

# Job 37: When God is Hidden

By C.M. Alvarez

In Job chapter 37, we come to the end of Elihu's response to Job. Elihu began his speech by addressing Job's friends, telling them that they were speaking from their own understanding, Elihu, however, states that he has received understanding from God and gives glory to God alone.

Elihu next addresses Job and takes Job to task for claiming that there is no benefit to serving God. In chapter 36, Elihu assures Job that when the righteous call out to God and repent of their wrongs, God will deliver them. Job was wrong in his judgment against God. A delay of judgment is not absence of judgment.

In Elihu's final words in chapter 37, he highlights the greatness of God.

Job 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.

Elihu encourages Job to continue to put his reliance on God in spite of his circumstances. Even though his “heart trembles,” to continue to listen to God's voice. God speaks, even in the trials, the thunder, of life.

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 when his voice is heard.

In our first lesson in the study of Job, we talked about the importance of keeping the cosmology of the writer of the book; in other words, how did the people of the time see the world? While the people of the Ancient Near East believed in a pantheon of gods, the storm gods were seen as the most powerful. In a study of the storm gods of the Ancient Near East, Daniel Schwemer writes:

In many regions of the ancient Near East, not least in Upper

Mesopotamia, Syria and Anatolia where agriculture relied mainly on rainfall, storm-gods ranked among the most prominent gods in the local panthea or were even regarded as divine kings, ruling over the gods and bestowing kingship on the human ruler.<sup>1</sup>

As we read the rest of this passage, keep in mind that what Elihu is describing that we see as forces of nature, the working of natural physical laws of the universe, the writer's contemporaries would have seen as acts of God. Schwemer describes the beliefs of the Sumerians regarding their high god, Enlil:

Enlil: The Sumerian father and lord of the gods is, together with the more remote An, the powerful ruler of the world who bestows kingship. He creates the universe by dividing heaven and earth; residing in Nippur, the "bond between heaven and earth", his special cosmic sphere are the earth (ki) and the lands (kur-kur), while heaven is ruled by An and the nether world by Ereskigal. Consequently Enlil is associated especially with the abundant growth of grain, but also with the space of air between heaven and earth; the latter may be reflected in his name. Within this context it cannot surprise that Enlil's violent power can be likened to a devastating storm in literary texts.<sup>2</sup>

After the Israelites were delivered from bondage in the land of Egypt, they were told to remember, to tell the story to their children, and to mark the day. They were to remember and declare the greatness of their God by remembering what he had done for them. Elihu is extolling the great acts of God in creation. He is declaring the power and might of God.

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.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Schwemer, "The Storm-Gods of the Ancient Near East: Summary, Synthesis, Recent Studies Part I," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 7, no. 2 (January 1, 2007): 121.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-126,

Again, Elihu highlights that we cannot understand the works of God and that God decrees, “seals up the hand,” the course of a man’s life.

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.

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.

We don’t see deities as being behind forces of nature. We understand much of the natural laws the world operates under, not all, but much of it. That does not lessen the majesty and magnitude of God’s power, rather his power is amplified exponentially.

Let’s just imagine for a moment. Let’s say you want to deliver a letter to a person. In the first situation, you want the letter delivered to your neighbor at 3 p.m. this afternoon. In the second, you want the letter delivered on a particular day hundreds of years in the future, the person you want it delivered to hasn’t even been born yet, and the place you want it delivered hasn’t yet been discovered. Which is easier to execute? The first situation where you can walk the letter over yourself, or the second where a series of events has to be initiated in order to accomplish the task far in the future. The first can be achieved under natural human effort. The second requires one who is omniscient and omnipotent.

What Elihu is saying is true, all of this natural phenomena is set in order by God’s guidance and it does “accomplish all that he commands.” However, natural laws were established and the processes set in motion at the moment of creation. This requires a greatness far beyond what we can even fathom.

Elihu points out that the processes of nature can be “for correction or for his land or for love.” This is an interesting phrase. The “for correction” and “for love” are easy to understand, but what about “for his land?” I think

what this means is for the benefit of the land, his space, his people. Remember that countries had their own deities, and prosperity and victory of the country and people was seen as evidence of the power and greatness of their god. If two countries or peoples went to war, the side that won was seen as having the more powerful god.

14 “Hear this, O Job;  
stop and consider the wondrous works of God.  
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 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?  
18 Can you, like him, spread out the skies,  
hard as a cast metal mirror?

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?

Elihu asks Job if he knows it all, if Job has full understanding of the workings and reasoning of God, to explain it to them. Elihu is saying, “we don’t know it all, but you seem to so let us in on the secret so we can present our case to God.” The NET study Bible explains that verse in this way. “the verb means “to arrange; to set in order.” From the context the idea of a legal case is included.<sup>3</sup>”

21 “And now no one looks on the light  
when it is bright in the skies,  
when the wind has passed and cleared them.

When I read verse 21, I take it to mean that no one “looks on” or recognizes the goodness of God, “the light when it is bright in the skies.” We run to God when trials come and ask him why he is letting it happen to us, but we are less likely to thank God for the goodness he provides for us on a

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<sup>3</sup> *NET Bible*, Full-notes Edition. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019) Job 37, note x.

daily basis. But I think the light in verse 21 is tied to the darkness in verse 19. Young's Literal Translation presents this passage a little bit differently:

19 Let us know what we say to Him, We set not in array because of darkness.

20 Is it declared to Him that I speak? If a man hath spoken, surely he is swallowed up.

21 And now, they have not seen the light, Bright it [is] in the clouds, And the wind hath passed by and cleanseth them.

Elihu is saying that we have a problem, we are in a mess and we don't know how to get out of it, we can't get our act together, set in order (set not in array) because of this darkness. God and his will is obscured. How can man even begin to approach him? Job himself asked this same question earlier. The light is "bright in the clouds," meaning the sun is obscured. The wind has "passed by" and cleanses them, meaning man cleansed by opposition and adversity while the fullness of the light is obscured.

