



## Job - Chapter Thirty Four

### **II Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God (continues)**

#### **II.d Job 32:1-37:24 - Elihu: Suffering as a Discipline (continues)**

##### **Summary of Chapter Thirty Four**

Elihu sets out to dispute Job in a speech structured by its general statements of address. He is calling 'wise men' to hear Job's contention that he is in the right (vv.2-9) and 'sensible men of understanding' to hear Elihu's disputation of this claim (vv.10-34), with both groups bracketed together as those who will agree with Elihu against Job (vv.35-37).

#### **II.d.iii Job 34:1-37 - Elihu Proclaims God's Justice**

Refer to the chapter summary above.

##### **Introduction to Job 34:1-9**

Elihu calls those who are wise to weigh Job's claim that he is right and that God has taken away what he was entitled to (vv.1-6); he prefigures his conclusion when he says that Job 'walks with wicked men' (vv.7-9); refer also to v.36.

<sup>1</sup> Then Elihu continued and said:

- <sup>2</sup> 'Hear my words, you wise men,  
and give ear to me, you who know;
- <sup>3</sup> for the ear tests words  
as the palate tastes food.

### Job 34:1-3

Hear my words, you wise men. Here Elihu again gave a wordy introduction to his point. In this speech he would quote the words of Job, the ones he felt accused God and justified himself.

The palate tastes food. Truth is discerned through hearing, just as the quality of food is discerned through tasting. Job used this same proverb earlier to challenge the wisdom of his friends: <<***Does not the ear test words as the palate tastes food?***>> (Job 12:11). Elihu repeats the proverb to challenge his listeners to weigh Job's words.

- 4 Let us choose what is right;  
let us determine among ourselves what is good.
- 5 For Job has said, "I am innocent,  
and God has taken away my right;
- 6 in spite of being right I am counted a liar;  
my wound is incurable, though I am without transgression."

### Job 34:4-6

With the repeated reference to right in these verses, Elihu seems to be playing particularly off Job's earlier statements, where he lamented that God had taken his right away and he refused to agree that his friends were right about him: <<***As God lives, who has taken away my right, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter, as long as my breath is in me and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit. Far be it from me to say that you are right; until I die I will not put away my integrity from me. I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go; my heart does not reproach me for any of my days***>> (Job 27:2-6).

My wound is incurable, though I am without transgression. This was another slight mischaracterisation of what Job had said. Job certainly did claim to be wounded so severely by his trials that it might seem incurable; yet again he never claimed to be sinless. He only claimed that there was not some special sin that made him the target of this special catastrophe. Elihu tried to quote specific statements of Job to rebuke, but he quoted selectively and unfairly.

- 7 Who is there like Job,  
who drinks up scoffing like water,
- 8 who goes in company with evildoers  
and walks with the wicked?

### Job 34:7-8

Who is there like Job, who goes in company with evildoers and walks with the wicked? It seems unthinkable that Elihu believed that Job actually was a companion of wicked men. Perhaps he meant that what he considered to be Job's confused moral thinking led him to associate with the morally corrupt.

Elihu describes Job as one who associates with evildoers and the wicked, which is a path that the wise are called to avoid: <<*Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night*>> (Psalm 1:1-2 NIV). He will ground this description in what he feels Job's assertion about himself and God necessarily means; refer also to vv.11-13.

- <sup>9</sup> For he has said, "It profits one nothing to take delight in God."

### Job 34:9

Although Job had stated that the wicked and the righteous seem to suffer the same fate in order to argue against his friends' suggestion that the wicked are always punished, he did not state precisely what Elihu presents here. Job had governed his life by delight in God and his words: <<*But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold. My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured in my bosom the words of his mouth*>> (Job 23:10-12), and he had argued that it was the wicked who live, often in prosperity, as if service to the Almighty profits one nothing: <<*What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit do we get if we pray to him?*>> (Job 21:15).

### Introduction to Job 34:10-37

Although Elihu has already indicated his conclusion about Job (vv.7-9), he sets out to prove that Job should be condemned for his claims.

