

Introduction

The old adage, “You can’t take it with you” certainly describes the fact that material possessions are all left behind at the point of death; but there **ARE** “things” you take with you from this life to the next. In the course of this life some of the things we pursue are the necessities of life such as food, clothing, and so on. Other things are pursued because it’s our desire to have them even though we don’t absolutely have to have them to exist, such as riches or an abundant excess of life’s necessities. But the real test we’ll all face after death before God will reveal whether or not we pursued the things in this life that mattered, the things that produce results for eternity. The things on which we focus our time and energies in **THIS** life actually matters.

Read verses 1-11

Q: What is the nature of the pursuit described in v.1-2?

A: It’s the pursuit of wealth and things.

Q: What’s the difference between looking for silver and gold versus iron and copper? What might be revealing in their all being grouped together?

A: The precious metals aren’t an absolute necessity of life, while iron and copper are practical commodities used for the basic needs of life. Although they occupy a wide spectrum from “nice-to-have” to “need-to-have”, together they represent man’s goals of obtaining earthly possessions.

Q: What are the main words used in v.3-4 that together make up a theme and to what does it allude?

A: The list of theme words are “darkness” (v.3), “gloom” (v.3), “deep shadow” (v.3), “far” (v.4), and “forgotten” (v.4). These verses allude to the fact that man actively pursues earthly needs and possessions by overcoming **physical** darkness, and therefore needs to do the same to overcome **spiritual** darkness.

Q: What are the results of man’s overcoming the physical darkness according to v.5-6?

A: He obtains what he needs (“food”, “fire”) and what he desires (“sapphires”, “gold”). It’s another allusion to the fact that overcoming spiritual darkness will result in meeting his true needs and desires.

Q: What do you suppose is the reason for contrasting man’s pursuits of hidden things to the animals listed in v.6-7?

A: It’s the contrast of the different nature God has given mankind than to beasts, who lack the inclination and/or will to seek out anything hidden. It probably speaks of both positive and negative aspects of man’s character in contrast to the beasts of nature. [Discuss with the group what those might be.]

¹“Surely there is a mine for silver
And a place where they refine gold.
²Iron is taken from the dust,
And copper is smelted from rock.
³Man puts an end to darkness,
And to the farthest limit he searches out
The rock in gloom and deep shadow.
⁴He sinks a shaft far from habitation,
Forgotten by the foot;
They hang and swing to and fro
far from men.
⁵The earth, from it comes food,
And underneath it is turned up
as fire.
⁶Its rocks are the source of sapphires,
And its dust contains gold.
⁷The path no bird of prey knows,
Nor has the falcon’s eye caught sight of it.
⁸The proud beasts have not trodden it,
Nor has the fierce lion passed over it.

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⁹He puts his hand on the flint;
He overturns the mountains at
the base.
¹⁰He hews out channels through
the rocks,
And his eye sees anything
precious.
¹¹He dams up the streams from
flowing,
And what is hidden he brings
out to the light.

¹²“But where can wisdom be
found?
And where is the place of
understanding?
¹³Man does not know its value,
Nor is it found in the land of the
living.
¹⁴The deep says, ‘It is not in me’;
And the sea says, ‘It is not with
me.’
¹⁵Pure gold cannot be given in
exchange for it,
Nor can silver be weighed as its
price.
¹⁶It cannot be valued in the gold
of Ophir,
In precious onyx, or sapphire.
¹⁷Gold or glass cannot equal it,
Nor can it be exchanged for
articles of fine gold.
¹⁸Coral and crystal are not to be
mentioned;
And the acquisition of wisdom is
above that of pearls.
¹⁹The topaz of Ethiopia cannot
equal it,
Nor can it be valued in pure
gold.
²⁰Where then does wisdom
come from?
And where is the place of
understanding?”

Application: Man goes to great lengths and efforts to uncover **physical** things that are hidden and buried in **darkness**, bringing them out into the **light** of his world for his use. This is an allusion to the **spiritual**.

- What are the things that you work the most to obtain? It may not be simply “money”, but meets either your needs or desires emotionally or physically.
- What are the things for which you do the bare minimum to get by, as opposed to the things you devote the extra effort to obtain in the greatest quantity possible? [Hint: The amount of time you dedicate to something is a very strong indicator.]

Read verses 12-22

Q: What is the biblical definition of “wisdom”? Does it mean the same as “smart” or “genius”?

A: The Hebrew words for “wisdom” are very practical in their focus. They convey the existence of spiritual strength of character in those who apply God’s guidelines to every situation, whether normal and small or once-in-a-lifetime huge. It’s really the description of someone who takes God’s Word and applies it to their choices and behavior. Merely being “smart” or having knowledge is different because it does not mean that the person acts on the knowledge they possess. Biblical wisdom begins with knowing and acknowledging God’s Word and is possessed by following His Word in every thought, deed, and decision.

Q: How is the biblical definition of “wisdom” different than “understanding”? How do they compliment each other?

A: The meaning conveyed by the Hebrew word for “understanding” describes a person who is most able to make the best and right spiritual choice, to discern and choose God’s ways and reject the opposite. Together they speak of the practical character of the Believer who puts into practice God’s Word and guidance rather than just live life aware of what it might or should be. Without “obedience”, there exists no wisdom and understanding according to biblical standards.

Q: So what does v.13 mean in the context of the biblical definitions of “wisdom” and “understanding”?

A: Man most often concentrates his efforts on earthly things rather than heavenly. His methods of obtaining things on earth don’t apply to obtaining the things of heaven because he doesn’t see what’s really valuable from eternity’s point of view, and cannot find it “in the land of the living”, that is, from any earthly source.

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²⁰Where then does wisdom
come from?
And where is the place of
understanding?

²³“God understands its way,
And He knows its place.
²⁴For He looks to the ends of the
earth
And sees everything under the
heavens.
²⁵When He imparted weight to
the wind
And meted out the waters by
measure,
²⁶When He set a limit for the
rain
And a course for the
thunderbolt,
²⁷Then He saw it and declared it;
He established it and also
searched it out.
²⁸And to man He said, ‘Behold,
the fear of the LORD, that is
wisdom;
And to depart from evil is
understanding.’”

Application: *Even the most valuable earthly commodities cannot purchase something that can only be obtained by **obedience** to God’s **Word**. It does not exist in any form that man can obtain by his own **will** and **effort**.*

- *Have you now or ever been under the mistaken belief that wisdom is a gift that God grants in a special dispensation like the gifts of the Spirit?*
- *Do you now realize that wisdom and understanding are the result of putting into practice God’s Word and guidance in any and every situation? How “wise” and understanding are you right now?*
- *How will you become “wiser” and more “understanding”?*

Read verses 23-28

Q: What is the only source of wisdom and understanding?

A: God.

Q: Why is it compared to things that God created in v.24-27?

A: The point is that He is the Author of wisdom and understanding and it cannot be obtained through any other means.

Q: How does v.28 fit in with the explanation given above as to the biblical definition of “wisdom” and “understanding”?

A: They are actions that result from our obedience, from putting God’s Word and guidance into practice.

Application: *What matters most is **fear** (extreme **regard** for) of the **Lord** and **willful** separation from **sin**.*

Overall Application

- What are the things you spend the most time and effort obtaining? If you became the number one owner of them in all the world, how would they benefit you when you die and stand before God in eternity?
- What is the importance of obedience in a Christian’s life? Is it a worthwhile pursuit?
- How does your wisdom and understanding stand up by the measurements “fear of the Lord” and “to depart from evil”? Will you pursue them as fervently as a miner for gold, or for your heart’s most important, current desire?