

Job 36-37 – “Consider the Wondrous Works of God”
Psalm 105 (147, 68)
John 10:22-42

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Elihu concludes his speech with an extended meditation on the wondrous works of God.

As one who has Abrahamic roots, but who is portrayed in an Edomite context,
Elihu speaks only of God's wondrous works in general revelation
(in creation and providence).

There is nothing about the Exodus, the Conquest,
or anything specific about Israel's history –
and yet the language that he uses would make an *Israelite*
think about these things.

Elihu's final speech is all about seeing and hearing.

He calls Job to “behold” God’s mighty deeds,
and to “listen” to the voice of God in the thunder.

Since Elihu doesn't expect God to show up,
he thinks that he needs to "justify God" (what Job failed to do, in his opinion).

Elihu shows us both the wisdom and the limitations of general revelation.

We can learn a lot from the mighty deeds of God revealed in the created order –
and in the history of nations.

But by the time you get to the end of Elihu's speech, all you have is law –
there is no gospel!

Elihu says, “Listen to God; behold his mighty deeds, and do what is right and just.”
You see the sovereignty and majesty of God clearly revealed – even his kindness –
but there is no grace and mercy.

Since you just heard Elihu’s description of God’s wondrous works,

I want you to hear another way of talking about God’s wondrous works.

Psalm 105 calls us to sing of God’s wondrous works –
to tell of his mighty deeds.

But Psalm 105 emphasizes *the gospel* – God’s mighty deeds in redeeming his people.

Sing Psalm 105

John 10:22-42

Throughout the book of Job we have seen the connection between power and knowledge.

The one who is able to do mighty deeds is also the one who is able to teach true wisdom.

Jesus says,

“If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me;
but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works,
that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.”

Truly, one who is perfect in knowledge is now here!

Introduction: “One Who Is Perfect in Knowledge Is with You” (36:1-4)

36 And Elihu continued, and said:

² “Bear with me a little, and I will show you,
for I have yet something to say on God's behalf.

³ I will get my knowledge from afar
and ascribe righteousness to my Maker.

⁴ For truly my words are not false;
one who is perfect in knowledge is with you.

Chapters 36-37 of Job are a single speech –
held together by Elihu’s two references to perfect knowledge in 36:2-4 and 37:16.

Elihu claims to be perfect in knowledge.

In Job 12:4, Job had said that he was “a just and blameless man” –
(the word “blameless” is the same adjective here translated “perfect”).

And yes, it is the same word that is used in Job 1,
when God says that there is no one like Job,
one who is *blameless* and upright, who fears God and turns away from evil
Now Elihu claims to be “blameless” (or perfect) in knowledge.

James Wharton suggests that “we are being deliberately invited
to contrast Job’s truly ‘blameless’ life of innocent suffering
with the unbounded arrogance of an unscarred pip-squeak
who claims ‘perfection’ for his religious grasp of Job’s suffering and its cause.”
When in fact, this allegedly perfect knowledge is a tired rehash
of everything that Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have already said!
[James Wharton, *Job* (151)]

But as we have seen throughout Elihu’s speeches,
you have to be doubly careful –
because while Elihu is the “jester” – the “court fool” –
who says some silly things –
you always have to listen carefully,
because mixed in with his foolery are some zingers!

He says much about God that is true!

1. Seeing and Hearing God’s Mighty Deeds (36:5-21)

a. Exile and Return Is Due to Iniquity and Repentance (v5-11)

⁵ “Behold, God is mighty, and does not despise any;
he is mighty in strength of understanding.

⁶ He does not keep the wicked alive,
but gives the afflicted their right.

⁷ He does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous,
but with kings on the throne
he sets them forever, and they are exalted.

⁸ *And if they are bound in chains
and caught in the cords of affliction,*
⁹ *then he declares to them their work
and their transgressions, that they are behaving arrogantly.*
¹⁰ *He opens their ears to instruction
and commands that they return from iniquity.*
¹¹ *If they listen and serve him,
they complete their days in prosperity,
and their years in pleasantness.*

Elihu starts by declaring the mighty power and justice of God.

He repeats what we saw last time – that God always does what is right.
God does not need to investigate a case.

He knows all things (“he is mighty in strength of understanding”)
and so when he renders judgment
he does what is right the first time!

When God comes in judgment he makes everything right.

He does not keep the wicked alive, but gives the afflicted their rights.

