

## GOD'S GRACIOUS PROVISIONS

**32** Then these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. <sup>2</sup>But Elihu, son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God. <sup>3</sup>He also became angry with [Job's] three friends, because they could not refute Job, and yet they had condemned him. <sup>4</sup>Elihu had waited while they spoke with Job because they were older than he. <sup>5</sup>[But] when Elihu saw that these three men had no answer, he became angry.

<sup>6</sup>Then Elihu, son of Barachel the Buzite, spoke: I am young in years and you are aged; therefore I was timid and afraid to offer my view to you. <sup>7</sup>I thought, "Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom." <sup>8</sup>But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty that gives him insight. <sup>9</sup>It is not necessarily the old that are wise, and the aged may not understand justice. <sup>10</sup>Therefore I say, Listen to me; I, even I, will offer my view. <sup>11</sup>I waited while you spoke; I listened to your reasoning, as you pondered what to say. <sup>12</sup>I paid close attention to you, but not one of you has been able to refute Job; none of you has answered his arguments. <sup>13</sup>Do not say, "We possess wisdom, [regardless of what he says]. Let God refute him, not man." <sup>14</sup>He has not marshaled his arguments against me, and I will not respond to him with your replies.

<sup>15</sup>They are dismayed and have nothing more to say; words have forsaken them. <sup>16</sup>Must I continue to wait, now that they are silent, since they have stopped speaking and no longer respond? <sup>17</sup>I, even I, will speak my piece; I, even I, will offer my insight, <sup>18</sup>for I am full of words, the Spirit within me compels me. <sup>19</sup>Inside me I am like bottled-up wine, like new wineskins ready to burst. <sup>20</sup>I must speak and get relief; I must open my lips and reply. <sup>21</sup>I will not show partiality, nor will I flatter any man. <sup>22</sup>I have nothing to do with flattery; if I did, my Maker would quickly carry me away.

**33** But now, Job, listen to my words; pay attention to everything I say. <sup>2</sup>I am about to open my mouth; my words are on the tip of my tongue. <sup>3</sup>My words come from an upright heart; my lips utter knowledge sincerely. <sup>4</sup>The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life. <sup>5</sup>If you can, answer me; prepare your case; take your stand before me. <sup>6</sup>I am just like you before God; I, too, have been formed out of clay. <sup>7</sup>No fear of me should terrify you; my pressure will not be heavy upon you.

<sup>8</sup>Without dispute, you have said in my hearing—I heard your very words—<sup>9</sup>"I am pure, without rebellion; I am innocent and without iniquity. <sup>10</sup>Yet [God] has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy. <sup>11</sup>He fastens my feet in shackles; he keeps close watch over all my paths [so that I cannot escape]." <sup>12</sup>Listen; I must tell you, in [saying] this you are not right, for God is greater than man. <sup>13</sup>Why do you complain to him that he does not give an account of any of his actions?— <sup>14</sup>for God does speak, now in one way, then in another, [although man] may not take notice of it. <sup>15</sup>In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, as they slumber on their beds, <sup>16</sup>then he opens men's ears and frightens them with visions, <sup>17</sup>in order to turn man from his [sinful] conduct and to keep him from pride. <sup>18</sup>So he preserves man's soul from the pit, his life from passing over into Sheol.

<sup>19</sup>Or a man may be disciplined on a bed of pain with constant aching in his bones, <sup>20</sup>so that his whole being finds food repulsive and his soul loathes [even] the choicest meal. <sup>21</sup>His flesh wastes away to nothing, and his bones, once hidden, now protrude. <sup>22</sup>His soul draws near to the pit, and his life [draws near] to the messengers of death. <sup>23</sup>[But]

*if there is an angel at his side, a mediator, one out of a thousand, to tell the man what is right, <sup>24</sup>then [God] is gracious to him, and says, "Spare him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him." <sup>25</sup>[Then] his flesh is renewed like a child's; he returns to the days of his youth. <sup>26</sup>He prays to God and finds favor with him, he sees [God's] face and shouts for joy; he is restored by [God] to his status as an upright[man]. <sup>27</sup>He sings among men and testifies, "I sinned and perverted what was right, but it was not beneficial for me. <sup>28</sup>He has redeemed my soul from going down to the pit, and my life enjoys the light."*

*<sup>29</sup>Indeed, God does all these things for a man—twice, even three times—<sup>30</sup>to turn back his soul from the pit, so that the light of life may shine upon him. <sup>31</sup>Pay attention, Job, and listen to me. Be silent, and I will speak. <sup>32</sup>[But] if you have any response, answer me. Speak up, for I desire to justify you. <sup>33</sup>[But] if not, then listen to me; keep silent, and I will teach you wisdom. (Job 32:1-33:33)*

## **Introduction**

One hot summer day a Christian man was traveling along Interstate Highway 95 just south of Philadelphia. Noticing that the fuel gage was signaling a near-empty gas tank, he took the next exit in order to fill up at the local gas station. Upon exiting, the man found himself in a strange and rather threatening neighborhood of south Philadelphia.

