job's actual viewpoints expressed either before or after. So, I look at this as the work of the

narrator who is giving us a kind of an intermission, so to speak, and transitioning us to a different way of thinking.

Structure of Job 28, Hymn to Wisdom [2:47-3:46]

So, chapter 28 verses 1 through 11 use the illustration of mining. The basic thrust of that illustration is that mining brings hidden things to light. In verses 12 through 19, there are a number of rhetorical questions concerning wisdom. It's suggested that wisdom is inaccessible to humans yet beyond value and beyond human effort and ingenuity. There are numerous indicators of what this is. Now this is a cosmic discussion, and there are numerous indicators of that. Then the final segment of chapter 28, verses 20 to 28, God provides a path to wisdom, and the fear of God is the foundation for wisdom.

Job 28: Wisdom and Order Nexus [3:46-5:02]

So, what are some of the points being made? First of all, wisdom cannot be found in 28:12, but it comes from God that's in 28:20. So, it contrasts the search, trying to find it, from the source. God is the one who gives it. Wisdom is found in the ordering of the components of the cosmos. Again, here we find an important connection between wisdom and order. This is true throughout the Bible. Wisdom is found when one goes about pursuing order and perceiving order, and practicing order. An ordered world, ordered life, and ordered society are all the pursuits of wisdom. So, wisdom is found in the ordering of the components of the cosmos. Order, it goes on to say, is not readily observable in daily operations, but it was instrumental in the foundation of creation, and it is inherent in the ongoing operations.

Friends justice focus, God wisdom focus [5:02-7:01]

Job and his friends think that they know how the cosmos was ordered. The retribution principle is their operating theory. In that equation, the righteous will prosper; the wicked will suffer; to them this is how the world is ordered. But, of course, that's not the case. Job and his friends have not found true wisdom. When we look at verse 27, "Then he [God] looked at wisdom and appraised it. He confirmed it and tested it." Here

God approves creation by the criterion of wisdom, not by the criterion of justice. When Job and his friends tried to make the retribution principle the foundation of order, they were making justice the foundation of order in the cosmos. This phrase by God, turns that around and says, "No, the foundation is not justice." He looked at wisdom and appraised it confirmed it, tested it, and approved creation by the criterion of wisdom. So, this is a little bit different perspective. The equation that Job and his friends have used has been shown to be inadequate.

The protagonists we've met so far, Job's friends, all have reputations as being among the wisest that the world has to offer. But when we think back through the dialogues through their speeches, the fear of the Lord has not figured prominently in their comments. And here, that's what the book focuses on.

Job 28:18 Fear of the Lord is Wisdom [7:01-7:26]

Verse 28 is interesting in the way it sets up. It's an instruction to humankind, *adam*. When we read it: "And he said to the human race," this is NIV. "He said to the human race, [that's *adam*] the fear of the Lord--that is wisdom, and to shun evil that is understanding."

Fear of Lord Contrasts [7:26-8:49]

Now this idea of fearing God, we can understand pretty well by thinking about what it's contrasted to. Fearing God would be in contrast to thinking of him as detached and therefore to be ignored. Fear of God would be in contrast to thinking him incompetent and, therefore, be treated with disdain. Fear of God would be in contrast to thinking of him as limited or impotent and therefore to be scorned. Fear of God is in contrast to thinking of him as corrupt and, therefore to be admonished. Fearing God would be in contrast to thinking of him as short-sighted and, therefore to be advised. Fearing God would be in contrast to thinking of him as petty and therefore to be resented.

Fearing God has this idea of taking God seriously; we need to do that lest we fall into any of those other traps of thinking of him as less than God.

Fear of Adonai [lord, master] [8:49-11:28]

Now it's interesting that when this verse talks about the fear of God, it talks about the fear of Adonai, not the fear of Yahweh. This is a really interesting choice. It's not fear of Elohim; it's fear of Adonai. This is the only occurrence of Adonai in the book. Adonai in Hebrew can be used just to refer to an authority figure, whether it's a human or whether it's God. It's often used as a title for Yahweh, but it's often used in connection with Yahweh himself. So, it's very interesting here. We have not fear of Shaddai, not fear of Elohim, not fear of Yahweh, but fear of Adonai.

