

Job 28:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire.

Analysis

It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. This verse continues Job's magnificent poem on wisdom (Job 28), declaring wisdom's incomparable value. The Hebrew verb salah (שָׁלַח, "valued") means to weigh, measure, or compare—wisdom cannot be measured against even the most precious materials.

The gold of Ophir (כְּתֵם אֶופִיר, ketem Ophir) represents the ancient world's finest gold. Ophir's location remains debated (possibly Arabia, East Africa, or India), but its gold was legendary for purity and quality (1 Kings 9:28, 10:11; Psalm 45:9; Isaiah 13:12). Kings sought Ophir's gold for temple construction and royal treasures. Job declares that even this superlative gold cannot purchase wisdom.

Precious onyx (שְׁהָם, shoham) and **sapphire** (סְפִיר, sappir) complete the trinity of earth's treasures. The shoham may refer to onyx, beryl, or another precious stone; it adorned the high priest's ephod (Exodus 28:9). The sappir (lapis lazuli) provided deep blue coloring prized throughout the ancient Near East. These gems decorated thrones, temples, and royal regalia.

The theological point is profound: wisdom—true knowledge of God and His ways—transcends all material wealth. This anticipates Christ's teaching that the kingdom of heaven is like treasure worth selling all to obtain (Matthew 13:44-46). Paul echoes this when he counts all things as loss compared to knowing Christ

(Philippians 3:8). Job 28 culminates with wisdom's true location: "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom" (28:28).

Historical Context

Job 28 stands as ancient wisdom literature's most beautiful poem on wisdom's value and elusiveness. Written during the patriarchal period (possibly 2000-1800 BC), the chapter describes mining operations with remarkable technical accuracy —ancient peoples extracted copper, iron, gold, and precious stones from deep mines. The detailed mining imagery (28:1-11) establishes human ingenuity in finding earth's treasures, which makes wisdom's hiddenness all the more striking.

Ophir's gold trade flourished during Solomon's reign (970-931 BC), though the location was known earlier. Solomon's fleet brought gold from Ophir (1 Kings 9:26-28), and the phrase "gold of Ophir" became proverbial for supreme quality. Archaeological evidence confirms extensive ancient mining operations throughout the Near East, validating Job's technical descriptions.

The chapter's structure moves from human ability to find hidden minerals (vv. 1-11) to wisdom's superior hiddenness (vv. 12-22) to God's exclusive possession of wisdom (vv. 23-27) to wisdom's accessibility through fearing God (v. 28). This progression influenced later biblical wisdom literature (Proverbs 3:13-15, 8:10-11) and the New Testament's identification of Christ as God's wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30; Colossians 2:3).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does comparing wisdom to the most valuable materials challenge modern culture's priorities of wealth accumulation?
2. What does it mean practically to value knowing God above material prosperity or success?

Interlinear Text

לֹא תִּסְלַה בְּכָתָם אֶופֶר בְּשֵׁבֶם יְקָרָה
H3808 It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir onyx with the precious
H5541 H3800 H211 H7718 H3368

וּסְפִירָה:
or the sapphire
H5601

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 13:12 (Parallel theme): I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.

Psalms 45:9 (Parallel theme): Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.

Ezekiel 28:13 (Parallel theme): Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created.