

JOB

CHAPTERS 35 & 36

Introduction

Although you can know a measure of happiness in this life, there is also much hurt. Job himself said that "... man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward."¹

Job was hurting. For twenty-nine chapters Job's three friends tried to help him but failed. Job called them "miserable comforters"² and "worthless physicians."³

Then, beginning in chapter thirty-two, a young man named Elihu begins to speak, and he continues uninterrupted for six chapters. He is different from the three: He depends upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit in dealing with Job. Here, finally, is someone who can help.

I want to help people who hurt. I know that **you** want to help people who hurt. We can learn something about helping the hurting from Elihu.

What Elihu says to Job can be summarized. He says that there are two attributes of God to *remember* in your suffering, two attributes of God to *recognize* in your suffering, and one attitude to *realize* in your suffering.

The attributes of God you must remember, or remind others of, in suffering are that God saves and that God is sovereign. We dealt with these in our last study:

▶▶ Although you're suffering, remember God saved you. He that has begun a good work in you will continue to perform it.

¹ Job 5:7

² Job 16:2

³ Job 13:4

▶▶ Although you're suffering, remember God is sovereign. He controls all circumstances for your ultimate good and for His glory, doing only what is truly beneficial for you.

Those two attributes are the foundation upon which you offer help to the hurting. Once they are established, you can build upon them the next two attributes:

#1 All Through Your Suffering
Recognize That God Suffers-long

#2 All Through Your Suffering
Recognize That God Sanctifies

* * *

#1 All Through Your Suffering
Recognize That God Suffers-long
(Chapter 35)

Verse fourteen contains the key thought:

Job 35:14 Although you say you do not see Him, Yet justice is before Him, and you must wait for Him.

Job was discouraged that his suffering continued. We can certainly sympathize with him. His conclusion was that God must not be concerned with justice - - with rewarding the righteous and punishing the unrighteous. Elihu points out that God will sort all of these things out in time - - "justice is before Him." God is being patient with sinners. We call this special patience longsuffering; we say that God suffers-long. Therefore, in the meantime, you, too, must wait patiently - - even in your suffering.

Elihu builds to this counsel by first quoting Job's own words back to him:

Job 35:1 Moreover Elihu answered and said:
Job 35:2 "Do you think this is right? Do you say, 'My righteousness is more than God's'?
Job 35:3 For you say, 'What advantage will it be to You? What profit shall I have, more than if I had sinned?'

God allows the righteous to suffer and the wicked to prosper. Job concluded from this observation that it was no advantage to be

righteous! Certainly, that is how it seems to the righteous sufferer; but Job's viewpoint is too limited. God suffers-long with the unrighteous because He is not willing that any should perish, but that they all would come to eternal life. The advantage of being righteous will be an eternal one once God's long-suffering ends.

Job 35:4 "I will answer you, And your companions with you.

Job 35:5 Look to the heavens and see; And behold the clouds; They are higher than you.

Job 35:6 If you sin, what do you accomplish against Him? Or, if your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to Him?

Job 35:7 If you are righteous, what do you give Him? Or what does He receive from your hand?

Job 35:8 Your wickedness affects a man such as you, And your righteousness a son of man.

Job thought God unconcerned. The opposite is true. God is ultimately concerned and therefore does not react immediately to the righteousness or unrighteousness of men. He doesn't reward you every time you deserve it, and He doesn't punish you every time you deserve it. God has eternity in view and suffers-long with *both* the righteous and the unrighteous.

Job 35:9 "Because of the multitude of oppressions they cry out; They cry out for help because of the arm of the mighty.

Job 35:10 But no one says, 'Where is God my Maker, Who gives songs in the night,

Job 35:11 Who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth, And makes us wiser than the birds of heaven?'

You cry out to God in your suffering, usually for Him to deliver you from it. Elihu suggests that you should instead ask God to come alongside of you and take you through your suffering by giving you "songs in the night." He suggests that this is spiritual maturity - - separating you from the level of the beasts who instinctively flee from danger.