*And, if there are some who are unjustly held captive –
he “opens their ears to instruction and commands that they return from iniquity.
If they listen and serve him, they complete their days in prosperity,
and their years in pleasantness.” (v10-11)*

Notice the captivity language!

Job had spoken in Job 12 about God leading kings away in chains.

Now Elihu echoes Job’s language, promising that the captives who repent will be set free.

Elihu sees the world in the same sort of simplistic terms as Job’s friends:

if you are in captivity, it is because you have sinned;
and if you repent, then you will be restored!

He says that those who listen and heed God’s warning will “complete their days in prosperity.”

b. But the Godless Cherish Anger and Perish by the Sword (v12-15)

¹² *But if they do not listen, they perish by the sword
and die without knowledge.*
¹³ *The godless in heart cherish anger;
they do not cry for help when he binds them.*
¹⁴ *They die in youth,
and their life ends among the cult prostitutes.*
¹⁵ *He delivers the afflicted by their affliction
and opens their ear by adversity.*

But then, in verses 12-15, Elihu says that those who *do not listen* will perish by the sword.

They die “without knowledge.”

(Remember that Elihu had claimed that he was *perfect* in knowledge;
now he says that those who do not listen die *without* knowledge.)
They cherish anger – and they perish by the sword.

Elihu sees affliction as God’s way of rescuing the afflicted.

And Elihu is right:

God frequently sends us adversity in order to open our ears to his voice.
The general pattern is that those who repent are restored –
but those who do not listen perish.

But then in verses 16-21, Elihu tries to apply his general principles to Job.

And as we have seen, the problem with applying general principles to Job,
is that Job is unique!

God says that “there is none like him on the earth,
a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil.”

If it was just Job who had asserted his own innocence,
I’d be just as skeptical as the friends!

But *God says* that Job is innocent.

God has already declared that Job is blameless –
anyone who condemns Job is arguing against God!

c. But Your Cry for Help Will Not Be Answered (v16-21)

- ¹⁶ *He also allured you out of distress
into a broad place where there was no cramping,
and what was set on your table was full of fatness.*
- ¹⁷ *But you are full of the judgment on the wicked;
judgment and justice seize you.*
- ¹⁸ *Beware lest wrath entice you into scoffing,
and let not the greatness of the ransom turn you aside.*
- ¹⁹ *Will your cry for help avail to keep you from distress,
or all the force of your strength?*
- ²⁰ *Do not long for the night,
when peoples vanish in their place.*
- ²¹ *Take care; do not turn to iniquity,
for this you have chosen rather than affliction.*

But watch *how* Elihu engages Job.

Elihu brings us back to Satan’s question:

“Does Job fear God for nothing?”

And Elihu says, “remember all the things God gave you?”

Well, God has taken them away to see whether you will still follow him.

You have received the judgment of the wicked,
and now you are acting like the wicked as well.

Elihu warns Job that God does not answer him
because Job has chosen iniquity over affliction.

He exhorts Job to hold fast and endure patiently through trouble:
“let not the greatness of the ransom turn you aside.”

Elihu is saying, even though you can never pay the ransom –
there is nothing you can do to improve your situation in life –
still, do not long for the night –
do not seek death.

In your desire to escape affliction,
do not turn to wickedness!

Elihu misses the point, when it comes to Job.
But we, on the other hand, need to hear this!
After all, you are in danger of turning aside to wickedness
because the way of life isn't easy!

Nathaniel Hawthorne has a great parody of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*,
called, *The Celestial Railroad* (written in the 19th century).
The whole premise is that the old way of the pilgrim was too difficult –
and so with modern technology, we have bypassed the old ways,
and built a railroad that will give you a trouble-free journey to the Celestial City.
Just sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride!

We like the easy way – and we will do most anything to avoid difficulty and affliction.
But if we try to *use* God to get what *we* want,
then we fall into the trap of Satan's question:
“Does Job fear God for no reason?”
Satan thinks that the point of everything is, “What's in it for me?”
That's the way Satan thinks.
That someone would fear and love God simply because of who God is
is beyond Satan's imagination.

But so long as you are fixated on “what's in it for me” –
so long as you seeking first your own kingdom,
you will keep taking “the easy way” –
you will keep trying to manipulate God.

Of course, at the end of Hawthorne's *Celestial Railroad*,
the train begins to plummet straight into hell!
Hawthorne may have rejected part of his Puritan past,
but he understood the gospel well enough to know
that there is no way to glory except the way of the cross.

Elihu, in his own way, urges Job to endure patiently the way of the cross,
and then in verses 22-33, urges him to behold God's mighty deeds.

