

Elihu's Presentation (chapters 32-37)

Elihu was an observer, as many others also may have been, while the discourses between the *three friends* and Job occurred. “Before Elihu actually began his argument against Job (starting in 33:1) he first took a number of sentences to justify his right to speak” (*Bible Knowledge*). However, because he was much younger than the speakers, he had said nothing until all of them had exhausted their words in the several speeches that they had made. Still today, eastern and Asian cultures procure for the aged in the face of younger ones a respect and reverence for older ones. However, sometimes even today, the aged will demand for themselves this cultural respect when, in fact, unfolding circumstances, actions or words do not warrant it. For instance, in a foreign Bible school as a part of teaching and repetition of information in lessons, I divided the class down the middle into two teams for a *friendly* competition in fielding questions. To a large part due to how the class seated itself, one team was older and one team was decidedly younger. Some of the older ones became angry when the younger team won! They were angry, not because they happened to answer fewer questions or answer more questions correctly, but they were incensed because younger ones won, thereby not demonstrating, in their minds, proper respect for the aged. Perhaps we can appreciate better Elihu's reluctance to speak up sooner than he did. “It would have been a terrible breach of etiquette had Elihu interrupted his elders” (*Bible Exposition*).

Elihu uttered complaints against all parties—the three friends as well as Job, too. He faulted Job for accusing God of injustice, and Elihu seemed to believe that the sufferings through which Job had gone were indicative of divine punishment upon him for sins in his life. He appeared to sympathize with the misguided theology of Job's friends and even some people today. Jackson distinguishes the approach of the friends from Elihu, thus. “Job's three friends contended that suffering was a *punishment for sins*, while Elihu argues that suffering may be *disciplinary, and so serve to prevent sin*” (71). “Job's friends had argued that his suffering was evidence that God was punishing him for his sins, but Elihu now argues that sometimes God permits us to suffer to keep us from sin. In other words, suffering may be preventive and not punitive” (*Bible Exposition*). Homer Hailey suggests that Elihu's intent “was not trying to condemn Job, but to justify him. ...He would be fair, for his desire was to measure Job accurately by a just standard that he may see him justified” (275, 289).

In addition, Elihu shared Job's belief that God was angry with Job; however, Job did not know why that would be, even if the other four speakers attributed it to Job's supposed *secret sins*. Elihu accused Job of claiming sinless perfection, which is an overstatement.

Elihu was correct in chiding Job for rebelliously (a) questioning God's justice (34:17), and (b) demanding that God answer Him (v. 29) and show him where he had sinned (v. 32). But Elihu seemed to share something of the heartless attitude of the three elder counselors by wishing that Job would be tested “to the utmost,” and by assuming that Job's many words (cf. 35:16) meant he was **against God**. (*Bible Knowledge*)

Elihu condemned the three friends for not succeeding in their attempts to bring Job to repentance. In particular, he was “incensed with Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad ‘because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him’” (Jackson 69).”

Elihu was inflamed with **the three... because** they pronounced **Job** guilty but without adequate evidence. Anger seemed to characterize much of these verbal bouts. The three pugilists were mad at Job; he was mad at them and at God; and he sensed that God was angry with him. And now Elihu was infuriated too! (*Bible Knowledge*)

Elihu stated that neither the friends of Job nor Job, despite their many years, exhibited the wisdom that one would have expected from their decades of experience. Unfortunately, long life alone does not guarantee the accumulation of knowledge and wisdom.

Certainly, we can identify with Job and dispel the false accusations of his friends.

The three counselors had claimed that Job was suffering because he was sinning, but Elihu explained that he was sinning because he was suffering! His suffering led to an attitude of pride before God and a questioning of God’s ways. The triad diagnosis pertained to sinful actions in Job’s past experience, whereas Elihu’s diagnosis dealt with sinful attitudes in Job’s present life. (Zuck qtd. in Jackson 69)

Elihu envisioned himself as a messenger from God, whose task it was to set everyone else straight with God; commentators differ as to whether he was inspired or simply had not said anything worthy of public rebuke by God. Like the friends and Job, too, Elihu also proceeded to enumerate the incomparable qualities and characteristics of God. This latter speaker provided an interlude between the former discourses and God speaking—to the surprise and somewhat to the disappointment of all present. “The position of Elihu is clearly closer to the truth... for when Jehovah later rebuked them there was no rebuff of Elihu” (Jackson 70).

Elihu was horrified at one of the conclusions to which Job had arrived and spoken aloud. “...Elihu will come to the defense of God’s justice; it is unthinkable that the Almighty could do wrong” (Jackson 71). “From Elihu’s viewpoint, Job’s statements and charges left God in an unfavorable light” (Hailey 293).

