

# JOB

## Chapter 33

*Elihu Rebukes Job*

**“But now, hear my speech, O Job, and listen to all my words. 2 Behold, I open my mouth; the tongue in my mouth speaks. 3 My words declare the uprightness of my heart, and what my lips know they speak sincerely. 4 The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. 5 Answer me, if you can; set your words in order before me; take your stand. 6 Behold, I am toward God as you are; I too was pinched off from a piece of clay. 7 Behold, no fear of me need terrify you; my pressure will not be heavy upon you. 8 “Surely you have spoken in my ears, and I have heard the sound of your words. 9 You say, ‘I am pure, without transgression; I am clean, and there is no iniquity in me. 10 Behold, he finds occasions against me, he counts me as his enemy, 11 he puts my feet in the stocks and watches all my paths.’ 12 “Behold, in this you are not right. I will answer you, for God is greater than man. 13 Why do you contend against him, saying, ‘He will answer none of man's words’? 14 For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it. 15 In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, while they slumber on their beds, 16 then he opens the ears of men and terrifies them with warnings, 17 that he may turn man aside from his deed and conceal pride from a man; 18 he keeps back his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword. 19 “Man is also rebuked with pain on his bed and with continual strife in his bones, 20 so that his life loathes bread, and his appetite the choicest food. 21 His flesh is so wasted away that it cannot be seen, and his bones that were not seen stick out. 22 His soul draws near the pit, and his life to those who bring death. 23 If there be for him an angel, a mediator, one of the thousand, to declare to man what is right for him, 24 and he is merciful to him, and says, ‘Deliver him from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom; 25 let his flesh become fresh with youth; let him return to the days of his youthful vigor’; 26 then man prays to God, and he accepts him; he sees his face with a shout of joy, and he restores to man his righteousness. 27 He sings before men and says: ‘I sinned and perverted what was right, and it was not repaid to me. 28 He has redeemed my soul from going down into the pit, and my life shall look upon the light.’ 29 “Behold, God does all these things, twice, three times, with a man, 30 to bring back his soul from the pit, that he may be lighted with the light of life. 31 Pay attention, O Job, listen to me; be silent, and I will speak. 32 If you have any words, answer me; speak, for I desire to justify you. 33 If not, listen to me; be silent, and I will teach you wisdom.”**

**33:1–33** Elihu turns to Job and speaks directly to him. Unlike the three friends, he addresses Job by name (vv. 1, 31; see 37:14). (CSB)

Elihu is talking about redemption and forgiveness, in contrast to the others. Despite what Job sees and experiences in the suffering around him, Elihu is recommending that Job still trust in God. He cannot believe that Job’s suffering implies divine wrath. Luth: “This is the constant course of the church at all times, namely, that promises are made and that then those who believe the promises are treated in such a way that they are compelled to wait for things that are invisible, to believe what they do not see, and to hope for what does not appear. He who does not do this is not a Christian. For Christ Himself entered into His glory only by first descending into hell. When He is about to reign, He is crucified. When He is to be glorified, He is spit on. For He must suffer first and then at length be glorified. Moreover, God does this in order to test our hearts,

whether we are willing to do without the promised blessings for a time. We shall not do without them forever. This is certain. And if God did not test us and postpone His promises, we would not be able to love Him wholeheartedly. For if He immediately gave everything He promises, we would not believe but would immerse ourselves in the blessings that are at hand and forget God” (AE 5:202). Job’s only hope is in the redeeming mercy of God, not in self-justifying speeches. (TLSB)

For the first time in the book someone addresses Job by name. His three friends had not done so even once in their speeches. That tells you something about their personalities as well as their message. (PBC)

**33:1** *listen to my words.* He is thoroughly convinced of the importance and wisdom of the advice he is about to give (see vv. 31, 33). (CSB)

Elihu’s approach is conciliatory and more intimate in tone than the formal and more aloof style of the three friends, who did not address Job by name. (TLSB)

Perhaps Elihu’s awareness of his youth accounts for his excitement as well as his aggressiveness. (PBC)

**33:3** Elihu is not claiming that he is righteous before God. He claims his own speech to Job is righteous because God Himself is the origin of the speech (v 12). (TLSB)

**33:4** *Spirit of God has made me.* He was active in creation, and his creative power continues today (see Job 33:4; Ps 104:30). (CSB)

God is the ultimate source of all life. Elihu uses terms from creation. (TLSB)

*gives me life.* The Hebrew for this verb commonly referred to the work of a potter (see Isa 45:9; Jer 18:6), who fashions vessels from clay (see Job 33:6). “Make” (1:26), “create” (1:27) and “form” are used to describe God’s creation of both man and animals (v. 19; 1:21, 25). (CSB)

*breath of...life.*† Humans and animals alike have the breath of life in them (see 1:30; Job 33:4). But humans have a superior status because they received the Creator’s own “breath of life” as a constitutive element of their being. (CSB)

**33:5** *Answer me.* He opens and closes his speech (see v. 32) with the same plea. (CSB)

*if you can.* His attitude of superiority shows through. (CSB)

