

# Triennial Torah Study – 3<sup>rd</sup> Year 28/07/2012



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| Num 12 |  | Job 33-35 | Romans 1 |
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## Miriam's Leprosy (Numbers 12-13)

Resisting God-ordained authority has been as common a temptation as presuming to speak for God when not appointed to do so. Often in the case of sedition and rebellion, we see both. And in chapter 12, we find Miriam and Aaron doing both. Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth (verse 3)—a note probably inserted by Joshua or a later biblical editor to put the challenge against Moses in perspective. And this humble man patiently waited on the Lord to intervene and uphold him. He did nothing to refute his sister and brother.

People who are jealous of someone will often run them down, which is what Miriam and Aaron proceed to do. They start by attacking him over “the Ethiopian [or Cushite] woman whom he had married” (verse 1). Many have built theories on this accusation. We have no other record in Scripture of the woman mentioned here, for the only wife we do know of, Zipporah, was a Midianite. Thus, we cannot know for sure when Moses married this woman. It is possible that he married her decades earlier while a prince in Egypt, after winning a victory against Ethiopia, as this is what Josephus records. This first-century Jewish historian refers to her as Tharbis, daughter of the king of Ethiopia (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 2, chap. 10). Moses may have retrieved her when he returned to Egypt to free the Israelites—we simply do not know. In any case, there is no record of God issuing any criticism of Moses in this circumstance. Indeed, God exonerates Moses as being faithful in all His house (verse 7).

But do not Miriam and Aaron also speak for God? Is not their disapproval sanctioned by Him? The question is even raised as to whether Moses was unique in his role as the one through whom God communicated. At the very least, Miriam and Aaron wanted to have an equal say with Moses. Perhaps it was jealousy, perhaps it was pride, perhaps a family argument. They convinced themselves that they had a valid claim—after all, Miriam was a prophetess (Exodus 15:20) and God spoke to Aaron, too (Leviticus 10:8; 11:1; 13:1; Exodus 6:13; 12:1; etc.). God does, then, speak to all three of them. Yet, while exonerating Moses, He comes down hard on Miriam and Aaron. Miriam, it appears, may have been the instigator of the criticisms of Moses,

as her name is mentioned first (verse 1) and the principal punishment befalls her (verses 10, 14). Remarkably, Moses' wonderful character shines through as he intercedes for his brother and sister despite the personal betrayal he must have felt.

### **Job Chapter 33**

Elihu is so moved that he is about to burst at the seams with what he has to say (verses 18-20). He is insistent about being heard (verse 10; 33:1, 31, 33). Many in modern times have criticized Elihu for being insufferably verbose and pompous. For instance, he takes 24 verses to say he is going to speak (see 32:6-33:7). Yet loquaciousness was a prized attribute in the ancient world. Moreover, Elihu was, as mentioned, a virtual nobody compared to Job and his three friends—so he deems it important to establish why they should listen to him. He does seem somewhat overconfident in his ability to help Job “see the light,” perhaps because of his belief that God has blessed his perception of matters. That combined with youthful brashness and zeal probably accounts for his coming on a bit strong in places.

Elihu begins by explaining why he has waited to speak—he is younger and he wanted to hear what older, wiser people had to say (verses 6-7). This should illustrate that he is perhaps not so arrogant as some believe him to be. Elihu's mention of the human spirit and breath of the Almighty in verse 8 in context would seem to imply not just God giving intellectual ability to mankind generally through the imparting of the human spirit (which He has certainly done)—but, in contrast to wisdom coming with age, that God can impart wisdom directly to a man's spirit through His own divine Spirit. So Elihu, it appears, believes God has inspired him. And this may well be the case. Yet, as already mentioned, this would not necessarily mean that everything Elihu said was from God. He makes no claim to being a prophet.

The exact meaning of verse 13 is disputed. The NKJV has Elihu quoting the sentiment of the friends in the first part of the verse and giving his own opinion in the second part. The Good News Bible paraphrases this as: “How can you claim you have discovered wisdom? God must answer Job, for you have failed.” Other versions have Elihu quoting the sentiment of the friends in both parts of the verse. For example the New International Version has: “Do not say, ‘We have found wisdom; let God refute him, not man.’” That is, the friends are portrayed as saying that they have done all that can humanly be done and Elihu is here contradicting that.