He pulled up to the gas pumps at the local mini-mart and re-fueled. As he was doing so, a passer-by called his attention to the fact that his radiator had sprung a leak and was now pouring anti-freeze all over the pavement. Now what was he to do, finding himself stranded in a strange and increasingly threatening neighborhood? The attendant from the mini-mart helped the man push the incapacitated vehicle off to the side of the building.

As the man sat on the curb before the entrance to the mini-mart, he thought to himself, "This is certainly a God-forsaken place." Just then a car sped into the parking lot; it came barreling right past the helpless man seated on the curb—he thought it was about to hit him; it seemed to come speeding right out of hell! But as the car swept past him, that Christian man suddenly gained a whole new perspective. He caught sight of a small sign attached to the front bumper of the speeding car, on the sign was one word: JESUS.

That Christian man was reminded of God's gracious provision—and God's gracious provision not only came by way of a reminder of His watchful presence. That Christian man was struck by the unusual kindness shown to him by the attendant at the mini-mart. With the help of that attendant, the man's car was safely towed to a repair shop—owned and operated by a Christian mechanic.

Sometimes when a Christian is overwhelmed by personal suffering and trial, he fails to appreciate God's gracious provisions and needs to be reminded of them—such

was the case with Job in this present passage. God used this rather mysterious figure, Elihu—see the Appendix to this present lesson for a brief discussion on the person and place of Elihu in the Book of Job—to remind Job of His gracious provisions.

## I. God Graciously Communicates with Us

When Job's three friends are reduced to silence, Elihu steps forward (32:1-5.) Elihu's anger is aroused against Job for justifying himself rather than God (32:2.) Note: The LORD Himself will bring the same charge against Job; He will inquire of Job *"Would you condemn me so that you might be justified?"* (40:8b.) Elihu's anger is aroused against Job's three friends because they could not refute Job, and yet they had condemned him (32:3.) The three friends could not refute Job's arguments, nor his claim to innocence, yet they declared him to be guilty.

Because of his youth, Elihu had remained silent; but when Job's friends fail in their attempts to refute Job, Elihu can restrain himself no longer (32:4-5.) Elihu begins his speech by first addressing the three friends (32:6-22.) He explains that he has restrained himself up to now in deference to the age of the three friends; expecting that his elders would evidence a greater wisdom in addressing Job (32:6-7.) But Elihu testifies that he can no longer restrain himself because *"it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him insight"* (32:8.) Here Elihu seems to be claiming some sort of divine inspiration that supplies a wisdom and understanding superior to that of natural man, regardless of age and experience. Indeed, it is not age alone that causes a man to be wise (32:9,) it is the Spirit of God; therefore, being moved and taught by the Spirit of God, Elihu now steps forward to speak.

But before actually presenting his divinely inspired insight, Elihu once again offers an apology. Up to this point he has humbly restrained himself in deference to his elders (32:11.) But it has become evident that they are unable to answer Job with a convincing rebuttal (32:12.) Elihu charges that the three friends have been discredited, they can make no claim to wisdom; and, therefore, Elihu will not resort to their arguments in addressing Job (32:13-14.) He asserts that he will not allow the silence of the friends to silence him; indeed, it is precisely because they have been reduced to silence that Elihu will now speak (32:15-17.)

Elihu cannot help but speak, for *"the Spirit within me compels me"* (32:18)—it appears that Elihu is here referring to the Spirit of God, possibly also in 33:8. We may compare Elihu's testimony with that of the prophet Jeremiah: *"if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a burning fire, shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot"* (Jer. 20:9.) Elihu compares himself to a new wineskin that is ready to burst (32:18-19)—he must express his divinely inspired insights.

Finally, before actually addressing Job, Elihu assures his hearers that he will not speak words that respect any man's person or words of flattery (32:21;) he will utter the truth without showing any favoritism. In this regard Elihu imitates the Lord Jesus Himself: *"They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You are not swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are'"* (Matt. 22:16.) The reason Elihu will speak the truth is due to the fact that he knows that God Himself is no respecter of persons and, consequently, He will not tolerate such a speaker—especially when the speaker claims to be presenting a message that is divinely inspired (32:22.)