**33:6** *toward God.* “Over against God” is how life is lived in faith. Comparisons based on conventional definitions of morality are impossible because they come from self-justifying evasions. (TLSB)

*I ... pinched off from a piece of clay.* Bodies made of dust. (CSB)

Elihu is claiming that he is a mere human being and living over against God, just as Job is. Elihu’s human solidarity with Job is once again drawn from creation (Gn 2:7). (TLSB)

This suggests being nipped or pinched off from clay, as a sculptor or potter might nip off a piece of clay as he is working. As Adam was created from dust of clay, so all his descendants share

that common bond that unites them and shows their total dependence on God, their Creator. Because Elihu, too, was only a mortal, he appealed to Job not to be intimidated by his words. (PBC)

**33:7** *pressure will not be heavy upon you.* The idiom is elsewhere used only of God. [Dagon's broken hand lay on the ground (v. 4), but the Lord shows the reality and strength of his own hand by bringing a plague on the people of Ashdod and the surrounding area (see vv. 9, 11). God would not be manipulated by his own people (see note on 4:3), nor would he permit the Philistines to think that their victory over the Israelites and the capture of the ark demonstrated the superiority of their god over the God of Israel.]. (CSB)

**33:8** *you have spoken.* Elihu's method is to quote Job (vv. 9–11; 34:5–6, 9; 35:2–3) and then show him where and how he is wrong. The quotations are not always verbatim, which indicates that Elihu is content simply to repeat the substance of Job's arguments. (CSB)

These verses imply that Elihu must have heard the discussion from early on if not from the beginning. (PBC)

**33:10** *He.* God. Elihu describes the position of Job, often using Job's earlier words (9:21; 16:17; 12:4; 10:7). He summarizes Job's view that God has been unfair toward Job, arbitrarily finding "occasions against" him. (TLSB)

**33:11** Elihu quotes Job's words almost verbatim here (see 13:27). (CSB)

Elihu was partly right in his accusation of Job, but in his youthful passion he made the mistake of overstating his case, of saying too much. (PBC)

*feet in the stocks.* Restraint assured that those who fled would trip and fall. Elihu thinks God places such close restraints that there is no escape from spiritual collapse. (TLSB)

**33:12** *you are not right.* Elihu feels that Job needs to be corrected. Certainly Job's perception of God as his enemy (see v. 10; 13:24; 19:11) is wrong, but Elihu is also offended by what he considers Job's claim to purity (see v. 9). Job, however, had never claimed to be "pure and without sin," though some of his words were also understood that way by Eliphaz (see 15:14–16). Job admits being a sinner (7:21; 13:26) but disclaims the outrageous sins for which he thinks he is being punished. His complaints about God's silence (see v. 13) are also an offense to Elihu. But he imputes to Job the blanket statement that God never speaks to man, whereas Job's point is that God is silent in his present experience. (CSB)

**33:14** *one way, and in two.* Idiom meaning "in several ways." God reveals Himself in more than one way. Elihu argues that God has given a clear witness to His gracious will, and that a person is at fault who does not perceive this good will (1Tm 2:4). God certainly speaks two messages: Law and Gospel (vv 16–17). (TLSB)

Elihu's words imply that God had already been speaking to Job, but Job hadn't realized it. (PBC)

**33:15** *In a dream ... when deep sleep falls on men.* Elihu echoes Eliphaz (see 4:13). (CSB)

These would occur in a deep sleep (4:13). (TLSB)

Now Elihu is possibly telling Job that God was using those troubling dreams as a means of teaching him a lesson. (PBC)

**33:16** Clear communication of God’s wrath against sin and His ultimate judgment. Through the Law, God drives us to repentance. (TLSB)

**33:18** *pit*. A metaphor for the grave as often in the Psalms. (CSB)

*perishing by the sword*. See 36:12. The reading in the NIV text note in both verses refers to the figurative waterway between the land of the living and the realm of the dead. The Hebrew for “River” here is *shelah* (from a root that means “to send”) and sometimes means “water channel,” a conduit through which water is “sent” (see Jn 9:7) by a spring. The “River” therefore is the figurative means of passage between this world and the next. (CSB)

**33:19** *man is also rebuked with pain on his bed*. Dreams and visions (see v. 15) are not the only ways in which God speaks. He can talk to us in ways that we do not perceive (see v. 14). Elihu rightly states that God speaks to man in order to turn him from sin. But he overlooks Job’s reason for wanting an audience with God: to find out what sins he is being accused of (see 13:22–23). (CSB)

God warns us of our weakness so that we might cast ourselves upon His mercy alone. Luth: “We are reminded of our weakness in order that no matter how great the gifts are that we possess, we may not exalt ourselves but may remain humble and fear God. From those who do not do this He turns His face away, and trouble and perplexity follow ” (AE 3:8). (TLSB)

In his words describing human suffering, Elihu indirectly refers to Job’s own suffering. But unlike the three friends, Elihu does not state that his suffering was the consequence of some special sin he had committed. Rather, Elihu reminds Job and three friends that suffering is a wholesome learning experience. (PBC)