- <sup>10</sup> 'Therefore, hear me, you who have sense,  
far be it from God that he should do wickedness,  
and from the Almighty that he should do wrong.
- <sup>11</sup> For according to their deeds he will repay them,  
and according to their ways he will make it befall them.
- <sup>12</sup> Of a truth, God will not do wickedly,  
and the Almighty will not pervert justice.

## Job 34:10-12

These verses represent the grounds for Elihu's argument against Job: since God will repay a man in accord with his deeds and ways, Job's claim that he is right and that God has taken away his right would be the same as saying that God has acted in wickedness so as to pervert justice. Although it takes a slightly different shape, Elihu's argument results in the same dilemma that resulted from the arguments of the three friends: either Job is in the right or God is in the right, but it cannot be both: <<*How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind? Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right? If your children sinned against him, he delivered them into the power of their transgression. If you will seek God and make supplication to the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore to you your rightful place. Though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great*>> (Job 8:2-7).

Elihu followed the simple 'you always reap what you sow' equation earlier promoted by Eliphaz in the very first speech of Job's friends; refer to Job 4:7-11. Many people today believe the idea of Elihu (and Eliphaz), and believe it as an absolute spiritual law instead of a general principle. Some take the passage from Paul: <<*Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow*>> (Galatians 6:7). Yet it is important to understand the context of Paul's statement, which was encouragement and exhortation for Christians to give materially for the support of their ministers. It is true that the principle of Galatians 6:7 has application beyond giving and supporting teachers and ministers. It has a general application in life; what a person gets out is often related to what they are prepared to put in. Yet Paul did not promote some law of spiritual karma that ensures people will receive good things when they do good things or always receive bad things when they do bad things. If there were such an absolute spiritual law it would surely damn everyone, removing the grace of God. Instead, Paul simply related the principle of sowing and reaping to the way resources are managed before the Lord. He used the same picture in: <<*If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits?*>> (1 Corinthians 9:11), and: <<*The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, 'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever.' He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness*>> (2 Corinthians 9:6-10).

13 Who gave him charge over the earth  
and who laid on him the whole world?  
14 If he should take back his spirit to himself,  
and gather to himself his breath,  
15 all flesh would perish together,  
and all mortals return to dust.

#### Job 34:13-15

If he should take back his spirit to himself, and gather to himself his breath, all flesh would perish together, and all mortals return to dust. Here Elihu wanted to emphasise the idea of God's independence and transcendence. He wanted Job to remember that God was so mighty that Job was entirely wrong to question him at all: <<*Whom did he consult for his enlightenment, and who taught him the path of justice? Who taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?*>> (Isaiah 40:14).

16 'If you have understanding, hear this;  
listen to what I say.  
17 Shall one who hates justice govern?  
Will you condemn one who is righteous and mighty,  
18 who says to a king, "You scoundrel!"  
and to princes, "You wicked men!";  
19 who shows no partiality to nobles,  
nor regards the rich more than the poor,  
for they are all the work of his hands?  
20 In a moment they die;  
at midnight the people are shaken and pass away,  
and the mighty are taken away by no human hand.

#### Job 34:16-20

Will you condemn one who is righteous and mighty? Elihu took Job's agonised cries to God as Job condemning God. It was an unfair assumption; Job's agony was deeply rooted in the sense that he did love God and respect his justice.

For the Lord shows no partiality to nobles, nor regards the rich more than the poor. Elihu, in his own wordy way, was again emphasising the perfect justice of

God: <<Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?>> (James 2:5).

- 21 'For his eyes are upon the ways of mortals,  
and he sees all their steps.
- 22 There is no gloom or deep darkness  
where evildoers may hide themselves.
- 23 For he has not appointed a time for anyone  
to go before God in judgement.
- 24 He shatters the mighty without investigation,  
and sets others in their place.
- 25 Thus, knowing their works,  
he overturns them in the night, and they are crushed.

#### Job 34:21-25

For his eyes are upon the ways of mortals, and he sees all their steps. Elihu continued on the theme of God's perfect justice. Here he emphasised the idea that nothing man does is hidden from the eyes of God: <<*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good*>> (Proverbs 15:3), <<*And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account*>> (Hebrews 4:13).

