

Chapter 16

Elihu Speaks to Job of God's Righteousness

Job 36:1–22

Job 36:1–3 Elihu also proceeded, and said, ²Suffer me a little, and I will shew thee that I have yet to speak on God's behalf. ³I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker.

WHEREAS Job's other friends had spoken things originating from their own opinions, experiences, and traditions, thus representing themselves, Elihu would speak *on God's behalf*. It is here we see the distinct difference between Elihu and Job's other three friends. They had spoken from personal reason and experience. In spiritual contrast to this, Elihu reveals that he has searched for his knowledge *from afar*. Elihu assures Job that the wisdom he was about to bring forth originated not from himself but from above. He had not looked for the truth of Job's situation in his own mind or through prior personal experience, knowing that to do so would prove him just as ineffective in helping Job as his other three friends. Instead, it was from heaven that he sought understanding, and from heaven it would be given to him.¹

Because Elihu brings inspiration *from afar*, he reveals that he will *ascribe righ-*

teousness to [his] Maker. How rare are messengers such as this, who instead of seeking to justify themselves and/or other sinners like themselves, have rather chosen the divine path that pursues justifying God and ascribing righteousness to Him.

Job 36:4 For truly my words shall not be false: he that is perfect in knowledge is with thee.

(Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible, Job 36:4)
For truly my words shall not be false, . . . But strictly true; he would take the utmost care to say nothing but the truth, with the greatest impartiality and sincerity, so that what was said might be depended upon; truth spoken briefly, clearly, and on so important a subject as the righteousness of God, deserved attention;

Elihu assures Job that he would not err or speak false words concerning Job's situation, as his other three companions had done. This was because Elihu's source for wisdom was via inspiration of the Spirit.² The Spirit is truth,³ and only He can reveal where sin actually abides and the real cause of it. In his previous words to Job, Elihu revealed where he knew the source of all true wisdom resided, and

¹ *Jas. 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

² *Job 32:8 But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.*

³ *John 15:26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:*

1 John 5:6 This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

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it was not in himself but rather in Him Who imparts His Spirit to man.⁴ It is from this Spirit, this Holy Spirit, Who descends from above and originates from the higher spiritual realm,⁵ that divine knowledge is imparted to those who through mere natural birth lack it. *But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding* (Job 32:8).

Job 36:5 Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any: he is mighty in strength and wisdom.

Elihu assures Job that the Lord does not despise men and cannot do anything unbecoming toward them beyond what they deserve. Ultimately, the Lord is neither capricious, nor are His judgments concerning man erratic or haphazard. Because of the Lord's great might and His distance from man, He is above all human vendetta and emotion. Consequently, all the Lord's judgments will be fair, equitable, and deserved. The Lord's high and exalted position above creation allows this. Because He has no equal, God judges all men impartially, and as such, righteously.

Job 36:6 He preserveth not the life of the wicked: but giveth right to the poor.

(Pulpit Commentary, Job 36:6) He preserveth not the life of the wicked. There is no special

providence over the life of the wicked, as Job had supposed, or pretended to suppose (Job 21:7; comp. Job 12:6).⁶ On the contrary, God "overturneth" wicked men "in the night, so that they are destroyed; he striketh them as wicked men in the open sight of others" (Job 34:25, 26).⁷ *But giveth right to the poor.* The poor and afflicted, the meek and humble, God vindicates.

Assuring Job of God's justice, Elihu refutes Job's claim that the wicked become old and live long lives while simultaneously increasing in both influence and power. *Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?* (Job 21:7). One needs only to observe the actual lives of sinners to know that no wicked man has a good end. Hence, even if the lives of evil men appear momentarily blessed, it is only for a time before they reap as they have sown. Elihu also rightfully proclaims that the genuinely blessed are those who remain poor in spirit, who have humbled themselves before the Lord and yielded to His sovereignty over their lives. Because the Lord's deep affection has always been toward the humble and those contrite in spirit, it is foolishness to suppose that the same God Who adores and cherishes the lowly would ever promote the proud. It is not the wicked who actually live long lives but the humble, who by divine grace are given eternal life as a gift from God. This is why sinners should never be en-

⁴ Ezek. 36:26–27 *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.* ²⁷ *And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.*

