

Job 28:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears.

Analysis

Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears—

In Job's poetic quest for wisdom, even the cosmic forces of Abaddon (אֲבַדּוֹן, destruction/the place of ruin) and Mawet (מָוֶת, death) are personified as witnesses to wisdom's elusiveness. These terms represent the furthest reaches of existence—the realm beyond human life. Yet even they confess only hearing wisdom's shema (שְׁמָע, report/fame), not possessing it.

The Hebrew shema (the same word in "Hear, O Israel") emphasizes that even the grave has merely heard whispers of wisdom's existence. This literary device amplifies Job's argument: if the deepest darkness and death itself cannot find wisdom through direct experience but only rumor, how much less can mortals discover it through suffering or empirical investigation? The progression in chapter 28 moves from mining precious metals (vv. 1-11) to questioning where wisdom dwells—concluding that God alone knows its place (v. 23). This verse marks the climax before revealing wisdom's true source.

Historical Context

Job 28 stands as an independent wisdom poem within the larger discourse, often called the 'Hymn to Wisdom.' Written in classical Hebrew poetry with sophisticated metallurgical imagery, it reflects ancient Near Eastern mining operations and philosophical speculation about wisdom's nature. The personification of death and destruction draws from Canaanite and Mesopotamian

mythological language, where Mot (death) and the underworld were deified forces. Job redeems these concepts, presenting them not as gods but as created realities subordinate to Yahweh's wisdom.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. If even the realm of death cannot comprehend divine wisdom, what does this teach about the limits of human understanding when facing suffering?
2. How does recognizing that wisdom comes only from God (not from experience or knowledge) change your approach to life's mysteries?
3. In what ways do we today still try to extract wisdom through human effort rather than receiving it as God's gift?

Interlinear Text

אַבְדָּ וְ	וּ מָוֶת	אָמַר ו	בְּ אָזְנוֹ יִנּוֹ	שָׁמָעְנוּ	שִׁמְעָהּ:
Destruction	and death	say	thereof with our ears	We have heard	the fame
H11	H4194	H559	H241	H8085	H8088

Additional Cross-References

Job 26:6 (Parallel theme): Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering.