

Session 17

Elihu Speaks to Job of God's Greatness

Job 36:23–37:22

Scriptures

<i>Job 36:23</i>	<i>Job 22:14</i>	<i>Job 36:31–33</i>	<i>Job 37:15–17</i>
<i>Proverbs 19:3</i>	<i>Exodus 13:21–22</i>	<i>Job 37:1</i>	<i>Job 37:18</i>
<i>Job 36:24–25</i>	<i>Deuteronomy 4:11</i>	<i>Romans 1:20</i>	<i>Job 37:19</i>
<i>II Corinthians 3:18</i>	<i>Revelation 14:14</i>	<i>Job 37:2</i>	<i>Job 37:20</i>
<i>Exodus 34:29</i>	<i>Job 36:30</i>	<i>Job 38:1</i>	<i>Job 37:21</i>
<i>Job 36:26</i>	<i>Psalms 97:4</i>	<i>Job 37:3–6</i>	<i>Exodus 33:20</i>
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Job 36:23 Who hath enjoined him his way? or who can say, Thou hast wrought iniquity?

At the core of all rebellion is the treasonous belief that men know how to rule the earth better than God. Consequently, sinners will rarely hesitate to bring charges against the Lord, simply because they believe they can govern the earth better than Him. Yet no mortal man, let alone a sinful man, has ever ascended so high in creation that he could counsel the Lord or ascribe sin to Him.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 36:23

The idea is, that God is supreme and independent; no one has advised him, and no one has a right to counsel him.

Men are sinners; the Lord is not. Men transgress against the Lord; He does not against them.

Elihu thus declares that none have the right to say that the Lord has wrought iniquity, when in fact it is spiritually impossible for Him to do so.

Proverbs 19:3 The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, Prov. 19:3

A man's own self-will (Proverbs 1:7) overturns his way, stops his progress, whether in temporal or spiritual matters, and then, instead of blaming himself, "his heart fretteth against the Lord." (Comp. Isaiah 8:21; Revelation 16:10–11.)

Martha blamed Lazarus' death on the fact that Jesus was not there during his sickness (John 11:22). Israel blamed Moses for bringing them out of Egypt (Num. 21:5). Ahab blamed and hated Micaiah because he prophesied evil concerning him (I Kgs. 22:1–8). No doubt, they were all collectively in error concerning their accusations.

The point is that the righteous will often be blamed and accused of wrongdoing, when in fact they are actually purposing to help their fellow man.

It is also impossible to blame the Lord for anything unjust without directly sinning against Him, simply because it has been revealed, and is it certain, that he who unjustly blames or casts aspersions upon God, openly sins against Him.

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary, Job 36:23

Let not Job continue his unjust quarrel with God and his providence. And let us never dare to think favourably of sin, never indulge it, nor allow ourselves in it. Elihu thinks Job needed this caution, he having chosen rather to gratify his pride and humour by contending with God, than to mortify them by submitting, and accepting the punishment. It is absurd for us to think to teach Him who is himself the Fountain of light, truth, knowledge, and instruction.

Job 36:24–25 Remember that thou magnify his work, which men behold.

²⁵ Every man may see it; man may behold it afar off.

By directing Job's thoughts to the Lord, Elihu sought to move them away from his own misery.

What men think upon greatly determines the opinion they have of their situations.

He also who is overly occupied with self, also considers himself to be a much higher creature than he really is. Elihu's antidote to this is to direct Job's thoughts off himself and onto God.

It is also by beholding the Lord and His works, thus abandoning self-obsession, which is the key to true spiritual transformation:

II Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

What men dwell upon produces the greatest degree of influence on their character.

Moses' face shone after he came down from Mount Sinai, because of both being in, and beholding the Lord's presence. Through Moses' communion with the Lord, his own countenance and visage were actually changed.

Exodus 34:29 And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, Exod. 34:29

The skin of his face shone.—That an actual physical phenomenon is intended appears from the entire narrative, as well as from St. Paul's comment upon it in 2Corinthians 3:7–18. According to some commentators, a radiance like that here described was a part of man's original heritage, a feature of that "image of God" wherein he was created (Genesis 1:27). The gift was forfeited by the fall, and will not be restored generally until the time of the restitution of all things. But meanwhile, from time to time, it pleases God to restore to certain of His saints the physical glory, which is the symbol of internal purity and holiness, as to Moses on this occasion and afterwards to Elijah on the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:31), and to St. Stephen when he pleaded before the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:15). A glory of the kind, but of surpassing brilliancy, belonged to the human nature of our blessed Lord, who concealed it ordinarily, but allowed it to appear temporarily at the transfiguration, and permanently after His ascension (Revelation 1:16; Revelation 10:1; Revelation 21:23; Revelation 22:5). The grant of the privilege to Moses was perhaps necessary to support his authority among a people of such materialistic leanings as the Israelites.