It's also put in the mouth of God. This is God speaking. "He said to the human race, the fear of Adonai, that is wisdom." So, it's God himself speaking that way. Nowhere else in the Old Testament does God refer to himself simply by the title Adonai, without some other label connected to it. So, this is a really interesting choice of words here. This is part of what we do when we analyze texts. We assume that the choice of words is meaningful, intentional, and purposeful, and so, we consider them carefully.

Now, again, Adonai draws out the issue of authority. It has the sense of Lord or master. And it draws out the element of submission to authority. That's something that's very needed in this context, submitting to this God, by fearing him. So, unlike the similar saying in Proverbs where "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Here, "The fear of Adonai is wisdom." It's wise to trust God as the path to wisdom. The definite form with a definite article is used both in verses 12 and 20--"The wisdom."

Fear of the Lord then finally is paralleled with an ethical exhortation "to shun evil." It's not paralleled to ritual observance. So again, that's something that we need to be aware of.

Rhetorical Role of Job 28 Hymn to Wisdom [11:28-13:08]

So, what's the rhetorical role of chapter 28? First of all, it transitions us from the dialogues to the discourses. So, it has that rather mechanical role. Second, it transitions from the Challenger's contention not a good idea to bring prosperity to righteous people, to Job's contention, not a good policy for righteous people to suffer, and the second part of the book is going to deal with Job's contention.

Thirdly, it shifts the book from a search for justice to the source of wisdom and the understanding of the importance of wisdom in the equation. Job and his friends have left wisdom out of the equation. As they understand order, it's been all about justice, but now it transitions to being all about wisdom.

Fourthly, Job has demonstrated that he has a disinterested righteousness contrary to the Challenger's suspicion. And so, now we're ready to move on. The book has yet to deal with Job's challenge. So, the question now that's on the table, as we move into the next section, connected to Job's challenge, is: can there be coherence when righteous people suffer? That's, again, in contrast to the Challenger's contention where the question was about disinterested righteousness.

Coherence with the Righteous Suffering? [13:08-13:50]

Here, can there be coherence when righteous people suffer? It serves notice that Job is not in a position of control and that his expectation should not dictate the direction in which the situation proceeds. God's wisdom rules. It serves to notice that the friends' perception of coherence is flawed and simplistic. Following the friend's advice would not have brought coherence to Job's world. So, wisdom should be understood as that which brings order and coherence.

God as Source/Author of Wisdom/Order [13:50-15:06]

God is the author of order and the foundation for coherence, but one would not speak of God himself alone as coherent or orderly. God was exercising wisdom when creating, but to say that God is wise understates God's nature. Just like we mentioned near the beginning of this whole course, the idea that God is just somehow making him

seem contingent on some outside criteria. It's the same thing here. Certainly, God acts wisely. God is the source of wisdom. That's the most important connection. God is the source of justice, and God is a source of wisdom.

So, affirmation such as God is wise, or God is good, or God is holy are misleading because the adjectives themselves actually find their definition in God. One may as well say that God is God. Any wisdom we might find has its foundations in him. The poem does not suggest that God is wisdom or that he has wisdom.

Fear Expressed in Trust [15:06-16:05]

We express our fear of the Lord when we trust him, with our circumstances as uncomfortable or as confusing as they might be. We trust him enough to accept that there need not be an explanation. We trust that his just nature is unassailable. Even though there is no identifiable justice in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We trust that he has set up the system in the very best way, which means wisest way possible. Even when we are suffering the consequences of a system broken by the fall, we trust his love for us. We trust that even in our difficulties, he can show his love and strengthen us through trials.

Conclusion on the Significance of Job 28 Hymn of Wisdom [16:05-16:44]

Chapter 28 is one of the key chapters of the book. We need to attend to it carefully so that we glean its message. So, it has a structural role and, therefore, a rhetorical role, but it also has a significant role in the theological message that the book has to present, as it helps us to think about God in the right ways in relationship to the world.

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