

BIBLICAL COUNSEL TO THOSE WHO WOULD CHALLENGE GOD

36 Elihu continued to speak: ²Bear with me a little longer and I will show you that there is more to be said on God's behalf. ³I receive my knowledge from afar; I will ascribe justice to my Maker. ⁴Be assured that my words are not false; one who possesses full knowledge is with you.

⁵God is mighty, but he does not despise anyone; he is mighty in the strength [that comes from] understanding. ⁶He does not keep the wicked alive, but gives the afflicted their rights. ⁷He does not take his eyes off the righteous; he seats them on the throne with kings and exalts them forever.

⁸But if men are bound in chains, held tight by cords of affliction, ⁹he tells them what they have done—that they have transgressed and acted arrogantly. ¹⁰He opens their ear to instruction and he commands, "Turn away from iniquity!" ¹¹If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment. ¹²But if they do not listen, they will cross the river of death and die because they lacked commitment.* ¹³Those who are godless in heart harbor resentment; when [God] "imprisons" them, they do not cry to him for help. ¹⁴They will die in their youth; they lose their lives [engaged] in the shameful [conduct practiced by] young men.

¹⁵He saves the afflicted through their affliction; he opens their ears by means of tribulation. ¹⁶He is wooing you from the mouth of distress to a spacious place free from anguish; your table will be filled with rich food. ¹⁷But now you are burdened down with the judgment due to the wicked; judgment and justice will take hold of you. ¹⁸Do not let wrath stir you up against chastisements; neither let the greatness of the ransom turn you away [in despair]. ¹⁹Will your cry [of protest] succeed [in delivering you] from your distress? Or can all the force of your strength [deliver you]? ²⁰Do not long for the night, when people vanish from their place. ²¹Beware that you do not turn to evil, which to you may seem preferable to affliction. ²²God is sovereign; who is a teacher like him? ²³Who has appointed his way for him, or who has said to him, "You have done wrong"?

²⁴Remember to extol his work, which men have praised in song. ²⁵All mankind has seen it; men gaze upon it from afar. ²⁶How great God is—beyond our understanding! The number of his years is unsearchable! ²⁷He draws up the drops of water from the sea, they distill as rain from his clouds. ²⁸The clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind. ²⁹Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds, how he thunders from his pavilion. ³⁰See how he scatters his lightning over [the landscape; his light] reveals the depths of the sea. ³¹By these [rainstorms] he nourishes the people; he provides food in abundance. ³²He picks up lightning in his hands and commands it to strike the mark. ³³His thunder announces his presence; [the fury of] the storm [reveals] the wrath of his [holy] indignation.

37 At this my heart trembles and leaps from my bosom. ²Listen! Listen to the roar of his voice, to the rumbling that comes from his mouth. ³He unleashes his lightning beneath the whole heaven and sends it to the ends of the earth. ⁴After that comes the sound of his roar; he thunders with his majestic voice. When his voice resounds, no one can hold back [the storm]. ⁵God thunders marvelously with his voice; he does great things that are beyond our comprehension.

⁶He says to the snow, "Fall on the earth," and to the pouring rain, "Be a mighty downpour!" ⁷[By his storm] he keeps everyone [indoors], so that all men may respect his work. ⁸Animals enter their lair; they remain in their dens. ⁹The tempest comes from its chamber, the cold from the driving winds. ¹⁰The breath of God produces ice, and the broad waters become frozen. ¹¹He loads the clouds with moisture, he scatters his lightning through them. ¹²At his direction they swirl around over the face of the whole earth. ¹³Whether for discipline—if [the people] are not obedient—or for mercy, he sends the storm accordingly.

¹⁴Listen to this, Job; be still and consider God's wondrous works. ¹⁵Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes lightning appear in them? ¹⁶Do you know how the clouds are spread out [across the heavens]? —the wonderful work of him who has complete knowledge. ¹⁷You who swelter in your clothes when the land lies still under the hot south wind, ¹⁸can you join him in spreading out the sky, hard as a cast bronze mirror? ¹⁹Tell us what we should say to him; we cannot prepare our case because of our darkness. ²⁰Should he be told that I wish to speak? Should a man speak when he is confused?