The glory of the Lord, which made Moses' face visibly shine, came after he had direct communion with God.

What is also observable in this record is that though the Lord's glory radiated from Moses' countenance, he was at least initially unaware of it—teaching us that a Christian's spirituality may be observed and recognized by others, though he may himself not be fully conscious of it.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, Exod. 34:29

Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him—It was an intimation of the exalted presence into which he had been admitted and of the glory he had witnessed (2Co 3:18); and in that view, it was a badge of his high office as the ambassador of God. No testimonial needed to be produced. He bore his credentials on his very face; and whether this extraordinary effulgence was a permanent or merely temporary distinction, it cannot be doubted that this reflected glory was given him as an honor before all the people.

What a great spiritual lesson this teaches us, that those who do not know the Lord may be able, at least to a degree, observe Him in the countenance and visage of those who do!

Job 36:26 Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out.

An important indicator of true religion is the humble admission that there is much to know about God that we do not and cannot know during this earthly existence.

Nowhere also is human pride more evident than when sinful men both presume and assume to know a God, Whom in fact they are completely estranged from.

Job 36:27–28 For he maketh small the drops of water: they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof:

²⁸ ***Which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly.***

In truth, men do not have the power to grow or sustain anything without God providing the means through nature to have their needs met.

One of the natural evidences of this is when rain descends from the heavens, giving life to both the plants and creatures upon the earth.

Elihu thus directs Job's attention to the mystery of water in two of its three forms—vapor and liquid—to prompt him to consider that if even rain, the work of God, is so mysterious and wonderful, how much greater is its Sender?

Job 36:29 Also can any understand the spreadings of the clouds, or the noise of his tabernacle?

Another mysterious and powerful work of God is how clouds begin small and then expand, ultimately becoming great and severe thunderstorms.

Clouds are often associated in Scripture revealing the presence of the Lord:

Psalm 97:2 Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.

It seemed to be well known, even in Job's time, that clouds were a covering to God:

Job 22:14 Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of heaven.

It was also a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night, which revealed God's presence remaining with Israel in their long journey to the promised land:

Exodus 13:21–22 And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: ²² He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

A cloud also revealed the Lord's presence when He descended upon Mount Sinai:

Deuteronomy 4:11 And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness.

Scripture also describes Jesus as sitting, seemingly supported by a white cloud:

Revelation 14:14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.

By directing Job to observe the work of God concerning rain and clouds, Elihu begins the spiritual process of bringing Job to a greater awareness of the mystery that is God.

If Job looked up into the heavens and observed the great wonder and mysterious nature of the Lord's creation, then he could begin to realize that there were secrets of Him far beyond mere human and natural perception.

Job 36:30 Behold, he spreadeth his light upon it, and covereth the bottom of the sea.

Proceeding to enlighten Job to God's majesty and power, Elihu directs his thoughts to lightning and how it descends from the heavens, and even on the darkest night illuminates the vast expanse of the sea.

Like clouds, lightning is often associated with the presence and power of the Lord:

Psalms 97:4 His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled.

Scripture also reveals that lightning originates, and can come from the Lord, as a means of divine judgment:

Psalms 144:6 Cast forth lightning, and scatter them: shoot out thine arrows, and destroy them.

Through the startling display of lightning, the Lord conveys Himself as possessing sufficient spiritual power and authority to judge all sinners:

II Kings 1:10–12 And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

¹¹ Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly.

¹² And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

When the temple of God is opened in the book of Revelation, flashes of lightning will be among the strong natural forces that shall exhibit the Lord's presence within it:

Revelation 11:19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

If men would actually consider that lightning, thunder, clouds, and rain are revelations meant to display God's glory and majesty, then they would soon realize that He is far closer and much more powerful than they ever imagined.

***Job 36:31–33 For by them judgeth he the people; he giveth meat in abundance.
32 With clouds he covereth the light; and commandeth it not to shine by the cloud that cometh betwixt.
33 The noise thereof sheweth concerning it, the cattle also concerning the vapour.***

Benson Commentary, Job 36:31–33

For by them he judgeth the people—By thunder and lightning, and rain from the clouds, he executes his judgments against ungodly people. *He giveth meat*—By the same clouds by which he punisheth wicked men, he provideth plentiful showers to drop fatness upon the earth.

