

Job 35:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and
maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven?

Analysis

Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven? Elihu (Job 32-37) here describes God's unique instruction of humanity. The Hebrew מְאַלְּפֵנוּ מִבְּהֵמוֹת אֶרֶץ (me'allephenu mibhemot aretz) means "who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth." The verb alaph (אָלַף) means to teach, train, or instruct. God has endowed humans with greater wisdom than animals—not mere instinct but reason, moral awareness, and capacity for divine knowledge.

Maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven uses the Hiphil causative form of chakam (חָכַם, "to be wise")—God actively makes humans wise beyond birds. The "fowls of heaven" (עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם, of hashamayim) includes all flying creatures. While birds display remarkable navigational and seasonal instincts, humans possess wisdom—understanding of purpose, morality, eternity, and relationship with the Creator.

Elihu's argument addresses Job's complaint that God doesn't answer (35:9-13). Elihu contends that God has already answered through creation itself and through endowing humans with rational, moral capacity that transcends animal existence. This anticipates Paul's teaching that creation reveals God's eternal power and divine nature (Romans 1:19-20). Humanity's unique wisdom capacity obligates us to seek and worship our Creator rather than cry out only in distress like animals responding to pain.

The verse implicitly references Genesis 1:26-28, where God creates humanity in His image with dominion over creation. This image includes rational, moral, and spiritual capacities absent in animals. The question format (rhetorical) emphasizes God's unparalleled role as humanity's teacher. No other source grants true wisdom—neither human philosophy, nor mystical experience, nor natural observation suffices. Wisdom comes from God alone (Proverbs 2:6; James 1:5).

Historical Context

Elihu appears only in Job 32-37, a younger man who waited respectfully while his elders spoke. His speeches differ in tone from the three friends—less accusatory toward Job while still defending God's justice. Scholars debate whether Elihu's speeches were part of the original book or added later, but canonical Scripture includes them as inspired wisdom.

Ancient Near Eastern cultures recognized distinctions between human and animal intelligence. Egyptian wisdom literature celebrated human rational capacity, while Mesopotamian texts attributed human wisdom to divine gift from the gods. Elihu's argument stands firmly in biblical anthropology: humans are uniquely created in God's image with capacities for knowledge, morality, and worship that animals lack.

The context of Job 35 addresses Job's complaint that God doesn't respond to his cries (35:9-12). Elihu argues that humans cry out in distress like animals (35:9) but fail to use the unique wisdom God has given to seek Him rightly (35:10-13). This anticipated Jesus' teaching about anxiety—birds don't worry, yet God feeds them; how much more valuable are humans to God (Matthew 6:26). The early church fathers cited Job 35:11 when discussing the *imago Dei* and humanity's unique capacity for divine knowledge.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing God as the source of human wisdom above animal instinct shape our approach to education and knowledge?
2. What responsibilities come with possessing wisdom beyond the animals—how should this affect stewardship of creation?

Interlinear Text

מִלְּפָנָיו	מִבְּהֵמָה זֹאת	אֶרֶץ	וּמֵעוֹף	הַשָּׁמַיִם יִם
Who teacheth	us more than the beasts	of the earth	than the fowls	of heaven
H502	H929	H776	H5775	H8064
וַיַּחֲכֵמֵנוּ:				
and maketh us wiser				
H2449				

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 94:12 (Parallel theme): Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law;

Job 36:22 (Parallel theme): Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him?

Job 32:8 (Parallel theme): But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.

Genesis 2:7 (Parallel theme): And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Genesis 1:26 (Parallel theme): And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

