

Assignment Title: Exegetical Paper

Book of Job chapters 32-37

Name: Martin Nelson

Campus Location: ATS/Rockland or ATS/NY City

Course Title: Job

Course Number: OT647/OT747

Semester & Year: Fall 2021

Professor: Dr. Russell Mack

Date Submitted: December 11, 2021

Introduction

The name Elihu means "God is Lord." He came on the scene as a messenger on a mission, like someone who came to fix a wrong and was eager to express himself with the passion of John the Baptist. This paper is about the four speeches of Elihu. As seen in Job 32:1-3, it commences with Elihu's state of mind. In his video presentation of Elihu, Dr. Mack stated, "He came as a new character, with a cogent theodicy which opposes the Retribution Principle, although it fell short. He is angry with Job's friends because they ran out of arguments to convince him. He is not advising Job to restore his relationship with God to restore his fortune. He declared that God's justice is never perverted. However, he is mistaken about God's policies." Elihu entered the scene as a surprise witness to the persecution. Like Melchizedek, he showed up different from those before him, with credible credentials. First, the meaning of his name, second, his claim that he hears from the almighty, and third the statement he proclaimed about the wondrous works of the Almighty, which was quite impressive.

Main Characters

The principal characters in this speech are Job, Elihu, Bildad the Shuhite. As noted in Genesis 25:2 and 1 Chronicles 1.:32, he is a descendant of Abraham through Keturah by Shuah. Zophar, the naamathite is another character who is an epithet of Zophar according to Unger's Bible Dictionary. According to Numbers 26:40, the term naamathite might have derived from several towns—Noam, a castle in Yemen, and a place on the Euphrates. Also, an area belonging to the Arabs. He is one of the family descended from Naaman a Benjaminite. The other character is Eliphaz, the Temanite. 1 Chronicles 1:30 noted he could be the ninth son of Ishmael, and according to Ungers Bible Dictionary, whence the tribe called after him is

mentioned in Job. And also, the land occupied by his tribe. I believe these men became friends with Job, either through traveling, business, or religion. They are from various tribes and townships. And it appears Job lived either at the time of Abraham or a period close to that time.

Major Themes

- Job's Innocence
- God's Character
- God's Justice and Human Suffering
- God's Sovereignty
- Retribution Principle
- The Suffering of the Righteous

Genre

Numerous scholars agree that the book of Job is written with various literary genre styles, and chapter 29 to 37 is declared to be narrative. In *Discovering the Old Testament Story and Faith*, Alex Varughese (2003, 43) states,

The next step of exegesis involves the identification of the literary structure of the text that the writer has utilized to expand the main idea. Here we must analyze the text as a literary work and look for subthemes and the development of the plot or the main idea. How does the text begin? Does the text address specific people? Does the text introduce a speaker? Does the speaker use subthemes to expand the main idea? These are some of the questions answered to determine the genre is a narrative.

The Historical Background

According to Job 1:1, this drama unfolded in the land of Uz. The *Unger's Bible Dictionary* states, the Uzzities dwelt in the Arabian desert, west from Babylon, under the Caucabenes, and adjacent to the Edomites of Mount Seir.

Elihu is the youngest of the men who addressed Job. His family history is given in Job 32:1-3. In *All the Men of the Bible*, Dr. Herbert Lockyer (1958, 103) describes Elihu as the man who was a self-assertive dogmatist. He was of the kindred of Ram. His name means "God is Lord," suggesting his desire to exalt the Almighty.

One writer has described him as "the forerunner of Jehovah.' This youthful, somewhat self-assertive speaker reaches a high level and has "a far juster and more spiritual conception" in dealing with the problem that has confronted Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. But he gave only half the truth, and his appeal, although so lofty and eloquent, is marred by a self-assertiveness evident from his sayings, "great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment" (Job 32:9).

Job 32:1 - 33:33 shows Elihu starting his first speech in anger.

- He, first of all, condemns Job for his self-justification (Job 32:2, 33:8-9).
- He sets out to modify the doctrine of the friends by affirming that affliction is as much a judgment upon sin as a warning of judgment to come (Job 34:10-11).
- "He then unveils in a way, completely overmastering the mind, the majesty and glory of God, the climax of which is in Job 37:5. He claimed inspiration for his presence and message, eagerness was his to speak before he did, but youth and modesty kept him

back. What Elihu seemed to forget was, a trial can overtake the saintliest of men."

"That the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7, New King James Version).

The NIV Life Application Study Bible stated that Elihu introduced a new perspective. While Job's three friends said he was suffering from some past sins, Elihu said Job's suffering would not go away until he realized his present sin. He maintained that Job wasn't suffering because of sin; he was sinning because of suffering. He pointed out that Job's attitude had become arrogant as he tried to defend his innocence. He also said that suffering is not meant to punish us as much; it is meant to correct and restore us on the right path. His speech was partly true. He urged Job to look at his suffering from a different perspective and with great purpose in mind.

Elihu was very articulate in his presentation. He spoke with passion as to say I am on a mission. In Job 32:6-22, he acknowledges his youth and his fearfulness. He declared that the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty gives understanding. He stated that it is not because of age you attain wisdom. He demanded an audience. He chastised the elders because they could not convince Job of his sin. He has decided that they have failed, so now he will speak. And boldly declared that he is full of words, and the spirit compels him to speak. He stated he would show no partiality or flatter any.

In his notes, Dr. Constable (2020, 69) states, "some critical scholars believe that a latter editor inserted chapters 32-37. Many conservatives think there is ample external and internal

evidence indicating that this section fits into the argument of the book. His speeches which seemingly interrupt the argument of the book, actually set the stage for Yahweh's speeches. He appears as a type of mediator (an impartial witness) who speaks on behalf of God (36:2)".

In the book, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton (2009, 412-413) stated, "Elihu fulfills a narrative function in keeping the reader in suspense about how God will respond to Job's oath. It serves a philosophical function of offering a more sophisticated response to Job's problem than that suggested by the other friends."

Job's Plea of Innocence 34:1-9

Elihu began his second speech in Job chapter 34. In his notes on this chapter, Dr. Constable (2020, 73) stated, "Elihu, in this speech, sought to refute Job's charge that God was unjust. He tried to answer Job's question, "Why doesn't God have mercy on me?" He addressed Job's three friends (vv.10-15) and then spoke to Job (vv. 16-27)". "Elihu reminded the three older counselors that Job had claimed to be innocent of transgressions. Then he sided with them and agreed that Job was guilty of sin, for which God could punish him justly."

"Perhaps Elihu's rigid theological claim leaves him no choice but to implicate Job. Because God is both mighty and just, Job cannot be both innocent and suffering grievously. Divine justice rules out unjust misery" (Crenshaw 2011, 139). Unfortunately, Elihu did not know how the story began.

Elihu's Defense of God's Justice

Dr. Constable (2020) stated that Elihu made some truthful statements about God's character. First, he infers from God's supremacy as Creator that he is not accountable to

anyone (13). And secondly, verses 14-15 specify that every living thing depends on God for its being so that He may indiscriminately or universally withdraw this gift of existence and do nothing wrong. This is an acceptable acknowledgment of God as the owner of all. Defending God's character about how he dispenses justice has baffled scholars for years and will continue to be so. The question before us is Job's innocent and is God unjust. Here we have the doctrine of Theodicy, which deals with the reality of pain, suffering, and death in the world in relationship to God's holiness and justice. This topic is mostly described as the retribution principle.

Although this topic is from the pages of scripture, life experience teaches us that people do not always suffer because of sin, nor do people prosper because they are righteous. Let's look at some of the wealthiest people in the world today; they have no relationship with God as we see here in America, how the anti-God institutions and some multi-millionaire support many evil causes. Why was Job suffering? It was God's will. We know that we are reading the script because we have the plot before us. Job did not know the origin of his situation because that was not revealed to him. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8, New King James Version). "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel" (Jeremiah 18:6, New King James Version). God said to Joseph, you will be the head, your father's household will bow to you, but before this promise was fulfilled, note God's process of brokenness on Joseph. He was sold into slavery, lied upon by Mrs. Potiphar, ended up in prison, forsaken by the baker, then became a prime

minister. The three Hebrew boys and Daniel did nothing wrong. However, they ended up as slaves in Babylon. In Acts 9:15-16, God told Ananias that he had chosen the apostle Paul to show him things he will suffer for His name. In Acts 5, God desires to have a swift judgment on Ananias and his wife Saphira and granted salvation to Simon the sorcerer. The Apostle Peter gives us some good advice as believers in this world, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter (1 Peter 4: 15-16, New King James Version). In John 9, the question was asked, who did sin, and we receive the answer there. We must understand suffering in relation to God's will. This is also true of prosperity. These must be taken in context.

The NIV Life Application Study Bible gives a beautiful outline of how suffering affects us and provides a contrast.