⁵ Acts 2:1–4 *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.* ² *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.* ³ *And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.* ⁴ *And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

Acts 4:31 *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*

Acts 19:5–6 *When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.* ⁶ *And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.*

6 Job 21:7 *Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?*

Job 12:6 *The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly.*

7 Job 34:25 *Therefore he knoweth their works, and he overturneth them in the night, so that they are destroyed.*

Job 34:26 *He striketh them as wicked men in the open sight of others;*

vied or admired,⁸ simply because even abundant worldly prosperity is a small thing compared to being loved by the Lord and given His eternal life. It is the meek whom God looks upon with favor and bestows His blessings⁹—it is not the proud. *Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Matt. 5:3).

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, Matt. 5:3) To be poor in spirit is to have a humble opinion of ourselves; to be sensible that we are sinners, and have no righteousness of our own; to be willing to be saved only by the rich grace and mercy of God; to be willing to be where God places us, to bear what he lays on us, to go where he bids us, and to die when he commands; to be willing to be in his hands, and to feel that we deserve no favor from him. It is opposed to pride, and vanity, and ambition.

It is those who are truly poor in heart, who genuinely possess a broken and contrite spirit and tremble at God's Word, whom the Lord looks upon with favor. *For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word* (Isa. 66:2).

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, Isa. 66:2) *But to this man will I look*—That is, 'I prefer a

humble heart and a contrite spirit to the most magnificent earthly temple' (see the notes at Isaiah 57:15).¹⁰

That is poor—Or rather 'humble.' The word rendered 'poor' (עָנִי 'ânîy), denotes not one who has no property, but one who is down-trodden, crushed, afflicted, oppressed; often, as here, with the accessory idea of pious feeling Exodus 24:12; Psalm 10:2, Psalm 10:9.¹¹ The Septuagint renders it, Ταπεινὸν *Tapeinon*—'Humble;' not πτωχόν *ptōchon* (poor). The idea is, not that God looks with favor on a poor man merely because he is poor—which is not true, for his favors are not bestowed in view of external conditions in life—but that he regards with favor the man that is humble and subdued in spirit.

And of a contrite spirit—A spirit that is broken, crushed, or deeply affected by sin. It stands opposed to a spirit that is proud, haughty, self-confident, and self-righteous.

Job 36:7 *He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous: but with kings are they on the throne; yea, he doth establish them for ever, and they are exalted.*

(*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, Job 36:7) God does not forsake the godly, as Job implied, but "establishes," or makes them sit on the throne as kings (1Sa 2:8; Ps 113:7, 8).¹²

8 Ps. 37:1–2 *Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.*

Prov. 24:1 *Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them.*

Prov. 24:19 *Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked:*

9 Matt. 5:5 *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*

Ps. 37:11 *But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.*

Ps. 25:9 *The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.*

Ps. 147:6 *The LORD lifteth up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground.*

Ps. 149:4 *For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation.*

10 Isa. 57:15 *For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

11 Exod. 24:12 *And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them.*

Ps. 10:2 *The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined.*

Ps. 10:9 *He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net.*

12 I Sam. 2:8 *He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and he hath set the world upon them.*

Job 36:8–10 *And if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction;*

⁹Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded.

¹⁰He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.

Elihu reveals to Job that if the righteous find themselves bound in affliction, it is because of their own transgressions. By the Lord's allowing sinners to reap as they have sown, it is hoped that they see the error of their ways and humbly realize that their affliction is the result of divine discipline. The aim of spiritual discipline is not simply to punish past sins but also to prevent new ones from being committed. Hence, personal chastisement for sin is purposed not solely to avenge the past but hopefully also to protect the transgressor from even greater future divine judgment.

(Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, Job 36:9) The fundamental thought of Elihu here once again comes unmistakably to view: the sufferings of the righteous are well-meant chastisements, which are to wean them from the sins into which through carnal security they have

fallen—a warning from God to penitence, designed to work their good.

(Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, Job 36:9) This is Elihu's special doctrine, that God's chastisements are by way of discipline, to reform the future rather than to chastise the past.

Though most will almost universally disagree with this truth, Scripture clearly reveals that the Lord does use captivity,¹³ suffering, and affliction to open men's minds to the guilt of their sin and to assist them to come to realize their need to repent for it. But if sinners do not repent when they are being chastised by the Lord, then all hope for gaining salvation will be lost.

(Pulpit Commentary, Job 36:10) God's chastisements are to be viewed as commands to men to "go and sin no more."¹⁴

Job 36:11 *If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures.*

Elihu instructs Job that it is obedience and service to the Lord that produce a life filled with prosperity and pleasure.¹⁵ Thus, it is through true and genuine sub-

Ps. 113:7–8 He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; ⁸That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people.

13 II Kgs. 17:22–23 For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; ²³Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day.

Jer. 25:9–11 Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations. ¹⁰Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. ¹¹And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

14 John 8:11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. *15 Deut. 4:40* Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever.

Deut. 28:1–2 And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: ²And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.

Lev. 26:3–10 If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; ⁴Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. ⁵And

jection and service to the Lord that men's lives both are blessed and prosper, ultimately allowing spiritual contentment to fill their souls.

Job 36:12 *But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge.*

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 36:12) *But if they obey not*—If those who are afflicted do not turn to God, and yield him obedience, they must expect that he will continue their calamities until they are cut off.

He who resists heavenly chastisement, Elihu reveals, will die without any true knowledge of the Lord. It is not simply that spiritual disobedience will produce eternal death but also that sinners will die without ever really being able to come to know the Lord. To *die without knowledge* is to die without any true understanding of Him Who is the source of all true knowledge.

Job 36:13–14 *But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath: they cry not when he bindeth them.*

¹⁴*They die in youth, and their life is among the unclean.*

Advancing his argument of the godless and how the Lord deals with them, Elihu now draws Job's attention to the hyp-

ocrite, who refuses to cry unto God even in his affliction and as a result dies before his time. Spiritual hypocrisy also has no other end than storing up divine wrath and ultimately being accounted in death with the unclean. A religious hypocrite, therefore, though he professed to both know and follow God but actually did not, will have his lot cast with those who never even sought the Lord. This includes being counted and numbered among whom the Bible reveals are some of the vilest and most unclean of sinners, sodomites.

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 36:14) *And their life is among the unclean*—Margin, "Sodomites." The idea is, that they would be treated in the same way as the most abandoned and vile of the race. No special favor would be shown to them because they were "professors" of religion, nor would this fact be a shield against the treatment which they deserved. They could not be classed with the righteous, and must, therefore, share the fate of the most worthless and wicked of the race.

Every hypocrite is not merely a sinner; rather, he is also one who compounds his sin by lying about his true inner thoughts and feelings toward God. For this sin he will both die and lie with the unclean. To engage in hypocrisy, Elihu argues, is in God's eyes likened as committing sodomy, which is one of the highest forms of human perversion.¹⁶

your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. ⁶And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. ⁷And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. ⁸And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. ⁹For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you. ¹⁰And ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new. Deut. 6:24 And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.

Isa. 1:19 If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:

16 Lev. 20:13 If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

Lev. 18:22–23 Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination. ²³Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is confusion.

I Kgs. 14:24 And there were also sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.

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Job 36:15 He delivereth the poor in his affliction, and openeth their ears in oppression.

For the second time Elihu stresses to Job that through affliction men's ears are opened¹⁷ in order that they may hear God's voice and come to know His will for their lives.

(Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, Job 36:15) He delivereth the poor in his affliction.—The point of Elihu's discourse is rather that He delivereth the afflicted by his affliction; He makes use of the very affliction to deliver him by it as a means, "and openeth their ears by oppression."

The Lord's divine hope is always that sinners after experiencing adversity will be humbled enough to come to know their great need for subjection to divine will. For this reason affliction is just one of many means whereby the Lord continually attempts to save sinners from the pit and from progressing even further toward eternal death.

Job 36:16 Even so would he have removed thee out of the strait into a broad place, where there is no straitness; and that which should be set on thy table should be full of fatness.

(Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary, Job 36:15–23) Elihu shows that Job caused the continuance of his own trouble.

How sinners deal with affliction in its beginning will often determine the length of its duration. If they are not brought to come to know themselves, and the sin that

lives within them, as the real culprits of their bondage, then it will prove virtually impossible to escape it.

Job 36:17 But thou hast fulfilled the judgment of the wicked: judgment and justice take hold on thee.

