Job 35-36
November 1, 2026

Open with Prayer

HOOK:
Q: What's the difference between "complaining" to God and genuinely praying to God? [Let people engage]

Transition: That's the question Elihu tackles in these chapters. He observes that when people cry out against injustice, their prayers often aren't genuine attempts to connect with God, but rather instinctive reactions to pain—the kind of reflex response you'd see in animals[1]. So let's read what Elihu says about the difference, and see if his diagnosis resonates with us.

BOOK:
35 Then Elihu said:
2 "Do you think this is just?
You say, 'I will be cleared by God.'
3 Yet you ask him, 'What profit is it to me,
and what do I gain by not sinning?'
4 "I would like to reply to you
and to your friends with you.
5 Look up at the heavens and see;
gaze at the clouds so high above you.
6 If you sin, how does that affect him?
If your sins are many, what does that do to him?
7 If you are righteous, what do you give to him,
or what does he receive from your hand?
8 Your wickedness affects only a man like yourself,
and your righteousness only the sons of men.
9 "Men cry out under a load of oppression;
they plead for relief from the arm of the powerful.
10 But no one says, 'Where is God my Maker,
who gives songs in the night,
11 who teaches more to us than to the beasts of the earth
and makes us wiser than the birds of the air?'
12 He does not answer when men cry out because of the arrogance of the wicked.
13 Indeed, God does not listen to their empty plea;
the Almighty pays no attention to it.
14 How much less, then, will he listen
when you say that you do not see him,
that your case is before him
and you must wait for him,
15 and further, that his anger never punishes
and he does not take the least notice of wickedness.

16 So Job opens his mouth with empty talk;
without knowledge he multiplies words.”

36 Elihu continued:
2 “Bear with me a little longer and I will show you
that there is more to be said in God’s behalf.
3 I get my knowledge from afar;
I will ascribe justice to my Maker.
4 Be assured that my words are not false;
one perfect in knowledge is with you.
5 “God is mighty, but does not despise men;
he is mighty, and firm in his purpose.
6 He does not keep the wicked alive
but gives the afflicted their rights.
7 He does not take his eyes off the righteous;
he enthrones them with kings
and exalts them forever.
8 But if men are bound in chains,
held fast by cords of affliction,
9 he tells them what they have done—
that they have sinned arrogantly.
10 He makes them listen to correction
and commands them to repent of their evil.
11 If they obey and serve him,
they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity
and their years in contentment.
12 But if they do not listen,
they will perish by the sword
and die without knowledge.
13 “The godless in heart harbor resentment;
even when he fetters them, they do not cry for help.
14 They die in their youth,
among male prostitutes of the shrines.
15 But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering;
he speaks to them in their affliction.
16 “He is wooing you from the jaws of distress
to a spacious place free from restriction,
to the comfort of your table laden with choice food.
17 But now you are laden with the judgment due the wicked;
judgment and justice have taken hold of you.
18 Be careful that no one entices you by riches;
do not let a large bribe turn you aside.
19 Would your wealth
or even all your mighty efforts
sustain you so you would not be in distress?
20 Do not long for the night,

to drag people away from their homes.
21 Beware of turning to evil,
which you seem to prefer to affliction.
22 "God is exalted in his power.
Who is a teacher like him?
23 Who has prescribed his ways for him,
or said to him, 'You have done wrong'?
24 Remember to extol his work,
which men have praised in song.
25 All mankind has seen it;
men gaze on it from afar.
26 How great is God—beyond our understanding!
The number of his years is past finding out.
27 "He draws up the drops of water,
which distill as rain to the streams;
28 the clouds pour down their moisture
and abundant showers fall on mankind.
29 Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds,
how he thunders from his pavilion?
30 See how he scatters his lightning about him,
bathing the depths of the sea.
31 This is the way he governs (or nourishes) the nations
and provides food in abundance.
32 He fills his hands with lightning
and commands it to strike its mark.
33 His thunder announces the coming storm;
even the cattle make known its approach (or announces it coming).

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Recognize suffering as communication, not punishment. God speaks through multiple channels—dreams, visions, and the language of pain itself2. This reframes how we interpret our own afflictions. Rather than asking "What did I do wrong?" we might ask "What is God trying to teach me through this?" The application: cultivate attentiveness to what suffering might be revealing about our spiritual condition, our priorities, or our relationship with God.