For he has not appointed a time for anyone to go before God in judgement. The subject of this sentence is he in Hebrew, and just whom that refers to must be inferred from the context. Some interpreters suggest that it refers to 'man,' with the sense that a person does not set his own times for judgement, which would require a slight alteration or correction of the Hebrew text. However, understanding God as the subject makes sense in the context of Elihu's dispute: Job has been calling for some opportunity to present his case before either God or an arbitrator, but Elihu is suggesting that God has already acted and does not need to give further consideration to Job's or any other person's case.

- 26 He strikes them for their wickedness  
while others look on,
- 27 because they turned aside from following him,  
and had no regard for any of his ways,
- 28 so that they caused the cry of the poor to come to him,

and he heard the cry of the afflicted –  
29 When he is quiet, who can condemn?  
When he hides his face, who can behold him,  
whether it be a nation or an individual? –  
30 so that the godless should not reign,  
or those who ensnare the people.

### Job 34:26-30

Although Elihu does not apply the images directly to Job, his description suggests something very similar to what the three friends had already argued; refer to Job 22:5-11. Job has been struck while others look on because he must have turned aside from following the Lord's ways (v.27) by mistreating the poor and the afflicted (v.28).

So that the godless should not reign, or those who ensnare the people. Elihu thought it was important to emphasise these points because without them the moral order of society would be overturned. If these things were shaken then the godless or the hypocrite would reign and the common people would be ensnared.

31 'For has anyone said to God,  
"I have endured punishment; I will not offend any more;  
32 teach me what I do not see;  
if I have done iniquity, I will do it no more"?  
33 Will he then pay back to suit you,  
because you reject it?  
For you must choose, and not I;  
therefore declare what you know.

### Job 34:31-33

For has anyone said to God. Here Elihu spoke the words of humble repentance that he thought Job should have said. Job was the 'anyone' that Elihu had in mind:

- He should have manfully taken the punishment.
- He should have promised to not offend any more, therefore admitting his previous guilt.
- He should have humbly submitted, asking God to teach him.

Elihu saw none of this in Job and it offended him and made him angry. He therefore pressed Job to do what he thought was right.

Will he then pay back to suit you, because you reject it? Elihu criticised what he thought was Job's arrogance, "Should God be just what you think he should be, and do just what you think he should do?"

For you must choose, and not I; therefore declare what you know. Young Elihu tried to persuade Job with ultimatums and pressure that the three friends of Job did not use. He pressed his points on Job with great vigour. It is painful to see this young, brash Elihu speak to the godly Job in this manner. Yet the reader remembers that there is little doubt that Elihu had the best of intentions. He really thought he was helping Job.

**Basically, Elihu is calling on Job to repent:** <<*Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands*>> (Jonah 3:8), <<*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news'*>> (Mark 1:14-15), and: <<*Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realise that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*>> (Romans 2:4). This in and of itself is not a bad call but Elihu is making the same assumption that the three friends did in that Job has some unrevealed and unrepented sin that is the cause of his current misery.

34 Those who have sense will say to me,  
and the wise who hear me will say,  
35 "Job speaks without knowledge,  
his words are without insight."  
36 Would that Job were tried to the limit,  
because his answers are those of the wicked.  
37 For he adds rebellion to his sin;  
he claps his hands among us,  
and multiplies his words against God.'

### Job 34:34-37

Elihu concludes with the presumption that any who are truly men of understanding or the wise would agree with him that Job speaks like a fool who is without knowledge or insight. Furthermore, Elihu wishes boldly that the judgement signified in Job's suffering would be taken to its logical end, because in addition to

whatever sin he is ultimately being punished for, Job's words also express rebellion and arrogance against God.

Would that Job were tried to the limit, because his answers are those of the wicked. Young Elihu thought that Job had not suffered enough. He thought that a little more suffering, i.e. that he should be tried to the limit, might bring Job to repentance. Paul shows that people may be tried to the limit of their endurance but no further: <<*No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it*>> (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Elihu said this because he genuinely believed that Job was getting himself deeper and deeper into sin. The reader knows from Job Chapters 1 and 2 that Job was in fact a blameless and upright man who spoke from the fog and pain of his crisis and in the presence of his misunderstanding friends. Elihu thought that Job's problems began with his sin and got worse as he adds rebellion to his sin, as he scorned the good advice of his friends, i.e. claps his hands among us, and as he multiplies his words against God.