²¹Now no one can look at the sun, it is so bright in the skies after the wind has swept them clean. ²²From the north comes golden splendor; God is clothed in awesome majesty. ²³The Almighty is far beyond our reach, his power and justice are great, his righteousness is great—he does not oppress. ²⁴Therefore, men fear him; indeed, all those who are wise in heart shall see him. (Job 36:1-37:24)

*Chapter 36 verse 12 literally reads, "[they] die from lack of knowledge." In some contexts the Hebrew verb "to know" means to be in covenant with another person. Conversely, the phrase "lack of knowledge" means one of the parties is no longer abiding by the terms of the covenant. (J. Hartley, footnote #16, p.471.)

Introduction

The doctor approached Don's bedside with the bad news, "Don, I am sorry, but there is no doubt. You have polio."

This was the summer of 1954 when the T.V. newscasters reported "a veritable epidemic of polio." Numb with shock, Don stammered out the questions that raced through his troubled mind: Will I be crippled? How will I work? Who will support my wife and two children?

After the doctor left the room and he was alone, Don tried to pray. But the only words that would come forth were, "Lord, why, why, why? Don't You hear me? Why don't You answer me? What about my neighbors? They drink, gamble, and play around, and all they get is a regular paycheck. We are Christians, Lord. We try to be honest and good citizens, and what do we get? This!"

At last Don fell asleep, exhausted and discouraged. Sometime during the night Don dreamed that he was fighting a huge bear that stood on his chest. He awoke in a

panic, choking for air. He commanded his lungs to function, but to no avail. The realization of his helplessness overwhelmed him. Again he prayed. This time the words that came forth were a confession of sin and surrender: “Lord Jesus, I know I am wrong. Father, I can fight no more. Forgive me. I just know I need and want You.”

Little by little Don relaxed—and precious air flowed into his aching lungs. Feeling the Lord’s presence, he gave up the struggle and surrendered to His love. (POWER, 11/25/84, pp.2-ff.)

Don found the need to surrender himself and his situation unto God; accepting the LORD’s will and thereby finding the LORD’s sustaining presence and grace—and eventually the LORD’s blessing of restoration.

Elihu counsels Job to do the same. He asks Job, *“Will your cry [of protest] succeed [in delivering you from your] distress? Or can all the force of your strength [deliver you]?”* (36:19.) Elihu is asking if Job, by his struggling and by his complaints against God, can bring himself relief from his distress. The answer is “No.” The only way to relief and recovery is the way of surrender to the LORD.

When our trials would tempt us to challenge God and struggle against Him, we need to hear the counsel of Scripture concerning the person of God and our relationship to Him. That counsel, coming from this present passage of Scripture, is as follows ...

I. Submit to the Training of the Master Teacher

Elihu begs Job to listen to him, because there is more to be said on God’s behalf (36:1-4.) Elihu will speak as God’s representative; the fact that he receives his knowledge *“from afar”* (36:3) indicates that he will speak what has been made known to him by God. Because of the divine inspiration he possesses, Elihu assures Job that his words are not false; *“one who possesses full knowledge is with you”* (36:4.)

Elihu stresses that although God is mighty, He does not despise anyone (36:5)—here is divine condescension. Not only is God gracious, *“he is mighty in the strength [that comes from] understanding”* (36:5b)—God not only has concern for man, He also knows how best to minister to him.