Distinguish between complaining and genuine prayer. People often cry out under oppression seeking relief from their circumstances, yet never actually turn to God in prayer2. This challenges us to examine whether our prayers during difficulty are authentic conversations with God or merely demands for comfort. The application: when facing hardship, pause and ask whether you're genuinely seeking God or simply seeking escape.

Guard against bitterness as spiritual rebellion. The proper response to incomprehensible suffering is faith and perseverance; bitterness is the mark of the godless2. Elihu warns against allowing anger to entice rebellion against God, and cautions against a rebellious spirit when submission to God's hand is needed3. The application: recognize that how we *respond* to suffering matters as much as the suffering itself—our attitude either draws us closer to God or pushes us away.

Embrace humility about God's ways. God is the supreme teacher; no one can compare to Him, accuse Him of wrongdoing, or fully comprehend His work up close—it must be viewed with wonder from a distance3. The application: resist the urge to demand explanations or judge God's character based on circumstances you don't fully understand.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:
Wiersbe, W.W. (1996). Be Patient.* (pp. 135-141) *Victor Books

Having disposed of Job's first complaint, Elihu turns to the second one.
"There is no profit in obeying God" (Job 34:7–9; 35:1–16). Again, Elihu tries to throw Job's own words back in his face: "I am innocent" (10:7; 12:4; 27:6) and, "What have I gained by obeying God?" (9:29–31; 21:15) Job did make the first statement, but the second is not an accurate quotation of his words. *Job never did bargain with God as Satan said he would (1:9, 21; 2:9–10)*. Eliphaz had discussed this topic (Job 22) and had come to the conclusion that neither man's piety nor his iniquity could make any difference to the character of God. But Elihu felt it was important to deal with the theme again.

Elihu asked his listeners to look up to the heavens and see how far away the clouds were, and then imagine how far God's throne was from the earth (35:5–7). Can a man's sins or good deeds on earth exert such power that they will travel all that distance and change the Almighty in heaven?

Then Elihu asked them to consider human society (vv. 8–16). Our sins or good works may affect people around us (v. 8), but God is not affected by them. Certainly God grieves over man's sins (Gen. 6:6) and delights in the obedience of the faithful (Ps. 37:23); but our good deeds can't bribe Him, and our misdeeds can't threaten Him. God's character is the same whether men obey Him or disobey Him. God can't change for the better because He is perfect, and He can't change for the worse because He is holy.

God cares for the birds and beasts, and they trust Him (Job 35:11; Matt. 6:25–34); but men made in the image of God don't cry out to God until they are under a terrible burden of oppression (Job 35:9). They forget God until trouble comes. But God knows that their prayers are insincere, so He doesn't answer them (vv. 12–13). This explains why Job's prayers haven't been answered: his heart was not right with God (v. 14).

But even if God doesn't relieve the burden, He can give the trusting sufferer "songs in the night" (v. 10; Ps. 42:8; 77:6). "Any man can sing in the day," said Charles Spurgeon. "It is easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight; but he is the skillful singer who can sing when there is not a ray of light by which to read." The Lord gave "songs in the night" to Jesus before He went to the cross (Matt. 26:30) and to Paul and Silas in the prison in Philippi (Acts 16:25). If God doesn't see fit to remove our burdens, He always gives strength to bear them—and a song to sing while doing it!

Elihu dismisses Job's complaint that he can't see God. The important thing is that *God sees Job* and knows his case completely (Job 35:14). Job's situation won't be changed by his empty talk and many words (v. 16), so the only thing for Job to do is wait and trust (v. 14).
God is gracious (Job 33), and God is just (Job 34–35); but God is also great and mighty (Job 36–37), and Elihu thought that Job needed to recognize how great God is.

2. God is great (Job 36–37)

"Behold, God is mighty" (Job 36:5). "Behold, God exalteth by His power" (v. 22). "Behold, God is great" (v. 26). In these two chapters, Elihu magnifies the greatness of God in His *merciful purpose for man* (vv. 1–25) and in His *mighty power in nature* (36:26–37:13). He concludes his speech by making one last appeal to Job to fear the Lord and repent (vv. 14–24).