2. Behold God's Mighty Deeds... (36:22-33)

Behold is the key word in these 12 verses.

It is used in verses 22, 26, and 30,

as Elihu calls Job to *pay attention* – to *behold* – three things.

First,

a. God Is Exalted – So Extol His Work (v22-25)

²² *Behold, God is exalted in his power;
who is a teacher like him?*

²³ *Who has prescribed for him his way,
or who can say, 'You have done wrong'?*

²⁴ *Remember to extol his work,
of which men have sung.*

²⁵ *All mankind has looked on it;
man beholds it from afar.*

Notice how Elihu weaves together the themes of power and knowledge.

“God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him?”

If you want to know God – look at his mighty deeds.

He is Almighty.

No one can instruct God, or tell him “you have done wrong”!

(As Isaiah will say, “Does the clay say to him who forms it,
‘What are you making?’ or ‘Your work has no handles’?” 45:9)

And we should “extol his work, of which men have sung.”

And Elihu points out that all mankind has looked on God's work.

Man beholds it from afar.

When Elihu had claimed to be perfect in knowledge (36:4),

he had insisted that he had obtained his knowledge “from afar” (36:3).

Now he says that man beholds God's work “from afar.”

Remember that Elihu – like Job and his friends –
are set in an Edomite context.

They are not Israelites.

They have no access to scripture –

and *if* they have heard stories about their ancestors, Abraham and Isaac,
those stories don't mean much to them.

After all, the stories about Esau that *Israel* told, were not very flattering to Esau!

Why should Edomites tell their children stories like,

“Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have hated!”?

So the Edomite knowledge of God is a knowledge obtained by general revelation

(God's works in creation and providence),

and through the light of nature

(being created in the image of God,

and having a knowledge of him imprinted on their hearts).

All humanity has access to this general knowledge of God revealed in the created order.
Everyone sees this.

(Paul will talk about this in Romans 1 – the universal knowledge of God
that renders everyone without excuse,
because everyone knows *that* God is,
and that he should be worshiped and glorified as God).

As Elihu says in verses 26-29 in the second “behold”:

b. God Is Great – Beyond Our Understanding (v26-29)

- ²⁶ *Behold, God is great, and we know him not;
the number of his years is unsearchable.*
²⁷ *For he draws up the drops of water;
they distill his mist in rain,
²⁸ which the skies pour down
and drop on mankind abundantly.*
²⁹ *Can anyone understand the spreading of the clouds,
the thunderings of his pavilion?*

Here, Elihu introduces the theme that will continue to the end of his speech:
the theme of the storm – the “thunderings of his pavilion.”

In verses 26-29, the emphasis is on the hiddenness – the mysteriousness – of God.
His works are beyond our understanding.
We now understand a lot of the mechanics of how clouds and thunder work.
But Elihu is not merely talking about “scientific knowledge.”

Elihu’s point is that if we cannot exhaustively understand the created order,
how much less can we comprehend God.

Elihu has made it clear already that everyone *knows* God in some sense.

But now he declares that “we know him not.”

What does he mean?

We call this the “incomprehensibility” of God.

To comprehend something is to have complete knowledge.

If we say that someone has a comprehensive knowledge of a subject,
we are saying that he has mastered the field.

Our Ph.D. students have to take “comprehensive exams”
demonstrating mastery of their chosen fields.

Of course, anyone who has ever taken a comprehensive exam
will tell you that he came away from the exam

feeling like an ignoramus because there is always so much more to know!

We never have “comprehensive knowledge” “exhaustive knowledge” of anything!

How much less can anyone have a comprehensive knowledge of the Almighty!
We can know some things truly about God –
but one thing that we *know* is that “God is great, and we know him not!”

The *third* “behold” turns to what lightning and thunder is *for*:

c. God Judges the Peoples with His Lightning and Thunder (v30-33)

³⁰ *Behold, he scatters his lightning about him
and covers the roots of the sea.*

³¹ *For by these he judges peoples;
he gives food in abundance.*

³² *He covers his hands with the lightning
and commands it to strike the mark.*

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

Notice how the storm has two parts:
lightning and thunder display God’s judgment –
yet God’s judgment has two possible results:
1) condemnation
2) vindication

Any farmer will tell you that a good downpour is either a blessing or a curse.
Right now, it would be a blessing.
The crops need water!
But when he’s ready to harvest?
That would be a curse!