The object of God’s gracious and wise assistance is *“the righteous,”* as opposed to the wicked (36:6-7.) God *“does not keep the wicked alive”* (36:6a.) That is to say, the wicked are not permitted to endlessly perpetuate their ungodly lives, there comes for them a day of accountability and final judgment. Conversely, God *“gives the afflicted their rights”* (36:6b)—in His time and because of His righteousness, God vindicates the righteous who have been afflicted and provides justice for them. God does not take His eyes off the righteous, (He does not ignore their devotion and is not indifferent to their plight;) indeed, He will exalt them to the position of king forever (36:7.) Note: Elihu’s teaching is based upon divine

revelation (36:1-4) and finds its ultimate fulfillment with the final coming of Christ in glory not necessarily in this present world: *"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne"* (Rev. 3:21.)

Elihu maintains that part of the LORD's gracious concern for men is the discipline, chastening, training He administers to them (36:8-12.) In light of 36:6-7, (the object of the LORD's gracious and wise assistance is the righteous, as opposed to the wicked,) the work of God referred to in 36:8-12 would especially apply to the righteous—those who have a true relationship with the LORD, despite the fact that there is still sin present in their lives and they are still prone to depart from the path of righteousness.

There may be times when men find themselves *"bound in chains, held tight by cords of affliction"* (36:8.) Elihu is speaking of times when men encounter suffering in their lives, suffering inflicted by God: the men who are the object of God's loving concern are viewed as being taken captive by God as prisoners of war in order to check and restrain them from further pursuing a course of transgression (36:9.) When such times occur, God tells them what they have done—*"they have transgressed and acted arrogantly"* (36:9.) God enlightens them as to the cause of and reason for their affliction; namely, the fact that they have departed from the path of righteousness, which conduct itself has been motivated by pride—*"they have acted arrogantly."* The LORD's act of discipline at such times is an act of love and covenantal faithfulness. The fact that the righteous need such discipline shows that even the most godly men are susceptible to sin and in constant need of God's grace and divine oversight. The LORD graciously *"opens their ear to receive instruction"* (enabling them to understand the reason for their affliction) and commands them to turn away from iniquity (36:10.) As this disciplinary process pertains to the righteous, it is evidence of the LORD's covenantal faithfulness to those who have been brought into covenant with Him: *"I know, O Jehovah, that your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me"* (Psl. 119:75.) If those who have departed from the course of covenant faithfulness repent, they shall be restored to prosperity and contentment (36:11)—they shall be restored to the Old Testament covenantal blessings. But if they persist in their disobedience, they shall meet with the same judgment as the wicked: they shall perish (36:12.)

In contrast to the righteous, those who are godless in heart harbor resentment (36:13-14.) They do not cry out to God when He "imprisons" them (36:13b;) rather than humble themselves before the LORD and seek His mercy, they harden themselves against Him and become all the more defiant. Consequently, *"they lose their lives engaged in ... shameful conduct"* (36:14,) literally, *"their soul dies."* They become cut off from the life of God, and eventually they perish in their sins.

Elihu now reiterates the fact that the LORD in His covenantal faithfulness saves the afflicted through their affliction (36:15.) That is to say, it is by means of the

affliction He administers that the LORD causes the righteous to repent, and thus He delivers them from the course of sin and judgment.

Elihu now applies this teaching directly to Job (36:16-23.) He informs Job, “[God] is wooing you from the mouth of distress to a spacious place free from anguish” (36:16.) By means of the very afflictions Job is presently suffering, the LORD is seeking to woo and to coax Job to come to a place of great blessing—the LORD is applying to Job the very principle Elihu has expounded in verse 15. But because of Job’s obstinate attitude, he has become “burdened down with the judgment due to the wicked” (36:17a;) Job has made himself ripe to receive the judgment that befalls the wicked. Elihu warns Job that if he persists in his present course, “judgment and justice will take hold of you” (36:17b.) When a man refuses to submit to the LORD’s discipline there comes a point when that discipline (graciously intended to produce repentance, restoration, and spiritual growth) turns into punishment (an act of judgment inflicted against the unrepentant.) Elihu cautions Job against allowing anger to stir him up against chastisements (36:18a.) Job is being counseled not to respond to God’s disciplinary measures with anger that causes him to harden himself against God and become defiant. But neither should Job let “the greatness of the ransom turn [him] away [in despair]” (36:18b.) Job should not succumb to despair, thinking that his sin is so great that it is beyond forgiveness, supposing that his sin demands a ransom greater than he could ever hope to provide. The LORD Himself provides the required ransom: “if anyone sins, we have someone who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 Jn. 2:1b-2a,) literally, “he is the propitiation for our sins,” (i.e., the sacrifice that satisfies the divine justice and appeases the divine wrath of God.)

