

Job 28:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold.

Analysis

The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it—even the most exotic and valuable gem fails to match wisdom. Hebrew pitdah (פִּתְדָּה, "topaz") refers to a yellow or green precious stone, possibly chrysolite or peridot. Ethiopia (Kush, כָּשָׂע) was famous for producing the finest specimens. **Neither shall it be valued with pure gold** uses shalah (שָׁלָה, "valued"), meaning to compare or weigh against, and ketem tahor (קְטוּרָה, "pure gold"), the most refined gold available, possibly referring to Ophir gold (1 Kings 10:11).

This concludes Job's economic argument (verses 15-19): gold, silver, crystal, fine gold vessels, coral, pearls, rubies, Ethiopian topaz, pure gold—the complete inventory of ancient wealth—cannot equal, purchase, or be compared to wisdom. The cumulative effect is overwhelming: wisdom transcends all earthly value systems. This prepares for verse 23's revelation: "God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof." Wisdom belongs to God's realm, not humanity's marketplace. Romans 11:33-36 worships this reality: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Wisdom cannot be bought because it must be revealed.

Historical Context

Ethiopian (Kushite) topaz was legendary in antiquity for exceptional quality. Pure gold from Ophir was considered the finest available (1 Kings 9:28). Job

exhaustively catalogs ancient wealth's pinnacle items, then dismisses them all as inadequate for wisdom. This would profoundly impact his audience—if the sum total of earthly treasure cannot obtain wisdom, where can it be found? The poem answers: through fearing God (verse 28), receiving divine revelation rather than pursuing human acquisition.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does exhaustively listing earthly treasures' inadequacy help us reorient our values toward eternal wisdom?
2. What does it mean that wisdom must be revealed rather than earned, given rather than purchased?
3. How should recognizing that God alone possesses and gives wisdom affect our prayer life and dependence on Scripture?

Interlinear Text

לֹא יִعַרְכֶּה פָּנִית שֶׁכְנָה כִּי תְּמִימָה בְּכָל הַדָּבָר
H3808 shall not equal H6186 The topaz H6357 of Ethiopia H3568 gold H3800 with pure H2889 H3808

תִּסְלַה:

it neither shall it be valued
H5541

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 8:19 (Parallel theme): My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver.

Exodus 39:10 (Parallel theme): And they set in it four rows of stones: the first row was a sardius, a topaz, and a carbuncle: this was the first row.

Exodus 28:17 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt set in it settings of stones, even four rows of stones: the first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and a carbuncle: this shall be the first row.

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.

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