Suffering is helpful when...	Suffering is harmful when...
We turn to God for understanding, endurance, and deliverance	We become hardened and reject God
We ask important questions we might not take time to think about in our normal routines.	We refuse to ask any questions and therefore miss lessons that would be good for us.
We are prepared by it to identify with and comfort others who suffer	We allow it to make us self-centered and selfish

We are open to being helped by others who are obeying God	We withdraw from the help others can give
We are ready to learn from a trustworthy God	We reject the fact that God can bring good out of calamity
We realize we can identify with what Christ suffered on the cross for us.	We accuse God of being unjust and perhaps lead others to reject him
We are sensitized to the amount of suffering in the world.	We refuse to be open to any changes in our lives.

Elihu's Third Speech, chapter 35:

Chuck Swindoll (2004, 258) commented on Elihu's third speech in his book on Job. He stated, "He builds a case against those with impure motives (Job) and emphasizes that (that) is the reason for God's silence. He commences this speech by presenting Job with some questions:

- Do you think this is just? Yet you ask him, "what profit is it to me, and what do I gain by not sinning? V.2.
- If you sin, how does that affect him? If your sins are many, what does that do to him? V.6.d sincere
- If you are righteous, what do you give to him, or what does he receive from your hand? V. 7
- Who teaches us more than He teaches the beast of the earth and makes us wiser than the birds in the sky? V. 11.

These questions are all valid and sincere. Elihu is making a case to show that God is in control and He is not unjust, so Job, whatever the matter that causes you pain, it's from you. Elihu has not read the first chapter of Job as we have. He does not know God himself declared Job a righteous man to Satan. In the book *Reading Job*, by James Crenshaw (2011, 141), the author stated, "in vv.4-8 Elihu offers his corrective to Job's supposed questions. In essence, he reminds Job of his insignificance in the vast universe. "Look to the heavens and see; scan the clouds over you" (v.5). How can your sin affect EL in any way? The same applies to virtue. Your goodness contributes nothing to him. The transcendent deity is so far removed from the earth below that nothing done by mortals has any impact on him."

Elihu's Fourth Speech: chapters 36-37

Dr. Constable (2020, 76) stated, of all Elihu's speeches, this one is most impressive because of his lofty descriptions of God. "This concluding statement contains Elihu's best and most distinctive ideas. Up until now, he has been treading on the familiar and traditional ground, repeating largely the ideas which Job and his friends have already expressed. The harsh tone that Elihu had adopted in his second and third speeches is here softened. Job 36:1-21 is a more mature and engaging statement of orthodox theology than anything found elsewhere in the book."

- v.2, he declared to have patience with me, I am speaking on God's behalf.
- V.3, my knowledge is coming from afar.
- v.4, my words are not false. One who is perfect in knowledge is with me.

He went on to make some wonderfully statements about God's goodness, His mercy, His justice, how He keeps His eyes on the righteous. He blesses those who obey Him. Riches or mighty forces cannot keep you from distress. No one assigns God His way. He proclaimed God's majesty by asking Job to magnify God's work. From Job 36:24 to 37, he uses the order of nature to glorify God for His wondrous works, which demonstrates the wisdom of God.

Dr. Constable (2020, 81-82) stated that Elihu introduced a different reason for suffering in his four speeches. God has things to teach people that they can only learn through pain. He also described God in terms that suggest he may have had a more realistic, fuller concept of God than Job's three friends did. All the same, neither Elihu nor the other three men had good insight into Job's situation, and they could not have had it unless God revealed it to them from His heavenly court.

Chuck Swindoll (2004, 259-260) Elihu covers four important bases:

- God protectively watches over the righteous.
- If the righteous commit a transgression, He lets them know they have done wrong.
- If they respond to the rod of discipline, he restores them.
- If they persist, they will surely suffer His consequences.

The final speech says Swindoll, provides a magnificent segue into the moment when God finally breaks the silence and reveals Himself to Job. We learn from Elihu that God is prominent and preeminent. He is majestic in His power, magnificent in His person, and marvelous in His purposes.

I am assuming that Elihu indeed heard from God. I am not sure if he started the right way, but the things he said about God and the manner of his presentation will not be possible without a close relationship. Job had quite a different attentive manner in listening to Elihu. And if Job's other friends were standing by, they did not refute him, and they had the right and the tradition to do so because he was the younger.

Some of the personal lessons in the book of Job for me are:

- I do not have to know the why of everything that is happening.
- As believers, we have to trust God in all life's situations.
- It is far better to be silent than have a wrong opinion.
- No challenge in life should stop us from serving the Lord.
- We are not rich because we are righteous; or sinners because we suffer.

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