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 36:17) According to this the meaning is, that if Job held the opinions of wicked people, he must expect that these opinions would be rapidly followed by judgment, or that they would go together, and support each other. This seems to me to be in accordance with the connection, and to express the thought which Elihu meant to convey. It is a sentiment which is undoubtedly true—that if a man holds the sentiments, and manifests the spirit of the wicked, he must expect to be treated as they are.

When any man, even one who thinks himself righteous, aligns himself with the wicked, even if it is only in speech, he opens himself up to divine judgment. Job did fear God, but by agreeing with the opinions of those who opposed Him, he had unknowingly opened the door to be treated exactly as them.

Job 36:18 Because there is wrath, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee.

If the Lord is continuously provoked by sin, and if even affliction does not turn the sinner away from it, then divine wrath is promised to quickly take him away.

Job 36:19 Will he esteem thy riches? no, not gold, nor all the forces of strength.

Rom. 1:26–27 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: ²⁷And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

¹⁷ *Job 36:10 He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.*

Job had possessed both riches and wealth,¹⁸ yet none of his previous worldly abundance could prevent the Lord from allowing Satan to touch his life. Hence, just as worldly riches and honor could not prevent Job's affliction, neither would they be able to prevent Job's death if the Lord so willed it. Whatever therefore a man possesses, be it wealth, honor, or privilege, will not prevent divine justice if sin is neither accounted for nor repented of. Hence, not even great worldly prosperity and power can prevent the Lord's spiritual judgment in rendering to men exactly as they have sown. To prosper in this life is surely not grounds for hope of gaining eternal life in the next.

*(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 36:19) Will he esteem thy riches?—*That is God will not regard thy riches as a reason why he should not cut you off, or as a ransom for your forfeited life. The reference here must be to the fact that Job "had been" a rich man, and the meaning is, either that God would not spare him because he "had been" a rich man, or that if he had now all the wealth which he once possessed, it would not be sufficient to be a ransom for his life.

*Nor all the forces of his strength—*Not all that gives power and influence to a man—wealth, age, wisdom, reputation, authority, and rank. The meaning is, that God would not regard any of these when a man was rebellious in affliction, and refused in a proper manner to acknowledge his Maker.

Job 36:20 Desire not the night, when people are cut off in their place.

Job had desired death,¹⁹ which Elihu warns is never something the sinner should wish for. The reason for this is that there is a finality in death, which

when entered into cannot be reversed. In death the sinner can no longer repent, nor is there any more chance of his being reconciled to God. It was death that Job had sought, which if actually entered into could result in being eternally cut off from the Lord. *Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me; that he would let loose his hand, and cut me off!* (Job 6:8–9)

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 6:9) The sense is, that Job wished that God would wholly finish his work, and that as he had begun to destroy him he would complete it.

Job 36:21 Take heed, regard not iniquity: for this hast thou chosen rather than affliction.

*(Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, Job 36:21) Regard not iniquity.—*Or, perhaps, the special sin of longing for death, for thou hast desired to die rather than bear thine affliction.

The sinner often hopes for a quick death in order that he need not have to bear the full punishment for his sin. For this reason, when suffering the consequences of sin, death is often preferred by the transgressor of divine will, above life.

Job 36:22 Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him?

Elihu now instructs Job that if there is to be deliverance from his captivity, it must require the Lord instructing him. *Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way* (Ps. 25:8–9). In regard to pointing

¹⁸ Job 1:3 *His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.*

¹⁹ Job 16:22 *When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return.*

Job 17:13 *If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness.*

out and revealing sin committed against God, there is none who can instruct like God. This relevant truth would very soon be apparent in Job's life, for immediately after Elihu's correction, the Lord begins His own spiritual chastisement of Job by illuminating him not only to the error of his words but also to his inward and thought-to-be-hidden secret thoughts. The Lord would instruct Job, and some of this correction would be directly related

to the accusative considerations Job had wrongfully assumed could be hidden in his heart. *I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee* (Job 42:2). When this is understood, that the Lord's correction of Job was based not solely on his words against God but also on his inward murmuring against Him, then the book is far more easy to understand. To think evil is the same in God's eyes as committing it.²⁰

²⁰ Matt. 5:28 *But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*
Acts 8:22 *Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.*