Elihu then addresses Job. He is much more personal and direct than the three friends. Unlike them, Elihu repeatedly addresses Job by name. For a young man to address his elders so casually—especially someone like Job who, though presently removed from his position due to his condition, had served as a ruler over the people—would surely have seemed impertinent in the society of that day. However, this was evidently part of Elihu's commitment to show no partiality or flattery (verses 21-22). It is interesting to note that the Hebrew verb translated “flatter,” *kanah*, means “to call someone by his honorific title” (Expositor's Bible Commentary, footnote on verses 21-22).

Elihu's words to Job at the beginning of 33:6 are variously translated. The King James Version has: "Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead." The New King James Version gives just the opposite: "Truly I am as your spokesman [or mouth, according to the margin] before God." Yet neither of these translations seems to fit with the latter part of the verse, "I also have been formed out of clay." J.P. Green's Literal Translation renders the first part of the verse, "Behold, I am toward God as you." This seems more likely. Notice the NIV rendering of verses 6-7: "I am just like you before God; I too have been taken from clay. No fear of me should alarm you, nor should my hand be heavy upon you." Accepting this translation, The Bible Reader's Companion notes on verse 6: "How refreshing! At last Job hears from someone who does not think of himself as morally superior. Anyone engaged in a ministry of comfort must come with Elihu's attitude. We are all clay. We struggle together. Only the harmless person, who rejects the temptation to condemn or hold others in contempt, can be God's agent of healing." Indeed, Elihu appears to be taking a gentler approach with Job here than the three friends have.

Then, surprisingly, despite all his prior verbosity, Elihu cuts straight to the heart of Job's problem: Job is not right in his accusations against God's justice and in treating God as some sort of equal with whom he can contend in court (verses 8-13). Because of this and other statements to follow, some think that Elihu was accusatory in the same way Job's friends were. Yet it should be recognized that Elihu limits his direct criticism of Job to only the statements Job has made in the dialogue with his friends. He does not, as the friends, accuse Job of having lived an evil, hypocritical life to deserve the suffering he has been experiencing.

Elihu further addresses Job's frequent plea for a hearing with God by saying that God communicates with people in various ways that they do not always recognize (verse 14). Job had complained of nightmares (7:14), and Elihu suggests that God may have been trying to tell him something this way (33:15). Moreover, Elihu says that God's objective in this would be to get a person's attention or teach him something to keep him from perishing: "He causes them to change their minds; he keeps them from pride. He keeps them from the grave" (verses 17-18, New Living Translation). Elihu further suggests that illness is another measure God might use for the same disciplinary and ultimately redemptive purpose (verses 19-22).

Elihu is offering possibilities. He is not, like Job's friends, bound to the notion that all suffering is punitive and that the measure of suffering corresponds to the degree of a person's wickedness. He agrees that suffering may be punitive but also sees that its objective may be preventative. Perhaps he thinks that Job could be right in the description of his character but that he was headed for a prideful fall—and that God was intervening to keep that from happening. This may even be true. However, it would be surprising if Elihu simply assumed that Job had absolutely no aspects of his life prior to the trial of which to repent. We have no evidence that Elihu knew anything about the discussion between God and Satan at the outset of the book and, thus, of God's description of Job. It could be that while Elihu did not think Job some great sinner and hypocrite as the friends did, he may have felt that Job had some relatively minor sins that his generally righteous life was leaving him blind to—and that God could have been using suffering as a means to bring Job to more thoroughly examine himself.

Even if such an assumption were wrong, it would not have been unreasonable. And again, Elihu makes no dogmatic pronouncements on why Job has been afflicted.

In verse 23 Elihu presents the idea that God may send a messenger or mediator to the afflicted person. It seems likely that he views himself here as God's messenger commissioned with showing Job God's righteousness and justice—with the implication that a person reached in this way would then trust in God's righteousness rather than his own, thus leading to deliverance. In verse 24, Elihu says God commands the deliverance on the basis of having found a ransom—a kopher, a covering or atonement. Perhaps what is meant here is simply that God has instituted sacrifices for the purpose of redemption. After all, the offering of sacrifices for atonement is mentioned at the beginning and end of the book (1:5; 42:8). Yet there may be a more specific foreshadowing here of what such sacrifices prefigured—the role of Jesus Christ as the ultimate ransom and atoning sacrifice for the sins of all humanity.

Elihu, we should observe, looks on God's goal in chastening in an entirely different light than Job's friends. They only saw God harshly meting out judgment until people died or straightened up—and that He was practically ambivalent about the outcome. Elihu sees God disciplining repeatedly just as a loving parent would with the intent of saving people from destruction (see verses 29-30). Elihu appears to have this same concern for Job. Despite seeming somewhat overbearing, Elihu says that his desire in speaking to Job is for Job to be justified (33:32)—"cleared" (NIV)—again demonstrating a rather different attitude than Job's three friends. As we will see, Elihu will get more severe in his criticism of Job—yet not because he thinks, as the friends do, that Job is a hopeless hypocrite but because he thinks that Job is jeopardizing his relationship with God and spiritual future through now lashing out at God in outrageous accusations.