Verse 32 provides a striking image:
“He covers his hands with the lightning.”
In other words,
when lightning strikes, it is God’s own hand striking the earth.
Elihu’s point is that there are no random lightning strikes.
Lightning only strikes God’s own target.

Science can describe the “how” of the lightning and the thunder,
but never forget that God’s hand is in the lightning,
and that his voice is in the thunder!

3. So Listen to the Thunder (37:1-24)

And in chapter 37,
Elihu’s emphasis turns from *seeing* the hand of God in the lightning,
to *hearing* the voice of God in the thunder.

Notice all the verbs of hearing:
“keep listening” (v2)
“his voice roars” (v4)

“God thunders wondrously with his voice” (v5)
“to the snow he says” (v6)
“By the breath of God” (v10)
and even “Hear this, O Job” (v14)

a. Pay Attention to the Voice of God in Creation (37:1-13)

- 37 *“At this also my heart trembles
and leaps out of its place.*
- ² *Keep listening to the thunder of his voice
and the rumbling that comes from his mouth.*
- ³ *Under the whole heaven he lets it go,
and his lightning to the corners of the earth.*
- ⁴ *After it his voice roars;
he thunders with his majestic voice,
and he does not restrain the lightnings^[b] when his voice is heard.*
- ⁵ *God thunders wondrously with his voice;
he does great things that we cannot comprehend.*
- ⁶ *For to the snow he says, ‘Fall on the earth,’
likewise to the downpour, his mighty downpour.*
- ⁷ *He seals up the hand of every man,
that all men whom he made may know it.*
- ⁸ *Then the beasts go into their lairs,
and remain in their dens.*
- ⁹ *From its chamber comes the whirlwind,
and cold from the scattering winds.*

Notice the whirlwind here.

In the next chapter we will hear about a whirlwind –
but I should point out that this is a different word.

The *sufah* (here) refers to the whirlwinds that you encounter in nature:
whether the whirlwinds of the desert, the whirlwinds caused by speeding chariots,
or the whirlwind of the tempest (perhaps tornados).

But the *se’arah* (in chapter 38) is the divine whirlwind:
Elijah was caught up in a whirlwind (*se’arah*).

Isaiah speaks of God coming to Jerusalem in a whirlwind of judgment (Isaiah 29:6).
The *se’arah* is the storm of the LORD in Jeremiah 23,
and it is in the midst of the *se’arah* that the LORD appears to Ezekiel (ch 1).

Elihu thinks that God’s answer in the *sufah* is sufficient.

In his opinion, God’s voice in creation answers Job.

But Elihu will be in for a big surprise when the *se’arah* – the divine whirlwind –
appears a few minutes later!

- ¹⁰ *By the breath of God ice is given,
and the broad waters are frozen fast.*

- ¹¹ *He loads the thick cloud with moisture;
the clouds scatter his lightning.*
- ¹² *They turn around and around by his guidance,
to accomplish all that he commands them
on the face of the habitable world.*
- ¹³ *Whether for correction or for his land
or for love, he causes it to happen.*

In verse 13, Elihu says that there are three reasons why the storm comes:
either for correction, or for his land or for love.”

For correction (the word here means “a club” or “a rod”) – it is the same word used in Psalm 23,
“your rod” and your staff, they comfort me.

The rod is used for correction.

Notice that the goal of the rod is *correction*, not destruction.

Thunder and lightning can be sent as a warning – a call to repentance.

But the storm can also be sent simply “for his land.”

Since Elihu is not an Israelite, we should not see this as a reference to the promised land.

Indeed, the word is “*eretz*” – which in its general usage refers to the whole earth.

His land simply reminds us that all the earth is the Lord’s!

But sometimes the thunder and lightning – the rain and snow –
has nothing particularly to do with us!

God cares for the sparrows.

And sometimes, that’s all he’s doing!

But thirdly, the coming of the storm can be “for love” – *hesed*.

Hesed normally means “steadfast love” – “covenant faithfulness” –
loyalty to what you have promised to do.

God commands the winds and the rain – the thunder and the lightning –
to accomplish his purposes on earth,
for correction, for his land, and for his own steadfast love and faithfulness.

Why has Elihu spent so much time reminding Job about God’s voice in creation?

Well, he explains his purpose in verse 14:

b. Consider the Wondrous Works of Him Who is Perfect in Knowledge (v14-24)

- ¹⁴ *“Hear this, O Job;
stop and consider the wondrous works of God.*

Elihu goes on to describe the “wondrous works of God”
in terms of his mighty deeds in creation and providence.

