

WOMEN IN THE WORD OF

FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CHURCH

“Job: A 12-Week Study” by Eric Ortlund

Week Eight: Elihu’s Speeches

March 29, 2022

Last week, we heard the final words that Job would speak until he responds directly to God. The three comforters ended their speeches prior to that. Now we will look into the words of Elihu, a young man whom we haven’t met before. He speaks uninterrupted and at great length, more than any other speaker in the book except Job.

Chapter 32

32 So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.

In verse 1, the comforters are no longer referred to as such, nor as friends, but simply as “these three men.”

Who is this mysterious Elihu? Apparently he has been there all along listening to the arguments of Job and the friends, but we had no idea he was there.

So we are given details about his ancestry, his age and that he’s angry in this introductory section. His name means “he is my God,” and his father Barachel’s name means “God has blessed.”

Since God speaks immediately after him, he is often seen as Yahweh’s forerunner, and his speeches prepare Job for the appearance of God.

Elihu’s anger is mentioned 3 times in this brief introduction. He is angry with Job for justifying himself instead of God, and with the 3 friends because they had not answered Job adequately.

The social custom of the day was that only the elders would speak, and no one else, unless recognized by them.

So Elihu will go on to deliver 4 unanswered speeches. John Hartley has done an excellent job of summarizing them:

1. God instructs through dreams and afflictions.
2. God governs the world in justice without exception.
3. God cannot be placed under obligation as Job has attempted to do by demanding that God assert his innocence.
4. God disciplines anyone in jeopardy with suffering. He contemplates God's divine glory.

In Chapter 32, Elihu has spent a lot of time saying that he is going to speak and why, but he hasn't actually said much of anything yet.

It's the spirit in man, from Shaddai, that gives him insight. Here is the first way in which he differs from the comforters.

He also observes that older age is no guarantee of wisdom,

He also seems determined not to "take sides" in the argument or flatter anyone, but to speak what he thinks is right.

Chapter 33

In the opening remarks to Job, Elihu begins well. He acknowledges that he speaks from an upright and sincere heart. He repeats that he speaks by the spirit of God and he declares his equality with Job in God's eyes.

Elihu summarizes what Job has complained about, but it's important to know that the Hebrew word he uses for clean, *hap*, is different from the one Job used, *tam*.

In verses 12-13, we see the main difference between Elihu and the friends. Rather than trying to accuse Job of committing some heinous sin that is responsible for his suffering, Elihu focuses on Job's complaints against God.

Job has complained that God is silent, but Elihu contends that God speaks in all kinds of ways, specifically through dreams and suffering. Verse 16 is likely a response to Job's mention (7:14) of the terrifying dreams he has at night.

Then Elihu describes physical suffering very much like what Job has been enduring. Although Elihu is focusing on discipline rather than punishment, and his tone is relatively gentle, he is still making the same mistake that the comforters did.

Elihu is correct that Job is presumptuous to speak to God as he has, and to demand an explanation from Him.

Once again in Job we encounter the idea of a supernatural mediator.

Elihu concludes here by giving Job an opportunity to speak, but Job remains silent. It's likely that Job is not inclined to respond because he has already declared his final appeal to God.

Chapter 34

Elihu would have done well to end his argument there, but he continues. This chapter sounds much more like what the friends have already been saying.

His tone has turned harsh, especially for someone who wasn't going to pressure Job or make him feel terror. Once again, here is someone who has no empathy for Job's sincere questioning in the midst of profound suffering.

In verses 10-30, Elihu proclaims that God rules justly; He does not pervert justice or do evil, as Job has sometimes implied. God acts in His divine sovereignty and no man has a right to question Him.

Elihu goes beyond pointing out Job's errors to prescribing what Job needs to do next.

Although Elihu has wants to help Job see his errors and to be justified before God again, the brashness of his words here is startling.

Chapter 35

Elihu demonstrates his failure to understand Job yet again when he accuses him of saying that he is more righteous than God, (verse 2) which Job never did.

Elihu again restates some of the very things the friends have pointed out earlier (35:7 and 22:3-4).

Verse 4 is particularly striking. Elihu boldly declares that he is not just going to set Job straight, but also the friends.

Nonetheless, Elihu does add some insights here that were not expressed before. In answer to Job's accusation that God doesn't hear the cries of the oppressed, Elihu gives a reason why God might not respond to them.

Elihu also says something that the friends never said: that Job's case is before God, and Job's best course of action is to wait for Him (v. 14b).

It is also significant that Elihu uses a phrase about Job that God Himself will utter when He appears: Job multiplies "words without knowledge." (35:16 and 38:2)

Chapter 36

Elihu softens his tone a bit here, entreating Job to listen patiently a little longer because he has more to say on God's behalf.

From verses 5-23, Elihu reminds Job that God destroys the wicked, but He uses affliction to draw the righteous who have strayed back to Himself, that He may bless them again.

In verse 24, Elihu begins expounding on the theme of God's greatness, which will continue to the end of his speech, and serve as the transition to God's appearance in Chapter 38.

In verse 27, he begins to use the imagery of the storm, prefiguring God's appearance in the whirlwind. He talks about the rain, the thunder and the lightning, all of which are under God's command and used for His purposes.

Chapter 37

Elihu in beautiful, poetic images has described God's awesome power in controlling all facets of the weather, and for His own purposes.

Then he exhorts Job to reconsider his words, his challenge to be cleared by God in court.

God who is mighty in power is also just and righteous. Therefore, Job should abandon his argument.

These final words serve to prepare Job to meet God, who comes out of the whirlwind to confront him.

Over the next two weeks, we will explore that encounter – how it affects Job and what it means for us. It will be a welcome change, for we have seen that the words of the men in this book do little to help Job, and often would be better left unsaid.

Application

1. Do I use too many words?

When words are many, transgression is not lacking,
but whoever restrains his lips is prudent. Proverbs 10:19, ESV

Whoever restrains his words has knowledge,
and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Proverbs 17:27,
ESV

2. Do the aged always have more wisdom? Should we show them special respect?

You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man,
and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. Leviticus 19:32, ESV

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves,
all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble." 1 Peter 5:5, ESV

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. 1 Timothy 4:12, ESV

3. Worship God at all times. This is a worthwhile thing to do, even in the midst of suffering. Our God inhabits praise, and singing is particularly beneficial. Acknowledging God's power, sovereignty, and majesty keeps our perspective straight.

4. God's discipline is for our good. We should accept it and learn from it, not fight against it.

For the LORD reproves him whom he loves,
as a father the son in whom he delights. Proverbs 3:12, ESV

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives." Hebrews 12:6, ESV

Next week:

Week 9: The Lord's First Speech, pp. 67-74 in the study book
Job, Chapters 38:1-40:5