



Job - Chapter Thirty Six

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 Six

Elihu vindicates God's justice and his providential and gracious dealings with men (vv.1-9). To the obedient belong the promises of God and to the disobedient there will be righteous judgement; also there are promises to the poor and afflicted (vv.10-16). Elihu concludes the chapter with proof of God's mercy, with suitable exhortations and cautions (vv.17-33).

II.d.v Job 36:1-37:24 - The Mercy and Majesty of God

Elihu concludes with a lengthy speech that he introduces as being 'on God's behalf' (36:2-4). He begins by inferring that Job's situation is an example of God using affliction to deliver the righteous from their sin if they are willing to accept his correction (36:5-21). Elihu then describes God's power and majesty as manifested audibly and visibly in storms, through which God accomplishes whatever purpose he has in mind (36:22-37:13). Finally, he calls Job to consider whether he knows how God does any of these things (37:14-20), to remind him of God's majesty and power (37:21-23) – the reason both that men fear God and that he does not regard those who do not fear him (37:24).

II.d.v.1 Job 36:1-23 - Elihu Exalts God's Goodness

Elihu expounds God's righteousness in his dealings with all of mankind. He judges fairly and rewards the faithful, while correcting those who err. Those who are truly against God will be punished accordingly. Elihu also warns Job not to become obsessed with the wicked and the punishment they receive, but to focus on his own need to follow God's ways.

- ¹ Elihu continued and said:
- ² 'Bear with me a little, and I will show you,
for I have yet something to say on God's behalf.
- ³ I will bring my knowledge from far away,
and ascribe righteousness to my Maker.
- ⁴ For truly my words are not false;
one who is perfect in knowledge is with you.

Job 36:1-4

Bear with me a little, and I will show you, for I have yet something to say on God's behalf. Elihu presents his final speech as something offered on God's behalf, emphasising that, unlike Job from Elihu's perspective: <<*Job speaks without knowledge, his words are without insight*>> (Job 34:35), he has understanding that comes from outside himself (v.3) and that he is perfect in knowledge, something he will later ascribe also to God: <<*Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of the one whose knowledge is perfect*>> (Job 37:16). Again, he seems more arrogant than he realises, as young men sometimes do and not just the young.

Apparently young Elihu saw that his listeners were becoming uncomfortable with his condemnation and long-windedness. He begs for them to keep listening and insists that he is speaking on God's behalf. Young Elihu spoke with a directness Job's other friends did not use. Yet he also spoke with an authority that Job's other friends did not. Job's other friends appealed to conventional, ancient wisdom and common knowledge. Elihu claimed to speak on God's behalf. Charles Spurgeon comments, "I admire Elihu's attempt at brevity; I call it an attempt, for I am not quite sure that he succeeded, for he filled two chapters more. Yet he said, 'Suffer me a little'; and thereby promised to make his oration as short as he could. Some lengthy divines, with their many divisions, their 'Finallies,' and 'Lastlies,' and concluding observations, spin and spin, and cause their congregations to suffer, and that not a little, but exceeding much. It is well when we have anything good to say to use as few words as possible, for if brevity be not the garment of grace it is the soul of wit, and all our wits should be set to work to put gospel teaching into such a form that it will be the better received. Assuredly, short and pointed addresses are more likely to reach the heart than long and dreary sermons."

I will bring my knowledge from far away, one who is perfect in knowledge is with you. Although Elihu was obviously too confident in his knowledge and his words, the one with perfect knowledge was probably a reference to God here.

Introduction to Job 36:5-21

Elihu begins by describing God's power and wisdom (v.5) and asserts that he governs justly over the lives of both the wicked (v.6) and the righteous (v.7). The section is focused on affliction (v.8), which God uses to deliver the righteous from their sin unless they reject his correction and show themselves to be like the godless (vv.8-15). Elihu appeals to Job to consider his own circumstances as an example of this choice and encourages him to embrace the mercy of his affliction rather than his iniquity (vv.16-21).

- 5 'Surely God is mighty and does not despise any;
he is mighty in strength of understanding.
- 6 He does not keep the wicked alive,
but gives the afflicted their right.
- 7 He does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous,
but with kings on the throne
he sets them for ever, and they are exalted.
- 8 And if they are bound in fetters
and caught in the cords of affliction,
9 then he declares to them their work
and their transgressions, that they are behaving arrogantly.
- 10 He opens their ears to instruction,
and commands that they return from iniquity.
- 11 If they listen, and serve him,
they complete their days in prosperity,
and their years in pleasantness.
- 12 But if they do not listen, they shall perish by the sword,
and die without knowledge.
- 13 'The godless in heart cherish anger;
they do not cry for help when he binds them.
- 14 They die in their youth,
and their life ends in shame.