Elihu asks, “Will your cry [of protest] succeed [in delivering you] from [your] distress? Or can all the force of your strength [deliver you]?” (36:19.) Can Job by his loud protests or by the exertion of all his strength, deliver himself from his present situation? The obvious answer is, “Certainly not!” Elihu is seeking to make Job understand the futility of striving against God (cp. Job 9:4b;) Job should come to his senses and submit to God’s disciplinary training. “Who can defy [God] and succeed?” (Job 9:4b.) Job himself had raised the question that demands a negative response.

Elihu further cautions Job, “Do not to long for the night, when people vanish from their place” (36:20.) Job cannot deliver himself by his own defiant efforts, nor should he seek death as a means of deliverance; for the death of an unrepentant sinner is not a means of deliverance, it is a “deliverance” unto condemnation.

Elihu exhorts Job, “Beware that you do not turn to evil, which to you may seem preferable to affliction” (36:21.) He is warning Job not to abandon his devotion to God in this time of affliction, departing from God and turning to evil.

Finally, Elihu urges Job to consider God as the great Master Teacher (36:22-23;) Job should submit to God's disciplinary training and profit spiritually from it.

When our trials tempt us to challenge God, we need to hear the counsel of Scripture that exhorts us to submit to the training of the Master Teacher:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, ³⁰for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:28-30)

You have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: My son, do not make light of the LORD's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶because the LORD disciplines those he loves, and he scourges everyone he accepts as a son. ⁷Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as a son, for what son is not disciplined by his father? ... ¹⁰Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Heb. 12:5-7, 10-11)

II. Stand in Awe Before the Majestic Creator

Rather than wallow in self-pity or futile defiance of God, Job is exhorted to remember to extol God's work (36:24.) Job is reminded that men have sung of God's mighty work; all men have witnessed His works, albeit, from a distance (36:24-25.)

Elihu especially calls Job's attention to the thunderstorm as a manifestation of God's majestic greatness (36:25-33.) He exclaims, "*How great God is—beyond our understanding!*" (36:26)—the greatness of God is far beyond human comprehension: "*Great is Jehovah and most worthy of praise; his greatness is unfathomable*" (Psl. 145:3.)

By His infinite wisdom and power, "*[God] draws up the drops of water from the sea ... ²⁸The clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind*" (36:27-28.) God causes the water vapor to ascend into the heavens and form into clouds, and then He causes the clouds to release their vast quantity of water in the form of rain that refreshes the earth.

"Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds, how he thunders from his pavilion?" (36:29.) The clouds are poetically conceived of as being a sort of heavenly tent that contains and conceals God's awesome presence. From this cloudy pavilion God's thunder sounds forth and He sends out His flashing lightning that illuminates all the landscape below, even revealing the depths of the sea (36:30.)

God employs the majestic thunderstorm to fulfill a variety of purposes. By means of the bountiful rain God nourishes the people; he provides food in abundance (36:31.) Or again, God may employ the thunderstorm and its torrential rains as an instrument of judgment: like a mighty warrior, God lifts up the lightning bolt in his hands and orders it to strike the mark like a spear hurled at the enemy. His thunder announces his presence, and the fury of the storm reveals his indignant wrath (36:32-33.)

Elihu confesses how he is moved when he witnesses God's majesty in the thunderstorm: *"at this my heart trembles and leaps from [my bosom]"* (37:1.) Elihu calls upon us to listen to the roar of his voice (i.e.; God's mighty thunder) and to consider his lightning: *"he unleashes his lightning ... after that comes the sound of His roar; he thunders with his majestic voice"* (37:2-5a.) The flashing, exploding thunderstorm is a manifestation of God's majesty before which man should stand in awe and reverence of God.