God's merciful purpose for man (Job 36:1–25). Elihu's self-importance reaches new heights as he introduces the last third of his speech (vv. 1–4). His listeners must have been getting restless; otherwise, why did he have to say, "Bear with me a little [longer]"? (v. 2) The statement "I will fetch my knowledge from afar" (v. 3) suggests that either he is boasting of wide knowledge or of getting his knowledge right from heaven. And to call himself "one perfect in knowledge" (v. 4, NIV) is hardly an evidence of humility!

(1) Explanation (vv. 5–15). The fact that God is great and mighty does not mean that He ignores man or has no concern for individuals. "God is mighty, but does not despise men; He is mighty and firm in His purpose" (v. 5, NIV). What is that purpose? To punish the wicked and help the afflicted ("poor," vv. 6, 15, KJV). Elihu contrasts God's dealings with the arrogant wicked and the afflicted righteous. "He does not keep the wicked alive, but gives justice to the afflicted" (v. 6, NASB).

Job thought that God was ignoring him, but God keeps His eyes on the righteous (v. 7; 1 Peter 3:12) and eventually transforms their circumstances. He lifts them from the ash heap to the throne (Luke 1:52–53) and sets them free from their chains (Job 36:7–8). He chastens us that He might correct us and teach us the right way to live. If we learn our lesson and obey, He will bless us once again. But if we rebel, He will destroy us (vv. 9–12).

The response of the heart is the key. The hypocrites ("godless in heart," NIV) only heap up wrath as they harden themselves against God. No matter how much God disciplines them, they refuse to cry out for help. But the humble in heart get God's message ("He speaks to them in their affliction," v. 15, NIV) and turn from their sins. The phrase "the unclean" in verse 14 refers to the male prostitutes at the various idolatrous shrines (Deut. 23:17). Elihu chose this image as a picture of the very depths of shame and sin. The wicked not only die young (Job 36:14; 20:5, 11), but they die in disgrace.

(2) Application (vv. 16–25). Job must make a decision. "He [God] is wooing you from the jaws of distress to a spacious place" (v. 16, NIV; Ps. 18:19). Job's table was laden with suffering when it could be laden with the choicest of foods. How would Job respond?

Elihu saw several dangers ahead for Job and tried to warn him. The first was that Job might look for some "shortcut" for getting out of trouble and thereby miss the message God had for him. Job might agree to let somebody "buy his way out," but no amount of money could do that (Job 36:18–19). *The Wall Street Journal* said it best: "Money is an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven, and as a universal provider for everything except happiness."

The second danger was that Job might consider taking his own life (v. 20). "The night" and "darkness" are images of death, and Job often expressed a longing to die (3:1–9, 20–23; 7:21;

10:18–22). Many sufferers have committed suicide in order to escape their hopeless situations, but there was not much danger that Job would take this route. Job was a man of faith and was not about to go into God's presence uninvited.

Elihu saw a third danger, that Job might give up all hope and turn to a life of sin (36:21). In my own pastoral ministry, I have counseled people who were so bitter against God that they abandoned their professions of faith and went back into the world. "If life is going to be this tough," they say, "then we might just as well enjoy ourselves while we can." They forget that there can be no true enjoyment without God, and that sin eventually brings its own harvest of suffering and sorrow.

Finally, Elihu urged Job to catch a new vision of the greatness of God and start praising Him (vv. 22–25). God wants to teach us through our sufferings (v. 22), and one evidence that we are learning our lessons is that we praise and thank Him, even for trials. "Glorify Him for His mighty works for which He is so famous" (v. 24, TLB). "Praise changes things" just as much as "prayer changes things."
God's mighty power in nature (Job 36:26–37:24). "Behold, God is great, and we know Him not" (36:26). This is the theme of the last part of Elihu's speech; and he illustrated it with the works of God in nature, specifically, God's control of His world during the seasons of the year.

(1) Autumn (36:27–37:5). In the East, after the heat and drought of summer, both the land and the people welcome the autumn rains. It is interesting to discover Elihu's insight into the "water cycle" of nature (evaporation, condensation, precipitation) and the need for electricity (lightning) to help the "system" work.

With the mind of a scientist but the heart of a poet, Elihu describes the storm. He begins with the formation of the clouds (36:26–29), then the release of power by the lightning (vv. 30–32), and then the sound of the thunder (36:33–37:5). To Elihu, the lightning is the weapon of God (36:32), and the thunder is the voice of God (37:2, 4–5). In the East, you can see a storm brewing miles away and with fascination watch as it approaches.

