

Job 28:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air.

Analysis

Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Job declares wisdom's universal hiddenness from all created beings. The verb alam (עָלָם, "hid") means to conceal or hide completely—wisdom remains inaccessible to natural observation or human searching. **From the eyes of all living** (מִעֵינֵי כָּל-חַי, me-einei kol-chai) emphasizes the comprehensive scope: no living creature can discover wisdom through natural means.

Kept close from the fowls of the air (נִשְׁמָנִים נִשְׁתַּרְתָּה, ume-of hashamayim nistarah) uses satar (סָתַר), another verb meaning to hide or conceal. Birds, which fly high and see vast distances, symbolize the greatest natural perspective available to creatures. If even birds soaring through the heavens cannot perceive wisdom, then no created being can access it through observation alone. This echoes Deuteronomy 30:11-14, where God's word is not "beyond the sea" or "in heaven" requiring superhuman reach, but near—in the mouth and heart.

The theological significance is crucial: wisdom cannot be discovered through human philosophy, scientific investigation, or mystical ascent. Job 28:23 reveals the answer: "God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof." Wisdom belongs exclusively to God, who reveals it graciously to those who fear Him (28:28). This prefigures Paul's teaching that "the world by wisdom knew not God" but that God reveals Himself through the "foolishness" of gospel preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21). Christ embodies divine wisdom made accessible (Colossians 2:2-3).

Historical Context

Job 28 reflects ancient Near Eastern wisdom traditions that explored life's ultimate questions—purpose, justice, and knowledge. Mesopotamian wisdom literature like the Babylonian "Ludlul Bel Nemeqi" and Egyptian instruction texts addressed similar themes, but Job uniquely locates wisdom in the fear of Yahweh rather than human philosophy or magical knowledge.

The imagery of birds represents the ancient understanding of creatures with superior vantage points. Birds of prey can spot small animals from great heights, symbolizing exceptional perception. If even these keen-sighted creatures cannot find wisdom, human searchers have no hope through natural means alone. This contrasts with Greek philosophy's confidence that human reason could discover ultimate truth through dialectic and observation.

The passage influenced Jewish wisdom traditions collected in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and apocryphal works like Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon. The early church fathers cited Job 28 when arguing against Gnostic claims of secret knowledge accessible through mystical ascent or special revelation. Reformed theology emphasizes this passage's teaching that true wisdom comes only through divine revelation in Scripture and supremely in Christ, not through human speculation or philosophical systems.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does wisdom's hiddenness from natural observation challenge modern confidence in human reason and science to answer ultimate questions?
2. What are the implications of wisdom being accessible only through divine revelation rather than human discovery?

Interlinear Text

בָּשָׁם יְמִינֵי
Seeing it is hid from the eyes H3605
H5956 H5869

כָּל מְעִינֵי
of all living H2416
H3605

וּמְעַלְמָה
from the fowls H5775
H2416

בָּשָׁם יְמִינֵי
of the air H8064
H5775

נִסְתַּרְתָּ
and kept close

H5641

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 11:25 (Parallel theme): At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

Colossians 2:3 (Parallel theme): In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

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