### **“Will You Condemn Him Who Is Most Just?” (Job 34-35)**

It appears that Elihu may have paused at the end of chapter 33 to see if Job had anything to say in response. Job remains silent, and Elihu proceeds with his own comments in chapter 34, addressing both Job and his friends—and perhaps other gathered witnesses.

Elihu now tackles Job's charge that God is wrongly afflicting him, an innocent man (verses 56). In verse 7, Elihu says that Job drinks scorn—disrespect or contempt—like water. We can understand this remark by comparing it to Eliphaz's earlier comment that man drinks iniquity like water (15:16), meaning that he takes it to himself, indulging in it. Elihu is saying that Job has sunk to coping with his situation by indulging in scorning God's justice. In 34:8, Elihu is not saying that Job literally keeps company with the wicked. Rather he is saying that Job's comments make him sound like he is part of the host of scornful, wicked men on earth who disdain God and his justice and see no benefit to serving Him (verse 9).

This seems a bit harsh in light of Job's condition and character. The Expositor's Bible Commentary offers this appropriate caution in its introductory note on chapter 34: "As we

examine this chapter, we should keep in mind that Elihu had picked out of Job's speeches those words and ideas that sounded particularly damaging. Job had had questions about the justice of God, and he had emphatically asserted his innocence. But none of this should be viewed independently of Job's total statement. His claim to innocence was always given in the context of his reason for suffering. And while he had questioned the mystery of theodicy [divine judgment], he had also made clear he believed in God's justice so much that he was willing to rest his entire case, all his hope, on that one issue (13:13-19; 23:2-7)." Elihu may be too quick to take Job's remarks at face value, leaving no room for the sufferer to express his feelings as he tries to work through them. On the other hand, Elihu might realize that Job does not truly think the way described in 34:8-9 but be concerned that he would nevertheless give this impression to others.

Elihu may well have a lack of tact and appropriate consideration to Job's affliction stemming from youth and inexperience. Yet he has a sincere desire to defend God's justice and also to help Job. Indeed, considering that God Himself was about to intervene at this point, it probably was important at this stage for someone to properly address Job's accusations against God—both for Job's own good and for the sake of other people who were listening to all this. We should also consider that Elihu was not like the friends who had by now given up on Job—for Elihu was confident that Job, desiring to maintain his relationship with God, would be convinced by Elihu's words to take necessary steps to do so.

The Zondervan NIV Study Bible notes that the substance of Elihu's quotation of Job in verse 5 "is accurate (cf. 12:4; 13:18; 27:6), and much of v. 6 represents Job fairly (see 21:34; 27:5; see also 6:4...)—though Job had never claimed to be completely guiltless. Verse 9 is not a direct quotation from Job, who had only imagined the wicked saying something similar (see 21:15). But perhaps Elihu derives it from Job's repeated statement that God treats the righteous and the wicked in the same way (cf. 9:22; 21:17; 24:1-12), leading to the conclusion that it does not pay to please God" (2002, note on 34:5, 9).

In verse 10 Elihu stresses that God does no wickedness. "Elihu's concern that Job was [implicitly] making God the author of evil is commendable. Job, in his frustration, has come perilously close to charging God with wrongdoing (12:4-6; 24:1-12). He has suggested that this is the only conclusion he can reach on the basis of his knowledge and experience (9:24)" (note on 34:10).

In verse 11, Elihu seems to be upholding the traditional belief about retribution that Job's friends have been reciting—that God punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous. Elihu will say more about this in chapter 36. As mentioned before, this is a proper doctrine but the friends were improperly applying it in Job's case.

In 34:13, Elihu rhetorically asks who put God in charge. God is accountable to no one and yet, as verses 14-15 demonstrate, exercises His rule for the good of all humanity. Elihu points out that if God decided to, He could stop sustaining His creation through His Spirit and all would be destroyed—all people on earth would die. This parallels Hebrews 1:1-2, which describes God as

“upholding all things by the word of His power.” (It should be noted that Elihu here upends the view of Job’s friends, as his statement means that all people, including the wicked, are blessed by God’s grace.)