What was Elihu's response to the drama of the storm? For one thing, the storm reminded him of God's sovereignty and God's goodness. "This is the way He governs the nations and provides food in abundance" (36:31, NIV). It also aroused in him a sense of awe at the mighty power of God (37:1). David recorded a similar experience in Psalm 29.

(2) Winter (vv. 6–10). At some point, the autumn rains become winter ice and snow. Workers must stop their labor, and wild animals retreat to the protection of their dens. God breathes on the waters, and they freeze. What the weatherman calls "meteorological phenomena," Elihu calls the miracle work of Almighty God. Isaac Watts agreed with Elihu when he wrote:

I sing the goodness of the Lord
That filled the earth with food;
He formed the creatures with His word,
And then pronounced them good.
There's not a plant or flower below

But makes Thy glories known;
And clouds arise and tempests blow
By order from Thy throne.

(3) Spring (vv. 11–13). Eventually the warmer winds start to blow, the snow and ice melt, and the rain clouds appear once again. Elihu knew that the wind plays a most important part in the world's weather. Nobody can predict exactly what the wind will do (John 3:8), but God is in complete control (Ps. 148:8). The "water cycle" operates effectively: the clouds are full of water, the lightning flashes, and the rain falls. Sometimes God sends the storms for discipline (Job 37:13; Gen. 6–8; Ex. 9:13–26; 1 Sam. 12:16–19); but for the most part, the rain is the gift of His love and mercy (Job 37:13).

(4) Summer (vv. 14–18). Now the clouds "hang poised" (v. 16, NIV), and everything is still. The summer sun heats the air, the south wind (the "sirocco") blows from the desert, and people start to "swelter in [their] clothes" (v. 17, NIV). The sky is like a brass mirror, and nobody feels like doing anything but resting.

But Elihu was doing much more than delivering a poetical, scientific lecture on the four seasons. He wanted Job to consider the greatness of God and the wonders of nature *and realize how little Job really knew about God and His working in this world*. Elihu asked Job three rhetorical questions—about the clouds, the lightning, the wind, and the rainless skies. "Can you explain these things?" he asked. "Can you control them?"

This led to Elihu's final thrust: "If you can't explain to us the everyday things of nature, then how will you ever prepare a court case to defend yourself before God?" He then warned Job that to challenge God might lead to Job's being swallowed up by God's judgment (v. 20). Verses 21–22 describe the "clear shining after rain" (2 Sam. 23:4), the blue sky, the bright sun, the "golden splendor" and "awesome majesty" of God (NIV). "You can't even look at the sun," says Elihu, "and yet you want to meet God face to face!"

Elihu's closing words remind us that, even though we can't fully understand God, we know that He is great and just and does not afflict men to no purpose. What should our personal response be? "Therefore, fear Him!" Job had come to that same conclusion after pondering the works of God in the world (Job 28:24–28).

It is possible that while Elihu was speaking, an actual storm was in the making in the distance; and when he finished, the storm broke—*and God was in the storm!*
Job will now get what he'd been asking for: a personal meeting with God. Was he ready? *Are we ready?*

***Zuck, R. B. (1985). Job. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 761-765) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

3. Elihu's third speech (chap. 35)

In this speech Elihu defended God's sovereignty in answer to Job's charge that God did not reward him for his innocence. Elihu's answer was twofold: (a) Since God is supreme, He is not affected one way or the other by man's innocence or sin, and (b) God was not answering Job's cries because of his pride.

a. Job's inconsistency (35:1–3)

35:1–3. How could Job ever hope to be vindicated **by God** (cf. 13:18) as being innocent while at the same time he insisted that his innocence was of no value before God? Such a position was inconsistent, **Elihu** argued. Elihu had earlier quoted Job as having asked **what profit** or **gain** he would receive for serving God (34:9; cf. 21:15).

b. Man's inability to affect God because of God's greatness (35:4–8)

35:4–8. Replying to both Job and to the three (**your friends with you** probably refers to the three, not to Job's supposed wicked companions), Elihu pointed out that since **the heavens** and **the clouds** are higher than man, certainly God is higher than man. Therefore God is not affected adversely by man's **sins** or benefited by man's **righteous** condition. (Cf. Eliphaz's similar words about the stars, 22:12, and God's indifference to man, 22:2–3.) A person's **wickedness** or **righteousness** affects only man, not God. When God shows mercy it is not because man has persuaded Him to do so, and if He inflicts judgment it is not because man has injured Him. God is sovereign and therefore self-determining. He is not bribed by man; His standards for judging people are firm, impartial, and uninfluenced. But since a person's moral conduct does affect himself, it *does* make a difference for *him* whether he sins or not (cf. 35:3).

