

**THE BOOK OF JOB**  
**Job 34-37**

**By Dr. James E. Potts**

Without warning, Elihu turns from Job to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. He calls them to attention. ***“Hear my words, O ye wise men; and give ear to me [listen to me], ye that have knowledge [you wise men]. For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat [for the ear examines what is said as the mouth tastes food]” (34:2-3).***

Not only has Elihu changed his tone, but he has also changed the source of his authority. Earlier he had spoken to Job with the ***“spirit of understanding and the breath of the Almighty.”*** Now he appeals to the “ear” of his listeners. In the Bible, the ear represents human reason and the logical process by which we know and test the truth. Elihu’s subject is now the justice of God that stands over against the grace of God which he has just spoken. Like a judge weighing law and grace on the scales of justice, Elihu argues both sides of the case.

By balancing justice and grace, Elihu is staying true to his promise to speak impartially and without flattery to both parties. Having spoken the truth in love to Job, he now takes on the role of speaking with cold and hard reason—the language of the inner ear. Perhaps he wants to teach Job the difference between the God of grace and the God of justice in dealing with his sins.

Very early in this speech Elihu quotes Job as he issues his challenge, ***“Let us choose to us judgment [let us decide for ourselves what is right]: let us know among ourselves what is good. For Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away my judgment [God has denied me justice]. Should I lie against my right? My wound is incurable without transgression [I’m not guilty of anything but I am deeply wounded]” (34:4-6).***

Rather than just accept Job’s interpretation of what is just and unjust, Elihu urges his hearers to make their own decision after he has presented his arguments for the justice of God. But in quoting Job as he has, Elihu appears to take liberty with Job as actually said throughout their long discussion and debate. Under the weight of his suffering and agony, Job has come close to saying “I am righteous, and God is not just or fair”—but he has not quite said it as Elihu puts it now. But at this point Elihu has positioned Job as being against God. In doing so he has sided with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

Elihu then says, ***“What man is like Job who drinketh up scorning like water?”*** (34:7). With these words Elihu is accusing Job of being scornful of God, of scoffing at God and the religious thinking of that time. By complaining about the “injustice” of God, Job has joined the company of ***“the workers of iniquity” and wicked men*** (34:7-8). This was a false accusation because nothing in our story indicates that Job kept company with sinful people. Yes, he was guilty of pride and arrogance but not of moral sin.

Next Elihu puts words into Job’s mouth when he accuses Job of saying, ***“It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself in the Lord”*** (34:9). At no time has Job been so rash as to equate “delight” in the Lord with “profit.” If Job had served God only for the benefits he had received, then Satan would have been right when he sneered, ***“Does Job serve God for naught?”***

For sure Job had not been guilty of the sin of using God or of trying to manipulate Him. The modern counterpart to this attitude can be seen in the businessman who attends church in order to attract business from the congregation—or the professional person who is seen every Sunday morning in the prestigious church of the community’s “movers and shakers”—the church attended by the “right” people.

Elihu moves on now in his defense of the justice of God as he says, ***“Therefore hearken unto me [listen to me], ye men of understanding [you wise men]: far be it from God, that he should do wickedness [act in an evil way]; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity [do wrong]”*** (34:10).

Coming at the question of God’s justice from yet another angle, Elihu now speaks at length in defense of God’s fairness. But at best his arguments are confusing. On one hand he insists God is fair in His actions toward kings and princes and ordinary citizens, toward the rich and the poor, and toward those who are powerful and those who are not (34:18-20).

But then on the other hand, he says that those who disobey God and are hypocritical will not escape the swift and sure judgment of God for their actions (34:22-32). And that assertion is followed immediately with the statement that God is not obligated to distribute His judgment on our terms (34:33). This was a direct dig at Job who earlier had begged God to either strike him dead if he was guilty of sin or restore his health and wealth if he were righteous.

At this point Elihu once again turns to Job and invites him to respond to what has been said (34:33b). Job, for whatever reason, offers no deference against the accusations that have been hurled against him by his angry and disturbed young kinsman.

Throughout Elihu's long and confusing speech Job has felt the full force of the young man's dislike for his insisting on his innocence from moral sins. Job's silence seems to have caused Elihu to become very much disturbed, because next he asks Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar to listen carefully to what he now wants to say. When he is sure he has their attention, he accuses Job of speaking without knowledge and of using words that do not contain wisdom (34:34-35). This is a strong indictment against Job, but it is interesting to note that Elihu is condemning Job's words and not his character.

As Elihu evaluates the situation, he believes that Job's pride has not only moved him into the company of undesirable people but has also given him a distorted view of God. Then Elihu either misquotes Job or puts words into his mouth when he says, ***“For thou saidest, what advantage will it be unto thee? And what profit shall I have if I be cleansed from my sin?” (35:3).*** Elihu is accusing Job of saying here, “Why should I be good anyway because God does not hear and answer my prayer?”

As Elihu is interpreting Job's thinking, he concludes that Job's concept of God is all wrong. Elihu then goes on to remind Job that God is not dependent on the action or reaction of His creation, whether sinful or righteous. After all, if we sin, that does not make God less holy, and if we are righteous that does not make Him more holy. At the same time, our sin or righteousness is not without consequences. Even though God's character or nature may not be affected, our sin or righteousness affects us personally as well as all the rest of society. When we sin, other people are hurt, and when we live righteously, other people are blessed (35:5-8).