**33:22** *the pit*. Death. (TLSB)

*those*. Divine messengers who bring death. (TLSB)

**33:23–28** Having emphasized the importance of the chastening aspect of suffering, a point mentioned only briefly by Eliphaz (see 5:17), Elihu now moves on to the possibility of redemption based on a mediator (see note on 5:1). He further allows for God’s gracious response of forgiveness where sincere repentance is present (vv. 27–28). But Elihu is still ignorant of the true nature of Job’s relationship to God, known only in the divine council (chs. 1–2). (CSB)

These verses are the high point of Elihu’s four speeches. Job had accused God of being cruel to him; Elihu replies that God is loving, that he redeems and restores people from the clutches of suffering and sin. (PBC)

**33:23–24** Job (and perhaps Elihu) understands the messenger is the preincarnate Christ (19:25), who is the “one mediator between God and men” (1Tm 2:5). (TLSB)

**33:23** *one of the thousand*. Elihu is speaking conditionally and may not believe in a mediator who is “one of the thousand,” i.e., the number of witnesses to what is right. (TLSB)

Verse 23 contains two words which appropriately describe the Son of God: “angel” and “mediator.” The Hebrew word translated “angel” can be translated “messenger.” The expression “angel of the Lord” occurs several times in the OT. In some passages that “angel” refers to someone who is far greater than an ordinary created angel. He is none other than God, and in some passages he is directly called God. (PBC)

**33:24** *ransom*. Wealth cannot buy escape from death—not even one’s “redeemer” can accomplish it (cf. Ex 21:30; Lev 25:47–49). Only God himself can redeem a life from the grave. (CSB)

Atoning price to deliver from death (Ps 49:7–8). (TLSB)

**33:25** *flesh become fresh with youth*. Similar phrases are used in 2Ki 5:14 with reference to healing from leprosy. (CSB)

Rescue of dramatic proportions, as though youth has been restored by this return from the brink of death (Ps 103:5). (TLSB)

**33:26** *accepts him*. God accepts people by grace because of the work of the Redeemer. (TLSB)

*sees his face*. Not literally – To see God’s face brought death (see 32:30; Ex 33:20). (CSB)

*restores to man his righteousness*. Righteousness is a gift from God. “Those reconciled are counted as righteous and as God’s children. This is not because of their own purity, but through mercy for Christ’s sake, provided only that they receive this mercy through faith” (Ap IV 86). (TLSB)

**33:27** *not repaid*. God does not deal with humans as they deserve. He does not pay back, or we would instantly perish. (TLSB)

**33:28** *redeemed my soul*. Rescue from “the pit,” which is death. (TLSB)

**33:29** *twice ... three times*. Normally, such number patterns are not to be taken literally but are a poetic way of saying “many.” (CSB)

Not a limitation of divine mercy. In the speech of Elihu, the Lord repeatedly seeks the good of people. (TLSB)

**33:30** *to bring back his soul from the pit*. Elihu teaches that God’s apparent cruelty in chastening human beings is in reality an act of love, since man is never punished in this life in keeping with what he fully deserves (see v. 27). (CSB)

*light of life*. Often symbolizes well-being (see 97:11; Job 18:5–6; 22:28; 29:3; Pr 13:9; La 3:2) or life and salvation (see 18:28; Isa 9:2; 49:6; 58:8; 59:9; Jer 13:16; Am 5:18–20). To say “The LORD is my light” is to confess confidence in him as the source of these benefits (see Isa 10:17; 60:1–2, 19–20; Mic 7:8–9). In some contexts, the phrase refers to resurrection (see note on Isa 53:11 – A reference to the resurrection of Christ; see 1Co 15:4). (CSB)

God is the source of all life. To have the gift of life is to be rescued from the darkness (Gn 1:3). (TLSB)

**33:32** *I desire to justify you.* But this will happen, Elihu insists, only if Job repents. (CSB)

Elihu does not believe that Job will be able to respond adequately to his speeches (32:3, 13). (TLSB)

Although he offers him the opportunity to answer him, Elihu tells Job plainly that he has more to say. (PBC)

**Ch 33** “God puts His saints to work in various ways and often holds back the rewards of works-righteousness. He does this so that they may learn not to trust in their own righteousness and may learn to seek God’s will rather than the rewards. This can be seen with Job, Christ, and other saints” (Ap V 77). Elihu argues that there is no clear correlation between our experience of suffering (or good) and the will of God. Christ is the typical example, in that the Chosen One is arrested, beaten, shamefully mocked and brutally put to death on the cross, and yet He is the very beloved treasure of His Father. There are no signs of His value in His quiet and humble life or in His willing suffering and death, yet to whom else has God said, “You are My Son, today I have begotten You” (Heb 1:5)? Only faith sees that the crucified man is the beloved Son and dearest treasure of His Father. • Lord, teach us to see our suffering and understand its meaning through the lens of the suffering of Christ, Your beloved Son. If He so suffered and could also be and remain the Beloved of God, so also may we suffer without fear that You have forfeited divine grace toward us. Amen. (TLSB)