Elihu testifies, *"[God] does great things that are beyond our comprehension"* (37:5b-13.) At God's command the snow falls upon the earth; likewise, the showers of rain and the torrential rains descend by His order (37:6.) By means of the storm, *"[God] keeps everyone [indoors], so that all men may respect his work. ⁸Animals enter their lair; they remain in their dens"* (37:7-8)—by means of the storm, God restrains the activity of both man and beast. Indeed, all creatures seek shelter because *"the tempest comes from its chamber, the cold from the driving winds"* (37:9.)

"The breath of God produces ice, and the broad waters become frozen" (37:10.) Again, God loads the clouds with moisture (37:11;) at His direction they swirl around over the face of the whole earth (37:12,) ready to carry out His will. Whether it be to administer discipline upon a disobedient people—by means of the torrential, flood-producing storm (37:13a;) or as an act of lovingkindness (37:13b,) bestowing the seasonal rains to insure an abundant crop.

Thus the thunderstorm displays God's awesome majesty; ... reminds man that he and all creatures are subject to God, the majestic Creator; ... and teaches that God administers both judgment as well as blessing.

Now, addressing Job directly, Elihu exhorts him to be still and consider God's wondrous works (37:14-20)—works that fill man with wonder when he considers the awesome power and wisdom of God displayed in the creation, especially in the storm. Does Job know how God controls the clouds and makes His lightning appear in them? (37:15.) Does Job know how God spreads out the clouds across the heavens? (37:16a)—although they are filled with vast quantities of water, they float in the sky. This is *"the wonderful work of him who has complete knowledge"* (37:16b.) Note: Modern man may scientifically analyze the creation, but as he gains a greater comprehension of it he becomes more astonished at the awesome wisdom and power of God.

Again, Job is invited to consider how he swelters in his clothes when the land lies still under the hot south wind (37:17.) Elihu is referring to the scorching sirocco wind that sweeps in from the wilderness and causes village life to lie still under its intense and oppressive heat. Can Job assist God in spreading out the sky, hard as a cast bronze mirror? (37:18.) The deep blue cloudless sky is compared to a mirror that was made out of molten brass. Standing before such awesome majesty man is left speechless; can Job teach his friends how to address the mighty God? (37:19.) Indeed, shall the Almighty be notified that a mere mortal desires to speak, as though he had something of significance to impart to the God who is omniscient? (37:20.)

Elihu closes his present argument, and his whole discourse, by turning Job's attention to the unbearable splendor of God (37:21-24.) When the wind sweeps the clouds away, exposing the sun in all of its brilliance in the clear blue sky, men are unable to look upon that brilliant light—no one can look at the sun, it is so bright (37:21.) All the more, men cannot look upon the golden splendor of God who is clothed with awesome majesty (37:22)—the LORD is clothed with absolutely awesome, unbearable, unapproachable majesty: *“God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶who alone is immortal and who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen”* (1Tim. 6:15b-16.)

God is beyond our comprehension: *“The Almighty is far beyond our reach, his power and justice are great, his righteousness is great—he does not oppress”* (37:23.) Elihu confronts us with the fact that the essence of God's splendor and majesty is His holiness. God never violates or subverts justice, for He Himself is absolutely holy: *“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all”* (1 Jn. 1:5.) This is why men fear Him (37:24a.) *“All those who are wise in heart shall see Him”* (37:24b)—God will reveal Himself and enter into fellowship with those who acknowledge Him as God and bow before Him.

When our trials would tempt us to challenge God, we need to hear the counsel of Scripture that exhorts us to stand in awe before our majestic Creator:

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. (Psl. 46:10)

... God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. ⁶Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, (so that he may exalt you at the [appointed] time), ⁷by casting all your cares upon him, because he cares for you. (1 Pet. 5:5b-7)