God, Elihu notes, is the pinnacle of justice (see verse 17). Indeed, the Almighty Creator is the very definer of justice. We get our concept of justice from God’s just rule, not the other way around. Whether He is just or not is not up to human judgment. If God were unjust, Elihu seems to be saying, how could He rule the world with any sense of justice, rebuking kings and nobles for ruling contrary to justice? (compare verses 17-18, NIV). God’s impartiality between rulers and commoners, between rich and poor, should further illustrate God’s justice—here in the sense of fairness (see verses 19-20). Again, God is the One who has set these parameters of justice.

Moreover, the fact that God is omniscient ensures that He will make no mistakes in punishing the wicked for disobeying Him and afflicting others (see verses 21-28). And, Elihu attests, God does hear the cry of the afflicted (verse 28). This is evidently to respond to Job’s complaint in chapter 24 that God allows the powerful to freely oppress the weak in this age. Elihu counters that God does often intervene. The beginning of 34:29, which follows, is more likely rendered, as in the NIV, “But if he remains silent, who can condemn him?” It follows from the question in verse 17: “Will you condemn Him who is most just?” Comparing various translations, the difficult wording at the end of verse 29 and in verse 30 could perhaps be paraphrased as: “Even if God chooses to hide his face so that people can’t see what He’s doing, He still rules over nations and individuals to [generally speaking] keep the worst people from governing and thereby destroying everyone.” Or the latter clause might have to do with keeping wicked rulers in power in this age to prevent society from descending into anarchy and chaos.

Translators agree that the wording of verses 31-33 is difficult. But, comparing various translations and commentaries and considering the context, Elihu seems to be saying this to Job: “Suppose someone says to God, ‘Okay, I’ve had enough (of affliction presumably). I will stop offending. Just tell me what I need to stop doing. If I have sinned, I’ll stop.’ Should God now make things right just because the person has recanted? What do you think? You know the answer.” Clearly God is under no obligation to immediately bring people’s suffering to an end even when they say they are ready to get right with Him. He is the determiner of when to make it cease. It is not ultimately up to the sufferer. Perhaps there are yet lessons to be learned, sincerity to be demonstrated or other reasons known only to God. Verse 34 sets up a quote in the NKJV. But it may well instead sum up verses 31-33 as in the earlier KJV: “Let men of understanding tell me [the answer to the question I just posed], and let a wise man hearken unto me.”

In verse 35, the NKJV and some other versions have Elihu quoting others in this assessment of Job’s remarks: “Job speaks without knowledge, his words are without wisdom.” But this seems more likely to be Elihu’s own assessment, as in the KJV. In 35:16, Elihu says that Job “multiplies words without knowledge.” God later affirms this assessment by referring to Job as one who “darkens counsel by words without knowledge” (38:1-2). This does not mean that all

Job said was wrong, for we know that he said much that was right. But his accusations against God were unwise and not well thought out. Job will admit as much at the end of the book (42:3).

The NKJV rendering of 34:36 makes it look like Elihu wishes the worst on Job—for him to be “tried to the utmost”—for what he has said about God. This would go far beyond Elihu’s earlier stated desire to see Job cleared. The King James wording is better: “that Job may be tried unto the end.” That is, that Job would be brought all the way to the trial’s conclusion or, better yet, to its intended end or goal. This fits with Elihu’s question in verses 31-33. Consider also the wording of James 5:11: “You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord.”

The charge of “rebellion” in verse 37 may seem rather extreme. Yet we should note that the common word for rebellion, from the Hebrew root marah, is not used here. Rather, the word here is pasha, meaning transgression (Strong’s No. 6588; see “Transgress,” Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, 1985, p. 266). It can imply deviation from God’s way in a specific area rather than a wholesale turning away from God. Elihu clearly limits the transgression to Job’s excessive complaining against God and God’s justice. Yet as before, considering Job’s circumstances, Elihu appears to lack sensitivity in delivering his evaluation.

“You Must Wait for Him” (Job 34-35)

In chapter 35, Elihu takes to task Job’s statements about God’s apparent indifference. He begins by addressing what he deems a major inconsistency in Job’s reasoning. In the NKJV translation of verse 2, Elihu asks if Job is saying that he is more righteous than God. Yet the New International Version rendering is probably more accurate here. Notice verse 2-3 in the NIV: “Do you think this is just? You say, ‘I will be cleared by God.’ Yet you ask him, ‘What profit is it to me, and what do I gain by not sinning?’” The Zondervan NIV Study Bible explains that the Hebrew for the word “cleared” here “is translated ‘vindicated’ in Job’s statement in 13:18. Elihu thinks that it is unjust and inconsistent for Job to expect vindication from God and at the same time imply that God does not care whether we are righteous (see v. 3). But allowance must be made [as Elihu does not seem to] for a person to express his feelings. The psalmist who thirsted for God (Ps 42:1-2) also questioned why God had forgotten him (Ps 42:9) and rejected him (Ps 43:2)” (note on Job 35:2).