Following his lengthy introduction, Elihu now addresses Job directly (33:1-18.) He appeals to Job to pay attention to his speech, assuring him that his words come from an upright heart: *"my lips utter knowledge sincerely"* (33:1-3)—Elihu speaks with sincerity and a genuine desire to help Job. He further assures Job that he addresses him as a fellow man, so Job should not feel intimidated in Elihu's presence (33:4-7.) Earlier Job had expressed his concern about being overwhelmed by the immediate presence of God (23:15;) but he need not have such fear as he is confronted by God's spokesman, Elihu—here, in the person of Elihu, is an expression of God's mercy and condescension to His servant Job.

Elihu now repeats the essence of Job's position (33:8-11,) doing so in order to assure Job that he has listened carefully and that he accurately understands what Job is saying. Job has maintained, *"I am pure, without rebellion; I am innocent and without iniquity"* (33:9.) The use of the various terms makes emphatic and unmistakable Job's claim to innocence. Yet, despite his innocence, Job protests, *"[God] has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy"* (33:10-11.)

Elihu now confronts Job with the solemn words, *"Listen; I must tell you, in [saying] this you are not right, for God is greater than man"* (33:12.) Elihu warns Job that he is in danger of charging God with capriciousness and reminds Job that God is not a man—it is man who is characterized by capriciousness, not God, as Numbers 23:19 asserts, *"God is not a man, that he should lie; nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he spoken, and will he not act? Or has he promised, and will he not fulfill it?"* Indeed, God is greater than man (33:12b)—God's ways are above the ways of man: although Job may not as yet understand God's dealings with him, he can be assured that there is a divine purpose—God is not capricious. Because God has not seen fit to inform Job of His purposes, this does not give Job the right to complain against Him (33:13,) i.e.; to accuse God of injustice or capriciousness.

Furthermore, it is not true that God has been silent and unresponsive to Job; on the contrary, *"God does speak, now in one way, then in another, [although man] may not take notice of it"* (33:14.) For example, God communicates with men by means of a dream, *"a vision of the night"* (33:15.) Coming to man on such occasions, God opens men's ears and frightens them with visions (33:16.) God's purpose is two-fold: 1) *"to turn man from his [sinful] conduct"* (33:17a)—God may intervene when

a man goes astray so as to re-direct him into the paths of righteousness; and 2) *“to keep him from pride”* (33:17b)—by mysteriously coming to man in the visions of the night, rather than by means of a direct encounter, God guards man from becoming puffed up with pride. This is in keeping with the Apostle Paul’s experience: *“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given to me a thorn [or, stake] in my flesh, a messenger from Satan, to torment me”* (2 Cor. 12:7.)

Elihu reiterates that it is God’s purpose to preserve man’s soul from the pit (33:18)—to prevent man from following the course of willful disobedience that will eventually lead to condemnation. The implication and application of Elihu’s teaching given in verses 14-18 is that Job should recognize in his troubling dreams (7:13-14) God’s desire to communicate with him. As Elihu acknowledges, the frightening aspect of the experience is intended to impress upon man the awesomeness of the Almighty and the importance of submissively receiving His instruction (33:16b.)

Out of genuine concern for Job’s spiritual welfare, Elihu cautions Job with regard to his attitude: Job must not become like the arrogant scoffer who assumes for himself the role of judge and charges God with wrongdoing. Note that at the beginning of the book, Job was commended for not taking the role of the scoffer and charging God with wrongdoing (1:22,) but now he is in danger of adopting that sinful attitude.

On the positive side, Elihu encourages Job by reminding him of God’s gracious provisions, the first of which is the fact that God graciously communicates with man. During the patriarchal age God communicated primarily by means of dreams and visions, in the New Testament era He primarily communicates with us by means of the Scriptures: *“we have the absolutely reliable prophetic word. It is good for you to adhere to it as a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star arises in your hearts”* (2 Pet. 1:19.)

## **II. God Graciously Disciplines Us**

Elihu informs Job that another way in which God ministers to man is by disciplining him with pain upon his bed (33:19a.) Indeed, God visits him *“with constant aching in his bones”* (33:19b.) The result of such a visitation is that the man’s whole being finds food repulsive (33:20)—the man loses his appetite for even his daily food, let alone gourmet foods, so great is his pain and agony. Furthermore, the man’s flesh wastes away to nothing, and his bones, once hidden, now protrude. (33:21)—the man is reduced to a mere skeleton by the illness that afflicts his body. Indeed, *“his soul draws near to the pit”* (33:22)—he is brought to the very brink of death. What Elihu describes here is an intense and extremely severe visitation of trial and affliction. Note: This is precisely what Job has been experiencing in his own life up to this point.