You can't have songs in the night unless it's dark! There are certain choruses that can only come to you in your suffering; certain chords that can only be struck when you are struck down. God suffers-long with you, allowing you to complain in your suffering. He knows that you want to sing night songs even though you still fear the dark.

The next two verses concern the unrighteous in *their* suffering:

Job 35:12 There they cry out, but He does not answer, Because of the pride of evil men.
Job 35:13 Surely God will not listen to empty talk, Nor will the Almighty regard it.

“There,” in their suffering, they, too cry out - - but without sincerity. God is not moved to alleviate all human suffering because He sees the insincerity of the heart. He suffers-long by allowing sin and suffering to continue, knowing that some **will** be humbled by it to seek Him sincerely.

Job 35:14 Although you say you do not see Him, Yet justice is before Him, and you must wait for Him.

God will work everything out in the end; justice will be done. I, for one, am thankful that He suffers-long!

Job 35:15 And now, because He has not punished in His anger, Nor taken much notice of folly,

Job 35:16 Therefore Job opens his mouth in vain; He multiplies words without knowledge."

God doesn't "punish" the unrighteous in His "anger." No, He suffers-long with them - - desiring their sincere repentance.

God doesn't overreact to the foolish cries of the righteous. No, He suffers-long with them - - desiring that they learn songs in the night.

“Therefore,” Job was *wrong* in his comments and conclusions about God.

God's longsuffering must be taken into account when you are suffering, or when you are dealing with someone who is suffering. Failure to do so magnifies the present and minimizes the future. Everyday we can all be thankful that God suffers-long. Successful suffering depends upon recognizing God's longsuffering!

#2 All Through Your Suffering Recognize That God Sanctifies (Chapter 36)

“Sanctification” is a term loaded with doctrinal meaning. I mean it in our context to indicate that God sets you apart for growth toward maturity. I mean it as the logical spiritual by-product of remembering that God saved you, that God is sovereign, and that God suffers-long: Your suffering is a way of setting you apart to grow toward maturity as a Christian.

In chapter thirty-six, Elihu speaks of God’s “instruction” (literally, *correction*) in verse ten, and of His “teaching” in verse twenty-two. Recognize that God is instructing, correcting, teaching you as you are set apart in your sufferings.

Job 36:1 Elihu also proceeded and said:

Job 36:2 "Bear with me a little, and I will show you That there are yet words to speak on God's behalf.

Job 36:3 I will fetch my knowledge from afar; I will ascribe righteousness to my Maker.

Job 36:4 For truly my words are not false; One who is perfect in knowledge is with you.

What Elihu seems to be emphasizing is that his words are coming to Job with God’s anointing upon them. They’re not his words, or his counsel; they are what God wants him to say.

Often people claim to be speaking for God, or with words from God. I’m so thankful that we can test their words by the Word of God as revealed in Scripture! You see, sometimes people are not really representing God; they are misrepresenting God. Be careful and test everything you hear.

Job 36:5 "Behold, God is mighty, but despises no one; He is mighty in strength of understanding.

Job 36:6 He does not preserve the life of the wicked, But gives justice to the oppressed.

God is mighty and certainly could deal immediately with the wicked. But He is also mighty “in strength of understanding.” We would say He is mighty and merciful. Eventually He will deal with the wicked and give justice to the oppressed. For now He suffers-long.

How does this affect the righteous?

Job 36:7 He does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous; But they are on the throne with kings, For He has seated them forever, And they are exalted.

The key here is the word “forever.” God has seated the righteous on thrones “forever” and they are “exalted.” This is the true spiritual state of all believers; they are seated in heavenly places with Jesus, despite their temporary earthly sufferings.

Your temporary sufferings are for your instruction. Elihu describes at least two ways God teaches you through suffering:

Job 36:8 And if they are bound in fetters, Held in the cords of affliction,
Job 36:9 Then He tells them their work and their transgressions; That they have acted defiantly.
Job 36:10 He also opens their ear to instruction, And commands that they turn from iniquity.