All four of Job’s critics were harsh in their approach. “If any criticism needs to be offered of Elihu’s speech, it is that he saw God’s might power exercised in cold justice apart from any feeling of love, compassion, or tenderness” (Hailey 296). God, though, is also a God of love. “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). We, likewise, need to demonstrate love, compassion and tenderness toward others, especially toward those we attempt to guide back to the ‘narrow way’ (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20; Matthew 7:14). Contrasted to the approach of the three friends toward Job, Elihu, however, displayed a more admirable deportment in his speech toward the friends and toward Job.

Calm and candid reasoning in a kindly spirit is more likely to win men to a right state of mind than dealing with a “heavy hand” (Job 33:3,7). The minister, while addressing sinners authoritatively, as “in God’s stead” (Job 33:6), and “in Christ’s stead” (2 Cor 5:20), should speak with a fellow-feeling, as Elihu, “I also am formed out of the clay:” or as Peter to Cornelius, “I myself also am a man.” ‘Terror’ only hardens it: it is love alone that melts it (Job 33:7). (*Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown*)

There are lessons for us from these recent chapters, and after all, the Bible is most meaningful to us when we make application of it to our lives. “If men would spend more time reflecting upon the marvelous majesty of our great Creator, they would be considerably less preoccupied with wallowing in their own self-pity!” (Jackson 74). Furthermore, “God is under no obligation to give account for His ways, nor to answer questions that pertain to the divine government and ways that pertain to His actions and will” (Hailey 284). We can further comfort ourselves irrespective of what physical peril or spiritual duress in which we may find ourselves by trusting in our omnipotent and benevolent Creator. Even when we may find ourselves maligned, when our good is evil spoken of (Isaiah 5:20; 1 Peter 4:14; 2 Peter 2:2), our God in “His infinite intellect and insight – enables Him to see the right or wrong of any situation and to judge impartially” (Hailey 310).

Enlightenment comes through a number of different venues. Job, for instance, learned about the fallacious nature of the three friends’ corrupted theology only by personal observation through his much suffering. “Having previously held the position of the friends that all suffering was punishment for sins, from his own life’s experiences he now realized that this view was false” (Hailey 328). Another lesson learned is that Satan is powerless over us as long as we do not allow him to overpower us (Ephesians 4:27; 6:10-17; 1 Peter 5:8-9). “...Satan had failed to win the victory over him” (Hailey 328). “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Notice also that the charges of Job toward God were as unfounded and non-factual as were the unsubstantiated charges made by the friends toward Job; where observation fails and revelation from God has not been provided, man must not presume to know the spirit of another – man or God (1 Corinthians 2:11).

Still other lessons we learn include these. Suffering in one’s life may arise from a number of different sources. “It is a mistake to say that all suffering comes from God, because we cause some suffering ourselves” (*Bible Exposition*). Other people may be source of suffering by innocents who have no investment in or knowledge relating to their suffering. In the case of Job, Satan himself was behind the patriarch’s relentless suffering. Yet, often sinner and saint alike blame God for disease, accident or natural disaster that touches the health or lives of loved ones. The Book of Job enables the student of the Bible to know better and envision a bigger picture, while being aware that God loves His children dearly (Matthew 10:29-31).

Almighty God is evident throughout the Book of Job even when He does not appear directly in the unfolding scenes, whereas some few books of the Bible may only merely allude to God (e.g., Esther).

The book of Job magnifies the sovereignty of God. From the very first chapter, it is obvious that God is in control; for even Satan is told what he can and cannot do. During the debate, it appears that God is absent; but He is aware of how Job feels and what Job and his friends say. Thirty-one times in the book of Job, God is called “the Almighty.” (*Bible Exposition*)

Though Job argued with the three friends through three cycles of speeches, Job did not enter into a verbal exchange with Elihu. This latter, younger wise man made four speeches without response from either the three friends or from Job.

Job said nothing after Elihu’s speeches, possibly because he saw some truth in what Elihu was saying. Elihu fittingly prepared the way for God to speak. He did so: (a) by defending God; (b) by sensitizing Job to his need for humility; (c) by describing God’s wonders in natural revelation, which God elaborated on; (d) by probing Job with thought-provoking questions (33:13; 34:17-19,33; 35:2,6-7;

36:19,22-23,29; 37:15-18,20), a tactic that God continued; and (e) by targeting on Job's basic problem - justifying himself and condemning God - which God Himself later mentioned (cf. 32:2 with 40:8). (*Bible Knowledge*)

The endless wrangling with words between the four characters of the Book of Job closed. Jehovah, then, spoke to the three friends and to Job.

Jehovah Speaks to Job (chapters 38-41)

Job Is Blessed (chapter 42)

Special Studies

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