As Elihu now points out, the divine purpose of such a visitation is discipline; the intention is to bring the man to repentance and restoration (33:26-28.) As a result of his ordeal, the man is led to pray to God, and God is favorable to him (33:26a.) Consequently, the man is restored to fellowship with God—*“he sees [God’s] face and shouts for joy”*—and to a life of righteousness (33:26b.) We see the same results in the case of the Prodigal Son:

*And when [the prodigal] had spent all [his inheritance], there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup>He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>When he came to his senses, he said, “How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup>I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.” <sup>20</sup>So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>The son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his servants, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let us have a feast and celebrate, <sup>24</sup>for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate. (Lk. 15:14-24)*

That man now sings among men and confesses, *“I have sinned ... but it was not beneficial for me”* (33:27.) The reason for his joy lies in the fact that God has redeemed his soul from going down to the pit; now, rather than perishing in his sins, the light of life (God’s fellowship) will shine upon him (33:28.) Note the testimony of the Psalmist: *“Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I observe your word. ... <sup>71</sup>It is good for me that I have been afflicted, so that I may learn your statutes. ... <sup>75</sup>I know, O Jehovah, that your laws are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me”* (Psl. 119:67, 71, 75.)

Here then is a second way in which God ministers to man, namely, by disciplining him—this, too, is a gracious ministry because it is intended for the man’s benefit. Note: Elihu makes specific mention of that form of divine discipline that is designed and intended to bring a man to repentance and restoration when he has departed from God by willfully or negligently taking the course of sin. Other passages of Scripture enumerate other purposes intended by a divine visitation of discipline:

**a divine pruning/purging** intended to produce greater fruitfulness: *“I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup>He removes every branch in me that does not bear fruit. But he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it may bear more fruit”* (Jn. 15:1-2.) This is closely connected to the type of

discipline referred to by Elihu and is needed in Job's case to correct an attitude that is in danger of developing into a sinful self-righteousness by which Job thinks himself to be more righteous than God.

**a divine proving/testing** of the Christian's faith: *"now for a little while, since it is necessary, you have been brought to grief by all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup>[This has happened] so that the genuineness of your faith—[being of] greater value than gold which perishes—having been tested by fire, may be verified, [resulting] in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet. 1:6-7.) It is God's divine prerogative to test the genuineness of one's profession of devotion to Christ, and God does so by means of subjecting the believer to various forms of trial and affliction—this is the type of disciplining that is especially applicable to Job's present situation (note 1:8-12.)

### III. God Graciously Provides A Mediator for Us

Elihu teaches that if God provides an advocate for the man (33:23.) Elihu defines such an advocate as *"an angel"* (or, *"a messenger,"*) *"a mediator"* (or, *"an interpreter."*) The Hebrew term is מְלִיצָה, coming from the root word, לִוּי. It refers to one sent by God to intercede on the man's behalf in order to bring about reconciliation between the man and God. Note: The fact that Elihu identifies this advocate as being *"one out of a thousand"* points to his uniqueness; this advocate is in fact none other than Christ.

Then, having provided the mediator, God is gracious to that man and issues the command, *"Spare him from going down to the pit"* (33:24.) God commands that the man be spared from judgment because a ransom has been found (33:24b.) It is implied that the advocate/mediator has in some way provided the atoning sacrifice that satisfies the divine justice, as well as showing the man what is right (33:23b,) i.e.; directing him back into a lifestyle that is pleasing to God.

As a result of the advocate's ministry, the man's flesh is renewed like a child's; he returns to the days of his youth (33:25.) Whereas he had been reduced to a woeful condition in which his flesh wastes away to nothing (33:21,) he is now restored to the fullness of health and vitality—an indication of the blessing of God resulting from restored fellowship with God. Note: In this present passage part of the advocate's work is to be an interpreter (33:23,) explaining to the stricken man the reason for his affliction and the means of his restoration—in some sense Elihu himself is serving in that capacity for Job.

While Elihu speaks in conditional terms, *"if there is an advocate, then [God] is gracious,"* the whole of Scripture speaks in absolute terms: God has, indeed, provided the one great Advocate, His own Son Jesus Christ:

*... if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. <sup>2</sup>He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 Jn. 2:1b-2a)*

*I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor [or, Advocate] to be with you forever—<sup>17</sup>the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive him; because it does not see him, nor does it know him. But you know him; because he stays with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup>I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (Jn. 14:16-18)*

## **Conclusion**

In these chapters Elihu has presented three of God's gracious provisions: 1) God graciously communicates with us; 2) God graciously disciplines us; and 3) God graciously provides an Advocate for us.

Elihu informs Job that God's gracious ministry is not just a one-time event; on the contrary, *"God does all these things for a man—twice, even three times"* (33:29.) That is to say, God persistently and continuously offers His gracious provisions to a man, with His intention being the man's restoration to divine favor and fellowship (33:30.)

Elihu urges Job to pay attention to what he has just taught (33:31-33,) for it comes from God (see notes on 32:8) and is intended for Job's benefit and spiritual well-being. In the same way, especially when we encounter times of intense trial, may the LORD grant us the grace to recall His gracious provisions and profit from them.