c. Man's inability to influence God because of man's pride (35:9–16)

35:9–11. When people are in trouble (**under … oppression**) they often turn to **God** for a way out, but they do not turn to Him as their **Maker** (cf. 4:17; 9:9; 32:22; 36:3; 40:19), the One who can give joy *in* times of trouble (**songs in the night**). Nor do they express gratitude to Him for giving them more intelligence than **beasts** and **birds** possess.

35:12–15. Therefore, God **does not** respond to people's **empty** (insincere) cries for help, for such prayers stem from pride (**arrogance**; cf. 36:9). If such proud prayers are not answered, certainly Job's cries of arrogance and impatience would not be heard. Job claimed that he could **not see** or find God (9:11; 23:8–9; cf. 34:29); yet he had placed his **case** in God's hands (13:18; 23:7). But Elihu sensed another inconsistency in Job (cf. comments on 35:2–3): the sufferer was willing to **wait for** God in His justice to clear him, and yet Job felt, according to Elihu, that God did nothing about sin (24:1–12). Elihu here misconstrued Job, for the patriarch did not say God *never* punishes the wicked; though not punished in this life, they *will* receive judgment from God at death.

35:16. For **Job** to talk out of both sides of his **mouth** (wanting God to clear him, and yet being concerned that God does nothing to put down sin) was to make **empty** (*heḇel*; cf. comments on this word in Ecc. 1:2) **talk**, speaking many **words** (cf. Job 34:37) without wisdom (cf. 34:35). Elihu felt that Job could not be cleared by God (35:2) as long as he questioned the value of serving Him (v. 3) and prayed from a heart of pride (v. 12), while thinking that God does nothing about wickedness (v. 15).

4. Elihu's fourth speech (chaps. 36)

In his second speech (chap. 34) Elihu had defended God's justice, and in his third speech (chap. 35) he championed God's sovereignty. Now in his final speech he spoke again of both of those attributes—first, of God's justice (and power) in His dealings with man (36:1–26) and then, of His sovereignty (and benevolence) in His dealings with nature (36:27–37:24). In this way Elihu sought to answer both Job (32:2; 33:10–12) and his three elders (32:3, 12).

a. Elihu's defense of God's justice and power in His dealings with man (36:1–26)

(1) Elihu's confidence in his own insights.

36:1–4. As the youthful counselor began his fourth oration (suggested by the words **Elihu continued**; cf. "Then Elihu said" in 34:1 and 35:1, which introduced his second and third speeches), he was so full of ideas to share (32:18–20) that he asked Job not to become impatient (**Bear with me**). He still had more to say in defense of God. In self-confidence Elihu said his **knowledge** (cf. 36:4) was **from afar**, that is, he had a wide range of insights, in contrast with Job who, Elihu twice said, was "without knowledge" (34:35; 35:16). Elihu's first concern, as before (34:10–12, 17) was to extol God's **justice**. Again he referred to God as **my Maker** (cf. 4:17; 9:9; 32:22; 35:10; 40:19). Not lacking self-confidence, Elihu affirmed that his words were correct and that he was **perfect in knowledge**. However, the words "one perfect in knowledge" may refer to God, as they certainly do in 37:16. This view is supported by the recently discovered Ebla tablets (Mitchell Dahood, "Are the Ebla Tablets Relevant to Biblical Research?" *Biblical ArchaeologyReview* 6. September–October 1980:58).

(2) God's just dealings with the wicked and the righteous.

36:5–7. Though not translated in the NIV, the Hebrew word for "Behold" introduces four statements by Elihu about God's power (vv. 5, 22, 26, 30). Though **God** is just (vv. 6–7) He **is** also **mighty**; and though He is mighty He does not lack mercy (He **does not despise men**). Again Elihu sided with the three worn-out debaters by maintaining that God does not allow **the wicked** to live (cf. v. 14; 15:27–35; 20:5–29) in contrast with Job's insistence that many sinners do live on in prosperity to a ripe old age (21:7, 27–33). Elihu affirmed, on the other hand, that God restores **afflicted** righteous people, giving them deserved blessings, watching over them in care (though Job felt this was no longer true of him, 29:2; 10:12), and even honoring **them with kings** and exalting them. This sounds much like the arguments of the three, that God always rewards people *in this life* in accord with their conduct. Job, as seen in 27:13–23, did not question God's general practice of justice. But Job did challenge the views that God always metes out justice *before* death and that God was being just with *him*.