Other translations help to enlighten the meaning of verses 32 and 33.

(NLT) *He fills his hands with lightning bolts and hurls each at its target.*

³³ *The thunder announces his presence; the storm announces his indignant anger.*

(ESV) *He covers his hands with the lightning and commands it to strike the mark.*

³³ *Its crashing declares his presence; the cattle also declare that he rises.*

Job 37:1 At this also my heart trembleth, and is moved out of his place.

Elihu possessed a similar fear of the Lord as Job, if not actually greater. Understandably, it is true sight of God that produces fear of Him. Creation, in all its beauties and wonders likewise testify to God's eternal power and Godhead.

Romans 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Rom. 1:20

Being understood—His perfections may be investigated, and comprehended by means of his works. They are the evidences submitted to our intellects, by which we may arrive at the true knowledge of God.

The Lord has left such a mark on the universe that it still bears ample testimony to His eternal existence, glory, and majesty.

The Lord has determined that there is enough visible evidence of His power in creation, that this prohibits any excuse for men not to yield to His sovereignty and rule over their lives.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Rom. 1:20

So that they are without excuse—God has given them so clear evidence of his existence and claims, that they have no excuse for their idolatry, and for hindering the truth by their iniquity. It is implied here that in order that people should be responsible, they should have the means of knowledge; and that he does not judge them when their ignorance

is involuntary, and the means of knowing the truth have not been communicated. But where people have these means within their reach, and will not avail themselves of them, all excuse is taken away.

Job 37:2 Hear attentively the noise of his voice, and the sound that goeth out of his mouth.

It is extremely probable and virtually certain, that while Elihu was speaking to Job about the glory of God in creation, thunder reverberated and shook the environment around him, both awakening and startling Job to the Lord's approaching presence.

The tempest that was brewing became firm evidence that God was near and was neither happy nor content with what He had been observing.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 37:2

Hear attentively— ... It has been supposed by many, and not without probability, that the tempest was already seen rising, out of which God was to address Job [Job 38:1], and that Elihu here calls the special attention of his hearers to the gathering storm, and to the low muttering thunder in the distance.

The noise of his voice—Thunder is often represented as the voice of God, and this was one of the most natural of all suppositions when its nature was little understood, and is at all times a beautiful poetic conception; see the whole of Psalm 29:1–11. The word rendered “noise” (רָגַז *rôgez* (row-GEZ)), means properly “commotion,” that which is fitted to produce perturbation, or disquiet (see Job 3:17, Job 3:26; Isaiah 14:3), and is used here to denote the commotion, or “raging” of thunder.

The thunder and the great tempest containing God's presence approaching Job revealed to him two things.

First, it established the Lord's arrival in the situation.

Second, it revealed the Lord's displeasure with both Job's person and his words.

Because of this, it became evident that the Lord was ready to enter into direct conversation with Job.

Job 38:1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said . . .

Ultimately, everything that Elihu spoke to Job—including his mention of the rain, clouds, thunder, and lightning—was now actually becoming manifest, and they would together testify to the presence of God.

The Lord has often confirmed His presence through powerful acts of nature, purposed also to reveal the legitimacy of those sent forth to speak in his name.

As a result, Elijah had his spiritual ministry confirmed as being sent from God through the approaching tempest and strong bolts of lightning descending from heaven (I Kgs. 18:38). Joshua also had his ministry confirmed through the sun standing still, enabling him to win the battle in which he was engaged (Josh. 10:13).

At Jesus' crucifixion and subsequent death upon the cross, the earth did quake and the rocks were rent (Matt. 27:50–51), revealing the Lord's displeasure with the murder of His Son.

Hence, through the violent storm that was approaching, Elihu's message was being confirmed as having its source in God.

Elihu had spoken of the power and majesty of the Lord manifested throughout creation, and now Job was about to personally experience this reality for himself.

Job 37:3–6 He directeth it under the whole heaven, and his lightning unto the ends of the earth.

⁴ *After it a voice roareth: he thundereth with the voice of his excellency; and he will not stay them when his voice is heard.*

⁵ *God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend.*

⁶ *For he saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth; likewise to the small rain, and to the great rain of his strength.*

As the Lord's voice rumbled in the approaching storm, it would soon be followed by His actual approaching presence. Indeed *he* [the Lord] *will not stay them when his voice is heard* (v. 4). Once the Lord speaks, and once His voice is heard, nothing can hold back His mighty presence from intervening in men's lives.