The two things to note about suffering are:

- 1) Suffering can discipline you for sin: “He tells them their work and their transgression.”
- 2) Suffering can keep you from sin: “[He] commands that they turn from iniquity.”

The intent of God’s instruction is in verses eleven and twelve:

Job 36:11 If they obey and serve Him, They shall spend their days in prosperity, And their years in pleasures.
Job 36:12 But if they do not obey, They shall perish by the sword, And they shall die without knowledge.

If believers humble their hearts to learn through their sufferings, spiritual prosperity and spiritual pleasure will accompany them in their pilgrim journey on the earth. If they harden their hearts against suffering, they will die never learning the lessons God intended for them to learn. “They shall perish by the sword” indicates that their lives on earth will resemble that of unbelievers.

Job 36:13 "But the hypocrites in heart store up wrath; They do not cry for help when He binds them.
Job 36:14 They die in youth, And their life ends among the perverted persons.
Job 36:15 He delivers the poor in their affliction, And opens their ears in oppression.

If you are proud - - a “hypocrite,” a believer who despises God’s choice that you suffer - - then your life will be no different than that of

an unbeliever. But if you are “poor” - - poor in spirit and humble - - God will open your ears to receive instruction and encouragement in your suffering.

Elihu has come to a point of application. Job must decide how to apply this counsel. In verse sixteen he says,

Job 36:16 "Indeed He would have brought you out of dire distress, Into a broad place where there is no restraint; And what is set on your table would be full of richness.

Another translation, the NIV, says in verse sixteen,

Job 36:16 "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.

God was calling Job to a spiritual feast. How would he respond to this Spirit-led counsel?

Elihu saw three incorrect responses: *Short-cuts*, *suicide*, and *sin*.

▶▶ Don't take short-cuts:

Job 36:17 But you are filled with the judgment due the wicked; Judgment and justice take hold of you.

Job 36:18 Because there is wrath, beware lest He take you away with one blow; For a large ransom would not help you avoid it.

Job 36:19 Will your riches, Or all the mighty forces, Keep you from distress?

Job might seek to short-cut his suffering by “a large ransom... riches... or... mighty forces.”

I love to find short-cuts to suffering! But I always end up back where I started, only worse off.

▶▶ Don't consider suicide:

Job 36:20 Do not desire the night, When people are cut off in their place.

These are images that describe a desire to die - - to commit suicide.

We don't talk much about suicide in the church. Occasionally I get into a theoretical debate as to whether or not a true believer can commit suicide. In other words, Is suicide an unpardonable sin? The

answer is that believers do commit suicide; it is not an unpardonable sin. We're afraid to say these things because we don't want to encourage anyone to commit suicide. While not an unpardonable sin, it is nevertheless sin! It is never the answer, always a selfish act.

The third incorrect response is to sin.

▶▶ Don't sin:

Job 36:21 Take heed, do not turn to iniquity, For you have chosen this rather than affliction.

Some people give up on God in their suffering and turn to a life of sin. True, they enjoy themselves for a time. Eventually sin brings greater suffering - - both spiritual and physical.

Instead of these *wrong* responses, Elihu reminds Job that his sufferings are being used by God:

Job 36:22 "Behold, God is exalted by His power; Who teaches like Him?

Job 36:23 Who has assigned Him His way, Or who has said, 'You have done wrong'?

God was teaching Job - - or He could be, if Job would let Him. God had set him apart to teach and instruct. Job had himself recognized this earlier when he said,

Job 23:10 But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

God saved you... He is sovereign... He suffers-long... And He sanctifies. Remember and recognize these in your suffering.

When you *do* remember and recognize these attributes, you're ready to change your attitude: You're ready to **submit** to God. As Elihu ends his words, that will be his counsel to Job.

Conclusion

I know you want to help those who hurt. Help them the way Elihu helped Job. Bring them to the point of being ready to submit to the Word of God. Therein is their victory.