(3) God's design in suffering—to lead people to repent of pride (36:8–12).

36:8–10. Sometimes righteous people (**men** is lit., "they" and probably refers to the righteous mentioned in v. 7) undergo trials (**are bound in chains**) and are subjected to **affliction** (such as being chained, **held fast by cords**, to a bed of pain). "Affliction" (*'ănî*, "being weak or poor") is also used in verse 21. "Affliction" in verse 15 translates a different Hebrew word (see comments there). When God afflicts the godly, He does not forsake them. By it, He calls to their attention their wrong conduct (**what they have done**), their transgression (**have sinned** means "have transgressed"), and their arrogance (**arrogantly** is lit., "they show themselves to be strong," a

form of the verb *gāḇar*, "to be strong"). For a person to show himself strong before God means he vaunts himself against God (this form of the verb is rendered "vaunts himself" in 15:25). Removal of pride, as Elihu had said before (33:17), is one of God's purposes in afflicting His own. By pain God gets people's attention and teaches them (**makes them listen** is lit., "opens their ears," as in 33:16 and 36:15).

36:11–12. A godly sufferer, Elihu suggested, who will listen to God and will once again **obey and serve Him** will then prosper and enjoy **contentment**. Learning from suffering and turning from pride was Elihu's point earlier (33:23–28). This sounds like the theology of the three, but they stressed that Job was guilty of sinful *actions* whereas Elihu was concerned more with Job's sinful *attitude* of pride. But believers who in pride refuse to learn from their God-induced inflictions (**they do not listen** to His corrective instruction; cf. 36:10) **will perish by the sword** (cf. 33:18) **and die without** the **knowledge** (cf. 34:35; 35:16) God wanted them to have. Job should not think of his calamities as proof that he was essentially ungodly (the view of the three agitators) or as evidence that God had forsaken him (as Job maintained). Instead he should see his afflictions as a means of helping him become humble before God.

(4) The reactions of people to suffering.

36:13–15. True sinners, **the godless** (*ḥānēp̱*, "irreligious"; cf. 8:13) **in heart** resent problems by which God may bind them (cf. 36:8). They refuse to **cry for help** or if they do, it is not in sincere repentance (27:8–9). As a result **they die** at a young age, as Zophar had asserted (20:5, 11), and are treated in judgment like hardened sinners, **male prostitutes** in pagan **shrines**. ("Male prostitutes of the shrines" translates one Heb. word *qeḏēšîm*, which is lit., "consecrated ones," i.e., individuals [males or females] given over to depraved rites, probably in idolatrous worship; cf. Deut. 23:18; 1 Kings 15:12).

On the other hand, God delivers those who are afflicted (the word for **those who suffer** is *ʿănî*, "poor, afflicted," and suggests those who are righteous; cf. comments on "affliction," Job 36:8). "He opens their ears" (a lit. translated for **He speaks to them**) and apparently, they listen and obey (cf. v. 11). **Affliction** (v. 15) translates *laḥaṣ*, "oppression or distress," from the verb *lāḥaṣ*, "to squeeze, press, or oppress." (A different Heb. word is translated "affliction" in vv. 8, 21.) God, Elihu maintained, brings a repentant believer out of the dire straits or situations which squeeze him in. Elihu used an interesting wordplay in verse 15 in that "delivers" is the word *ḥālaṣ* and "affliction" is the word *laḥaṣ.*

The result—whether death or deliverance—all depends on one's heart and his response to difficulties. If Job did not admit to pride, Elihu implied, he would be showing that he was godless. But if he turned from shaking his fist in God's face, he would demonstrate that he was one of God's own.

(5) The reactions of Job to suffering (36:16–26).