Jesus proved this when He cried and summoned Lazarus to rise out of his tomb (John 11:43–44). It was also the spoken word of Christ which preceded His healing of the man with the withered hand (Matt. 12:9–13).

Hence, once the Lord speaks, His power, presence, and glory are ready to be revealed and made known.

The sound of the Lord's heavenly voice, ultimately is a precursor to the arrival of His actual person.

Job 37:7 He sealeth up the hand of every man; that all men may know his work.

Elihu now mentions God's supernatural ability, to stop men's hands from both labor and work and/or to shut them up because of the harsh and unbearable climate around them.

Thus, while men will often glory in the work of their own hands, it takes but a small act of God's intervention in nature to reveal that His hands are so much more powerful than any natural ability of man.

By this demonstration of heavenly power, sinners should be able to perceive that all true power, glory, and authority belong to God, and that there is no true governor upon the earth other than Him.

Job 37:8–13 Then the beasts go into dens, and remain in their places.

⁹ *Out of the south cometh the whirlwind: and cold out of the north.*

¹⁰ *By the breath of God frost is given: and the breadth of the waters is straitened.*

¹¹ *Also by watering he wearieth the thick cloud: he scattereth his bright cloud:*

¹² *And it is turned round about by his counsels: that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth.*

¹³ *He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy.*

In reality, all acts in creation have their roots either in God's correction or His mercy.

Job 37:13 (NIV) He brings the clouds to punish people, or to water his earth and show his love.

How shallow are sinners' thoughts when they insist on spending countless hours discussing the weather, but are not even the least bit interested in Him Who rules it.

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary, Job 37:13

Nature directs all creatures to shelter themselves from a storm; and shall man only be unprovided with a refuge? Oh that men would listen to the voice of God, who in many ways warns them to flee from the wrath to come; and invites them to accept his salvation, and to be happy.

Job 37:14 Harken unto this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God.

Elihu now instructs Job to stand still so that he could regain quietness in his heart and begin contemplating the wondrous works of God.

By Job being commanded to stand and cease from his own erring thoughts, room would be provided for him to hear directly from the Lord.

Mary also sat at Jesus' feet and remained still, enabling her to receive spiritual truth, which troubled an anxious Martha, because of her worldly preoccupation, forfeited (Luke 10:38–42).

Job 37:15–17 Dost thou know when God disposed them, and caused the light of his cloud to shine?

¹⁶ ***Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge?***

¹⁷ ***How thy garments are warm, when he quieteth the earth by the south wind?***

Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, Job 37:17

how thy garments are warm] Rather perhaps, thou *Whose garments are warm, when the earth is still because of the south wind.* Job 37:15 referred to the storm cloud; Job 37:16–17 refer rather to the sultry summer cloud. ... "This sensation of dry, hot clothes is only experienced during the siroccos" (Thomson, *Land and the Book*). In reference to the *stillness* of the earth under such a wind, this writer says, "There is no living thing abroad to make a noise. The birds hide in thickest shades, the fowls pant under the walls with open mouth and drooping wings, the flocks and herds take shelter in caves and under great rocks, and the labourers retire from the fields and close the windows and doors of their houses.

Like cold and unforgiving weather, smothering heat is able to keep men indoors and force them to cease from all activity and labor.

Hence, through God's influence on nature, He can easily control even the routine movements of man.

Now Elihu proposes to Job a series of questions.

First, he asks him if he knows how God controls the clouds and causes the lightning to flash out of them (v. 15).

Second, he inquires of Job as to whether he really knows how the Lord balances the clouds and keeps them suspended above the earth (v. 16).

Third, he asks Job if he is aware of the hot and warm wind that quiets all living creatures and demands they take shelter until it passes (v. 17).

By asking Job questions concerning creation, which Elihu knows Job has no answers for, it is hoped that he will realize that if he does not know these answers concerning even the earthly climate, then how could he presume to so easily know its Creator?

Job 37:18 Hast thou with him spread out the sky, which is strong, and as a molten looking glass?

Elihu now directs Job to look at the sky and all that comprises the earth's atmosphere. Hence, just as there is wonder in those things that fill up the sky, so is there even greater wonder in beholding and marveling in the sky itself.

Benson Commentary, Job 37:18

Wast thou his assistant in spreading out the sky, like a canopy, over the earth? *Which is strong*—Which, though it be very thin and transparent, yet is also firm, and compact, and steadfast. *As a molten looking-glass*—Made of brass and steel, as the manner then was. Smooth and polished, without the least flaw. In this, as in a glass, we may behold *the glory of God*, and the wisdom of *his handiwork*.