15 He delivers the afflicted by their affliction,
and opens their ear by adversity.

Job 36:5-15

Surely God is mighty and does not despise any. Here Elihu again promoted the ideas of God's power and perfect justice. In his perfect justice, God punishes the wicked and works for the oppressed.

The statement that God gives the afflicted their right comes directly between the mention of the wicked and the righteous, expressing the heart of Elihu's argument: the afflicted are treated justly by God and reveal the state of their heart by how they respond to affliction.

Elihu describes affliction using the language of captivity: people are bound in fetters and caught in the cords because God binds them. He argues that God uses this captivity of affliction to speak to people about their sin (v.9) and opens their ears to instruction by adversity. Those who listen (v.11) will be delivered by God (v.15); those who do not listen (v.12) will be judged even in the circumstances of their death (vv.13-14).

He does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous. Since Job had often said and felt that God had removed his eyes from Job, Elihu is clearly counting Job among the wicked. In Elihu's mind, the freedom God has for the righteous does not belong to Job because Job is not among the righteous. In Elihu's mind, the righteous man was marked by many things; things that were conspicuously absent from the present life of Job.

When he states that God opens the ears, Elihu is continuing his point from an earlier speech, suggesting ways that God has been speaking and that Job may be failing to listen: <<*For God speaks in one way, and in two, though people do not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on mortals, while they slumber on their beds, then he opens their ears, and terrifies them with warnings*>> (Job 33:14-16).

But if they do not listen, they shall perish by the sword, and die without knowledge. This was another one of Elihu's strong warnings to Job. He warned Job to repent and to not be like the disobedient who perish and who die without knowledge.

Elihu describes those who hold onto their anger rather than crying out when God binds them through affliction (v.8). He does so now to warn that Job's continued complaint could lead him to a state and end like that of the godless in heart. Elihu thought Job was a hypocrite for continuing to deny his guilt. He felt Job was putting himself under a greater and greater outpouring of God's wrath.

They die in their youth, and their life ends in shame. Elihu painted a bleak future for an unrepentant Job.

- 16 He also allured you out of distress
into a broad place where there was no constraint,
and what was set on your table was full of fatness.
- 17 'But you are obsessed with the case of the wicked;
judgement and justice seize you.
- 18 Beware that wrath does not entice you into scoffing,
and do not let the greatness of the ransom turn you aside.
- 19 Will your cry avail to keep you from distress,
or will all the force of your strength?
- 20 Do not long for the night,
when peoples are cut off in their place.
- 21 Beware! Do not turn to iniquity;
because of that you have been tried by affliction.

Job 36:16-21

He also allured you out of distress. Elihu here spoke to Job about what God would have done for Job, if Job would only repent as he should have (at least in Elihu's perspective). If Job would only have repented then God would have:

- Brought Job out of his dire distress.
- Brought Job into a broad place where there was no constraint.
- Brought Job to a table full of fatness.

Elihu refers to the change in Job's circumstances with a wordplay on the descriptions of when his table was full of fatness, i.e. a reference to his former prosperity, and how he is now obsessed with the case of the wicked, that is, with their calamity and distress.

Just as Elihu has already referred to affliction with the imagery of captivity, he suggests quite plainly that Job should see his own suffering as God seizing him in judgement and justice. For Elihu, Job's problems were easy to diagnose. Job did not have the blessings God gives to the obedient and repentant; therefore Job was not obedient and repentant. From Elihu's perspective there was only one reason for Job's crisis and loss; it was that the judgement and justice of God was against

him. It is helpful to remind the reader that Job Chapters 1 and 2 make it clear that Elihu was absolutely wrong in this analysis.

Elihu has already alluded to the possibility of a ransom: *<<Then, if there should be for one of them an angel, a mediator, one of a thousand, one who declares a person upright, and he is gracious to that person, and says, “Deliver him from going down into the Pit; I have found a ransom>>* (Job 33:23-24). Here he makes it explicit: Job should consider the greatness of the loss of his family, his reputation and all that belonged to his household as the means by which the Lord is arresting his attention and turning him from sin.