36:16–19. God was seeking to free Job from **distress** (*ṣar*, "straits, a cramped situation"; also used in v. 19), and take him into **a spacious place** (cf. Pss. 18:19; 31:8), a picture of prosperity with no obstructions, and give him rich and abundant **food**. Therefore, Job should not be

preoccupied with God's seeming failure to exercise **justice**. He was full (*mālē'*, **laden**) with that problem (Job 36:17), whereas he could have his **table** full of (*mālē'*, **laden** with) delightful edibles (v. 16).

Elihu's advice, then, to Job was that he be sure his longing for his former condition of prosperity did not **turn** him **aside** (cf. v. 21) from God's path. (**Bribe** may be rendered "ransom or recompense," as in 33:24. Perhaps it means here "the large price Job is paying by his suffering.") As many people have learned, money and accomplishments cannot buy a person *out of* **distress** (*ṣar*, "straits, a cramped situation"; cf. 36:16) or sustain him with peace *in* distress.

36:20–21. Nor should Job be so concerned about **the night** when **people** are involved in sin (cf. 24:13–17). Elihu's words in 36:20 are difficult in the Hebrew. Another possible meaning is that Job should not long for the night of death (KJV; cf. 3:20–23), that is, he should not anticipate death as a release from his suffering (3:13, 17). Instead, he should repent of his pride. Job ought to be careful that he not turn to sin, by complaining, **which** he seemed **to prefer to** bearing his **affliction** (*'ănî*; cf. comments on 36:8) without complaint. To find fault with God would not bring Job relief from his trials.

36:22–26. Elihu then turned Job's attention to **God** and spoke of **His power** (cf. v. 5; 37:23), instructional ability (cf. 36:9–10), independence (no one can tell God what to do by prescribing **His ways**), justice (no one can prove, as Job had tried to do, that God has ever **done wrong**; cf. 19:6–7), incomprehensible greatness (36:26), and eternality (v. 26). God's **years** are innumerable and unending in contrast with man's few years (9:25; 14:1–2, 5; 16:22). So, in view of God's perfections, Job ought to refrain from the sin of reproving God and ought to praise **His** great **work**, as other godly people have done, even **in song**. Everyone (**mankind** rightly translates, *'āḏām*) is aware of God's majestic work even when **men** (*'ĕnôš*, "weak, mortal man"; cf. comments on 4:17) view His awesome creation (e.g., the stars) **from** a distance. Job had frequently spoken of God's greatness (9:4–13; 10:16; 12:13; 21:22; 23:13; 24:22; 26:14; 27:11), but Elihu was seeking to point out that being aware of God's majesty and criticizing Him are inconsistent.

b. Elihu's defense of God's sovereignty and benevolence in His dealings with nature (36:27–37:24)

Having referred to God's "ways" and "work" (36:23–24), which man sees (36:25), Elihu then elaborated on God's doings in nature in the autumn storm (36:27–33), the winter (37:1–13), and the summer (37:14–18).

In his third speech (chap. 35) Elihu had spoken of God's sovereignty. Now he returned to that subject but with an added emphasis that God's control over nature involves His benevolence toward the earth, animals, and people.

(1) God's sovereignty in the autumn storm (36:27–33).

36:27–31. God manages various aspects of nature: evaporation (v. 27a), **rain** (vv. 27b–28), **clouds** (v. 29a), thunder (v. 29b; cf. v. 33; **His pavilion** is a picturesque description of the sky), **lightning** (vv. 30, 32), and the ocean. **Bathing the depths of the sea** (v. 30) should not be understood as describing the lightning; it should be translated "and covers the depths of the

ocean," meaning that God so floods the bottom of the oceans with water that people on land cannot see it.

God uses evaporation, precipitation, thunder, and lightning both to judge people (possibly a translation to be preferred to **governs the nations**) and to bless them by giving them **food** (v. 31; cf. Acts 14:17). Sometimes God uses rain to bring calamity on individuals (cf. 37:13) besides rain's more normal purpose of nourishing the soil.

36:32–33. Referring again to the **lightning**, Elihu said God **fills His hands with** it in the sense of, speaking figuratively, shooting lightning bolts like arrows. **Thunder** precedes the storm and even **cattle** sense **its approach**. "Thunder" was mentioned in verse 29 but here it is literally, "noise." **The coming storm** is the NIV's probably correct attempt to make specific the Hebrew word "it." The difficult Hebrew in the second line of verse 33 has been rendered in many ways (cf. NIV marg.; also see H.H. Rowley, *Job*, p. 301).

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