Job 37:19 Teach us what we shall say unto him; for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness.

There are many who have murmured against the Lord, who will be at a complete loss for words, and shall become exceedingly fearful, when they are summoned into the Lord's presence in heaven.

It is one thing for sinners to speak of God while it is thought they are outside of His observation, and quite another thing to attempt to defend themselves when being personally confronted by Him.

Could Job actually do such a thing as this, and properly order his words before the Lord? Elihu knew himself insufficient for such a task; was Job any different than himself?

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 37:19

Teach us what we shall say unto him—This seems to be addressed to Job. It is the language of Elihu, implying that he was overawed with a sense of the majesty and glory of such a God. He knew not in what manner, or with what words to approach such a Being, and he asks Job to inform him, if he knew.

We cannot order our speech by reason of darkness—Job had repeatedly professed a desire to bring his cause directly before God, and to argue it in his presence. He felt assured that if he could do that, he should be able so to present it as to obtain a decision in his favor; see Job 13:3, note; Job 13:18–22, notes. Elihu now designs, indirectly, to censure that confidence. He says that he and his friends were so overawed by the majesty of God, and felt themselves so ignorant and so ill qualified to judge of him and his works, that they would not know what to say. They were in darkness. They could not understand even the works of his hands which were directly before them, and the most common operations of nature were inscrutable to them. How then could they presume to arraign God? How could they manage a cause before him with any hope of success? It is scarcely necessary to say, that the state of mind referred to here by Elihu is that which should be cultivated, and that the feelings which he expresses are those with which we should approach the Creator. We need someone to teach us. We are surrounded by mysteries which we cannot comprehend, and we should, therefore, approach our Maker with profound reverence and submission.

Job 37:20 Shall it be told him that I speak? if a man speak, surely he shall be swallowed up.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 37:20

Elihu had designed to reprove Job for the bold and presumptuous manner in which he had spoken of God, and for his wish to enter into a debate with him in order to vindicate his cause. He now says, that if anyone should attempt this, God had power at once to destroy him; and that such an attempt would be perilous to his life. But other interpretations have been proposed, which may be seen in Rosenmuller, Umbreit, and Lee.

Surely he shall be swallowed up—Destroyed for his presumption and rashness in thus contending with the Almighty. Elihu says that on this account he would not dare to speak with God. He would fear that he would come forth in his anger, and destroy him.

Job 37:21 And now men see not the bright light which is in the clouds: but the wind passeth, and cleanseth them.

If men cannot even look at the brightness of the sun, then how could they possibly presume they can clearly see God, Who is Himself solely light (I John 1:5)?

(NIV) *Now no one can look at the sun, bright as it is in the skies after the wind has swept them clean.*

Benson Commentary, Job 37:21

Men are not able to look upon the brightness of the sun when it shines in the heavens, after the winds have swept away the clouds which before obscured the clear sky. And therefore it is not strange if we cannot see God, or discern his counsels and ways.

If the sun, which is but one element of God's creation, prohibits men from gazing upon it for any length of time, how can sinners presume that they could rightly observe the Lord, when He is so much more powerful and brighter than it?

Exodus 33:20 And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

Benson Commentary, Exod. 33:20

Thou canst not see my face—The full display of my glory, that light inaccessible, before which the angels stand, but which would be insufferable to mortal eyes; this no man can see and live.

Matthew Poole's Commentary, Exod. 33:20

The impossibility of the thing from man's weakness, which is such, that if God should display all the beams of his glory to him, it would certainly astonish, overwhelm, and destroy him.

Job 37:22 Fair weather cometh out of the north: with God is terrible majesty.

Benson Commentary, Job 37:22

Fair weather cometh out of the north—From the northern winds, which scatter the clouds and clear the sky. Elihu concludes with some short, but great sayings, concerning the glory of God. He speaks abruptly and in haste, because, it should seem, he perceived God was approaching, and presumed he was about to take the work into his own hands.

Just as the northern wind clears the air and removes the clouds so the sun can be seen, Elihu, now reveals that his time with Job is about to end. For soon the Lord will begin His own correction of Job, and consequently bring him into a spiritual awareness of his crimes against Him.

What this teaches us is this, that there is a time for messengers to speak on the Lord's behalf, and another more fearful and frightening time, when the Lord will directly speak for Himself.