But there is more, he sheds light on the fact that we usually pray only for relief when we suffer or are oppressed (35:9). Elihu reminds Job that the primary purpose of prayer is to enter the presence of God. ***“Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?”*** is the prayer of worship that is intended to go before our petitions.

But wrong-headed praying, we pray the reverse the order. We pray first for relief from suffering or ask for our daily bread. Worship comes last, if at all. When we reverse the true order of prayer, we miss what God has for us, for He wants to give us ***“songs in the night”***; He wants to teach us ***“more than the beasts of the earth”*** and make ***“us wiser than the fowls [birds] of heaven” (35:10-11).***

Elihu is saying here that there are greater answers to prayer than relief from suffering. Only God can give us a song to sing in the night of our suffering. Only God can teach us to understand the meaning of suffering beyond the base instinct of animals. And only God can help us see suffering and life's hard times from the perspective of His purpose for the wholeness of life.

It is pride that causes us to pray selfishly. And Elihu warns Job that he should not be surprised when God does not listen to his pleas for relief or respond to his demands that God appear before him and defend Himself against Job's accusations (35:12-16).

Before going on, Elihu apologizes for the length of his speech but asks Job to bear with him a little longer (36:1). Still assuming the role of the teacher, Elihu once again gives us the source of his authority before proceeding. He states that his knowledge comes from far and wide—from many sources—and that wisdom and justice come from God (36:2-3).

True to his role as a teacher, Elihu next states very simply the subject of the next lesson he wants to get across, ***“Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any: he is mighty in strength and wisdom”*** (36:5). Rather than thinking of the awesome power of God, Elihu speaks of the strength of God's understanding. Then he reminds Job that God always keeps the righteous in His sight (36:7). If they are afflicted, He uses suffering to save them from past sin and turn them from future sin (36:9-10). And on such occasions, they have three choices: they can obey God and be restored; they can reject God and be destroyed; or they can play God and become perverted (36:11-15).

For the first time, now, Elihu appears to point his finger directly at Job and in effect say, “You are the man.” Evidently Job's wealth and his feelings of being right had become a hindrance. His wealth had made him so self-sufficient that he did not think he really needed God, and his being so right had made him so “holy” that he did not think he needed full salvation. For this reason, God was permitting him to suffer, in order to turn him away from sin and teach him to trust, not on riches or righteousness, but on God alone, ***“Behold, God exalted by His power [God is exalted]: who teacheth like Him? Who hath enjoined Him His way? Or who can say, Thou hast wrought iniquity [No one can tell God what to do or charge Him with being evil]”*** (36:22-23).

In human terms, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. But God is just the opposite. His absolute power glorifies Him because His purpose is always good.

Next, we see Elihu shifting the focus of his teaching from human history to natural history, ***“Remember that thou magnify his work [remember to celebrate God’s work], which men behold. Every man may see it; man may behold it afar off [everyone has seen it, but we can only look from a distance]” (36:24-25).***

As Elihu visualizes the world around him, he sees all of nature validating his arguments. Looking far off across the desert he sees the storm clouds forming. Thunder rumbles in the distance and lightening splits the sky (36:26-33). In the power of the approaching storm Elihu senses that God is near, and he says, ***“At this also my heart trembleth, and is moved out of his place [my heart beats rapidly]” (37:1).*** His heart is pounding, and his pulse has accelerated as he sees the strength of God’s power in the storm.

In a fresh flood of inspiration Elihu compares the thunder to God’s majestic voice. And through His voice God issues instructions on the flow of the seasons and the meaning of the elements: the snow, the gentle rain, the heavy rain, the whirlwind, the scattering winds, the ice, the frozen seas, the thick clouds, and the bright clouds. All of these respond to the will of God.

Elihu is trying to say—all of creation—all of nature—is under God’s control and moves in line with His purpose. ***“He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy” (37:13).*** This is the God we can count on even in life’s most perplexing moments!

With the passing of the storm, Elihu captures the meaning of the moment as he calls Job to ***“stand still and consider the wondrous works of God” (37:14).*** The clouds are shining and making patterns in the sky. A south wind blows, the sun breaks through and golden splendor spreads across the northern skies—God is there!

Then during this majesty Elihu leaves Job with some unanswered questions: ***Do you know when God sends His wondrous works and what causes the light in the clouds to shine? (37:15); do you know how the clouds hang the way they do? (37:16); do you know why your clothes are warm? (37:17); do you know who spreads out the skies? (37:18).***

The “when,” “what,” “how,” “why,” and “who” all point to a mighty Creator-God and testify to His majesty and greatness. At such moments, any pride or arrogance has given way to our sense of smallness in comparison to the grandeur of God’s creation. Somehow in such moments “why?” seems irrelevant.

Elihu’s work is done. He began his lecture to Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Job with angry criticism and sarcasm; he closes with gentle teaching. Like John the Baptist who had the privilege of preparing the way and announcing the coming of Jesus Christ, Elihu, as we shall see, has prepared the way and announced the coming of God Almighty.

Just as John the Baptist introduced the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world, Elihu announced that God comes in golden splendor, in awesome majesty, and in excellent power (37:19-24). As simple as a child’s table grace, Elihu has indeed spoken the truth in love—God is great; God is good!

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