Elihu addresses Job more directly by describing the change in his circumstances (vv.16-20) and warns him against choosing his iniquity rather than embracing the purpose of his affliction.

22 See, God is exalted in his power;
who is a teacher like him?

23 Who has prescribed for him his way,
or who can say, “You have done wrong”?

Job 36:22-23

See, God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him? Elihu here again wanted to exalt God in the eyes of Job, thinking that Job’s problem was that he had too low a view of God and too high a view of himself. Yet the words are similar to those of Job himself: *<<Will any teach God knowledge, seeing that he judges those that are on high?>>* (Job 21:22), and are like those of the prophet Isaiah: *<<Who has directed the spirit of the Lord, or as his counsellor has instructed him?>>* (Isaiah 40:13). This leads on to a point where a marked change comes over Elihu. As the following verses indicate, he probably spoke with his eye upon a rapidly approaching storm with all of its rain and wind and thunder and dark clouds. A sudden and wonderful inspiration filled Elihu and he spoke in a very different way than his previous harsh and condemning way towards Job.

II.d.v.2 Job 36:24-37:24 - Elihu Proclaims God’s Majesty

Having described how God speaks through affliction (vv.5-23), Elihu focuses now on the majestic and unsearchable ways of God (vv.24-33) and the way in which his majesty is partially revealed in his governing of the power and purposes of storms (Job 37:1-13). The speech is structured by the calls to the hearer/reader to see and hear what Elihu is describing – further implying that Job is simply not attending to the places where God is actually speaking. Elihu focuses on God’s majesty and calls on Job to listen and apply the weight of this description to his complaint before God, just as he had called Job to do in relation to affliction.

- 24 'Remember to extol his work,
of which mortals have sung.
- 25 All people have looked on it;
everyone watches it from far away.
- 26 Surely God is great, and we do not know him;
the number of his years is unsearchable.
- 27 For he draws up the drops of water;
he distils his mist in rain,
- 28 which the skies pour down
and drop upon mortals abundantly.
- 29 Can anyone understand the spreading of the clouds,
the thunderings of his pavilion?

Job 36:24-29

Remember to extol his work, of which mortals have sung. Job himself had magnified the work of God and was well aware of the power, majesty and glory of God. As the storm approached Job and his friends, and as Elihu continued to describe it, the reader will recognise in Job Chapter 38 that the Lord was in this storm, ready to speak to Job. The words of Elihu are mirrored elsewhere in Scripture and are quite correct in any context: <<***Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous works among all the peoples***>> (1 Chronicles 16:24), <<***Let those who desire my vindication shout for joy and be glad, and say evermore, 'Great is the Lord, who delights in the welfare of his servant'***>> (Psalm 35:27), <<***And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: 'Great and amazing are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, King of the nations! Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your judgements have been revealed'***>> (Revelation 15:3-4).

Surely God is great, and we do not know him. Elihu again promoted the concept of the transcendence of God. He heard and sensed how Job demanded answers from God and counselled Job to understand that God was beyond Job and beyond explaining things to Job. This was Elihu's most truthful and powerful argument, yet it was based on the premise that Job had to do this in light of his great transgression against God. It was a powerful, good principle wrongly applied to Job's situation.

For he draws up the drops of water; he distils his mist in rain. In this beautiful section Elihu analysed the water cycle of evaporation, distillation and rain, and used it as an example of God's brilliance and beauty as a designer: <<*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it*>> (Isaiah 55:10-11).

³⁰ See, he scatters his lightning around him
and covers the roots of the sea.

Job 36:30

He scatters his lightning. The lightning of the storm represents God's glory in it: <<*Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honour and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent, you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers*>> (Psalm 104:1-4). His glory covers or lights up even the depths of the sea.

³¹ For by these he governs peoples;
he gives food in abundance.

Job 36:31

He governs peoples. Judging and nourishing are often parallel aspects of God's provision. The clouds bear God's throne, from which he governs and feeds his people: <<*The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season*>> (Psalm 145:15).

³² He covers his hands with the lightning,
and commands it to strike the mark.

³³ Its crashing tells about him;
he is jealous with anger against iniquity.

Job 36:32-33

He covers his hands. Hands may be a way of describing the great arches or vaulted chamber of heaven, filled with God's light.