Expositor’s notes on the chapter: “Elihu had missed Job’s point, that he wanted to be vindicated because he did believe God was just. Of course Job, in his struggle to understand what God was doing, had sent out two signals, one of which Elihu, like the others, had not been able to hear.”

Elihu turns the concept of serving God for no benefit around by saying that it is God who gets no benefit if Job serves Him (verses 4-7). People’s wickedness or righteousness impacts only themselves and other people, not God (verse 8). Eliphaz had made a similar point (22:2) yet further wrongly claimed that God did not even care one way or the other (verse 3). Elihu does

not appear to go this far in what he is saying. His point, in drawing a contrast, is to say that in any relationship between God and man, it is man who stands to gain, not God. And man should appreciate this fact. But this is usually not the case, which is the basis on which Elihu addresses “Job’s concern over God’s apparent indifference to the cries of the oppressed (cf. 24:1-12). Elihu maintained that God is not indifferent to people, but people are indifferent to God. People want God to save them; but they are not interested in honoring him as their Creator, Deliverer, and Source of wisdom (vv. 9-11). Human arrogance keeps God from responding to the empty cry for help (vv. 12-13)” (same note).

In verse 14, Elihu seems to be saying that even if Job does not see God or what He is doing, he should accept that God really is just and that he will have to wait on Him. Job should be glad, Elihu implies in the next verse, that God does not immediately punish for people’s foolishness. Otherwise Job himself would not be able to say the foolish things he has been saying about God. As harsh as this may sound, Elihu’s point seems to be that God’s justice is tempered by patience and mercy.

## **Romans 1**

Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the people who made up the Assembly in the provinces of Rome. Verses 1-15 Paul uses to give salutations to the brethren and identity to himself. He also shares his heart with them with words of encouragement and how much he has missed them and desired to visit them to witness their fruits.

Verse 16 seems to be the start of what Paul is planning to share with the Assembly in Rome: “For I am not ashamed of the Good News of Messiah, for it is the power of Elohim for deliverance to everyone who believes, to the Yehudite first and also to the Greek.”

He goes on to clarify to the Assembly that God has in fact revealed to “man” both His righteousness and His wrath. And this Paul knows, being a member of one of the twelve tribes, raised in the faith, and a Pharisee as is known. In order to read what he has to say to this assembly in proper context, one needs to read on beyond chapter one a bit for he has a certain reprimand to hand out to these brethren. It seems they are being hypocritical in their judgments of one another both inside and outside the assembly. This is the reason he begins as he does with a kind of historical account of the revelations of Elohim.

“For since the creation of the world His invisible [qualities] have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, both His everlasting power and Mightiness, for them to be without excuse, because, although they knew Elohim, they did not esteem Him as Elohim, nor gave thanks, but became vain in their reasonings, and their undiscerning heart was darkened.”

Paul is simply stating to them that the truth was once revealed by Elohim without influence of foolish men, but has now become corrupt because of man throughout the ages. Foolish men who were given the truth through revelation “changed the esteem of the incorruptible Elohim



into the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds and of four-footed beasts and of reptiles.” Verse 23.

Once idol worship is introduced among men, they will become what they worship to include things of nature – the created rather than the creator. Therefore Elohim gave them up to uncleanness. Elohim removed Himself from their presence and also removed them from His presence and because of this, all manner of degrading passions became the identity of these ones.

Degrading passions he goes on to list:

Women doing that which is unnatural

Men leaving the natural relations with women to fulfill passions with other men

Whoring, wickedness, greed, evil;

Envy, murder, fighting, deceit, evil habits;

Whisperers, slanderers, haters of Elohim, insolent, proud, boasters, devisers of evils, disobedient to parents, without discernment, covenant breakers, unloving, unforgiving, ruthless;

Verse 32 “though they know the righteousness of Elohim, that those who practice such deserve death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.”

And Chapter 2 verse 1 shows us what Paul is saying here, that everyone who judges these matters in one another or others, condemns themselves if they are doing the same. Why? Because just in the very fact that judgment is made reveals the fact that one knows the truth and what is righteousness or what is unrighteousness, what is transgression, and what is the Law. Therefore, no one is without excuse!