But this the phrase used in Exodus 3:14,
when God promises that he will do wonders in Egypt;

when God says at Sinai that he will do wonders
in bringing Israel into the Promised land (Ex 34:10; Josh 3:5);
And whenever the Psalms speak of God's "wondrous works" (27 times) –
they usually refer to the Exodus and the Conquest.
And many Psalms connect the "wondrous works" of creation
with the "wondrous works" of the Exodus (e.g., Psalm 136).

Job himself used the same word in Job 9:10 –
where Job spoke of God's wondrous works in defeating "the helpers of Rahab"
(an image normally used in the OT to connect creation and Exodus).

The connection between the word "hesed" (steadfast love) in verse 13
and wondrous works in verse 14
prompts us to see that the Israelite author of Job
wants to say more than his Edomite character could have known!

Sure, it's entirely plausible for an Edomite to speak of God's wondrous works,
but it is impossible for an Israelite to *hear* the phrase "God's wondrous works"
and steadfast love,
without immediately thinking of the Exodus and Conquest.

¹⁵ *Do you know how God lays his command upon them
and causes the lightning of his cloud to shine?*

¹⁶ *Do you know the balancings^[c] of the clouds,
the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge,*

¹⁷ *you whose garments are hot
when the earth is still because of the south wind?*

In verse 16, Elihu speaks again of "the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge."
Remember that Elihu had claimed to be perfect in knowledge.
Elihu claims to speak on behalf of God. (36:2)
And he generally gets *God* right!
Elihu has as good an understanding of God as anyone can have –
based on general revelation – based on God's voice in creation.

And Elihu looks at Job and says,
Who do you think you are to bring a case against God?

¹⁸ *Can you, like him, spread out the skies,
hard as a cast metal mirror?*

In the ancient world, they believed that the sky was a solid dome,
so it's not surprising to hear Elihu describe the sky that way here.
It's the language of ordinary observation.
That's the way it appears – so that's the way we talk about it –
just like "sunrise" and "sunset"

(somehow “earthspin” doesn’t have the same ring!)

Elihu’s point is that Job does not have the power or strength to do what God does –
and therefore, Job does not have the knowledge or wisdom to teach us.

Again, power and knowledge are intertwined.

The one who is able to do what God does
is also able to speak the wisdom of God.

- ¹⁹ *Teach us what we shall say to him;
we cannot draw up our case because of darkness.*
²⁰ *Shall it be told him that I would speak?
Did a man ever wish that he would be swallowed up?*
²¹ *And now no one looks on the light
when it is bright in the skies,
when the wind has passed and cleared them.*
²² *Out of the north comes golden splendor;
God is clothed with awesome majesty.*
²³ *The Almighty—we cannot find him;
he is great in power;
justice and abundant righteousness he will not violate.*
²⁴ *Therefore men fear him;
he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.”*

In verses 21-22 Elihu speaks of the coming of God in golden splendor from the north,
clothed with awesome majesty.

In Ezekiel 1, the LORD came in glory from the north.

Zaphon means “north.”

But for the Canaanites, Mt Zaphon (in the far north) was the mountain of the gods.
Psalm 48 speaks of God’s glorious residence of Mt Zion in the far north (the word is Zaphon).

Whether you are an Israelite or an Edomite,
major armies can only attack from the north or the south.

The only major threat in the south is Egypt –
but over the centuries there were all sorts of threats from the north.

So they would have been quite familiar with the picture of a conquering army
coming from the north!

And to give you a hint as to where this is going –
the coming of God in the whirlwind in chapter 38 is pointing us toward the incarnation.

The friends have said that God will not answer Job:

Don't be ridiculous!

God will not stoop to answer a mere mortal like you!

But then God stoops.

We sometimes think that God thunders from the heavens to shut Job up.
But even God's thundering out of the whirlwind is a remarkable condescension –
after all, how many people throughout all of history have challenged God?
And how many times has God accepted the challenge?

Well, let me ask:

how many of you have, at one point or other in your life,
said, “I wish God would speak directly to me and answer my question”?

Okay.

Now did God answer in an audible voice that everyone else around you could hear?

Job's friends were right.

Elihu was right:

God owed Job nothing!

But in his mercy and love –

in his grace and kindness that he shows even to those who deserve nothing –
God humbled himself and came in the whirlwind to speak to his servant.

And even so, how much more stupendous his humility
in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Remember the wondrous works of God!