The way the YLT translated those verses is quite a bit different than the ESV isn't it? This yet another example of the debate about the interpretation of Job. The NET study Bible provides a couple of comments on interpretation.

The light here must refer to the sun in the skies that had been veiled by the storm. Then, when the winds blew the clouds away, it could not be looked at because it was so dazzling. Elihu's analogy will be that God is the same—in his glory one cannot look at him or challenge him.<sup>4</sup>

And also:

and cleaned them." The referent is the clouds (v. 18), which has been supplied in the translation for clarity. There is another way of reading this verse: the word translated "bright" means "dark; obscured" in Syriac. In this interpretation the first line would mean that they could not see the sun, because it was darkened by the clouds, but then the wind came and blew the clouds away. Dhorme,

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<sup>4</sup> *NET Bible*, Full-notes Edition. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019) Job 37, note z.

Gray, and several others take it this way, as does the NAB.<sup>5</sup>

The passages and commentary has been on translating from the Hebrew. But how did Jews in the Intertestamental period understand this passage? The Hebrew Bible, also known as the Tanakh, was translated into Greek about 200 years before Jesus was born. This translation was known as the Septuagint (LXX) and was used by Hellenistic Jews through the first century A.D. Much of the passages cited in the New Testament actually come from the Septuagint translation versus the Hebrew, the Septuagint was the Bible of the early church and the Eastern Orthodox church<sup>6</sup> still uses Bibles based on the Septuagint.<sup>7</sup>

Translation is not a one-to-one equalivalence.<sup>8</sup> This is especially important to understand when we talk about Bible translations. A “formal equivalence” is a more word-for-word translation. The King James Version and New American Standard Bible are examples of English translations that try to achieve a more formal equivalence. A “dynamic” equivalence is one that is translated as “thought for thought.” The primary focus is to transmit the meaning of the passage accurately. The New International Version and the New Living Translation are examples of a dynamic equivalence. Then there are “moderate” translations which try to balance between the formal and dynamic equivalence, and on the far end of the spectrum as paraphrase translations where the translator gives you their own idea o what the passage is saying The Message is an example of a paraphrase.<sup>9</sup>

Here’s the thing. These methods and approaches to translating didn’t begin with the English language or after the Protestant Reformation. Challenges in translation have been around since the Tower of Babel. This

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<sup>5</sup> *NET Bible*, Full-notes Edition. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019) Job 37, note ab.

<sup>6</sup> “The Septuagint,” *Orthodox England*, accessed December 2, 2021, <http://orthodoxengland.org.uk/septuag.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Alexandru Mihăilă, “The Septuagint and the Masoretic Text in the Orthodox Church(Es),” *Review of Ecumenical Studies Sibiu* 10, no. 1 (April 1, 2018): 30–60.

<sup>8</sup> James A Sanders, “The Hermeneutics of Translation,” in *Removing the Anti-Judaism for the New Testament*, ed. Howard Clark Kee and Irvin J. Borowsky (Philadelphia: American Interfaith Institute, 1998), accessed December 2, 2021, [https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research\\_sites/cjl/sites/partners/cbaa\\_seminar/sanders2.htm](https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/sites/partners/cbaa_seminar/sanders2.htm).

<sup>9</sup> Karen Engle, “A Visual Guide to Choosing the Best Bible Translation,” *The Logos Blog*, last modified August 30, 2021, accessed December 2, 2021, <https://blog.logos.com/best-bible-translation/>.

also happened in the translation of the Hebrew Bible into the Greek Septuagint translation. The Septuagint translators used both formal and dynamic equivalence.<sup>10</sup> Their focus was on conveying the *meaning*, not simply a collection of words. What is particularly significant about the Septuagint is that it gives us a snapshot of what the majority of Jewish readers and scholars understood those passages to mean. As we have seen just in our comparison of English translations during our study of Job, doctrine very often influences how a passage is translated.

Having said all that, how does the LXX render this section?

19 Wherefore teach me, what shall we say to him? and let us cease from saying much. 20 Have I a book or a scribe my me, that I may stand and put man to silence? 21 But the light is not visible to all: it shines afar off in the heavens, as that which is from him in the clouds.

The LXX translator is in agreement with YLT in that he writes that the “light is not visible.” Interestingly, the LXX translator seems to be equating the wind (*ruach*) in verse 21 as “that which is from him [who is] in the clouds.”

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.

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<sup>10</sup> James K. Aitken, “The Septuagint and Egyptian Translation Methods,” ed. Wolfgang Kraus, Michaël N. van der Meer, and Martin Meiser (Presented at the XV Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Munich: SBL Press, 2013), accessed December 2, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctt1f5g5kr>.

“Similar approaches to Greek register, lexical consistency, transliteration, inflection of noun phrases, polysemous prepositions, interpretive renderings and literary embellishment are found in both Egyptian translations and the Septuagint.”

24 Therefore men fear him;  
he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.”

Elihu ends with stating that the Almighty {Shaddai} is great and he is just. He is not only righteous, but is abundantly righteous.

The LXX translator makes Elihu’s warning clear:

22 From the come the clouds shining like gold: in these great are the glory and honour of the Almighty; 23 and we do not find another his equal in strength: him that judges justly, dost thou not think that he listens? 24 Wherefore men shall fear him; and the wise also in heart shall fear him.

God is listening, and he will bring justice.



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