***Job: A Study in Suffering…And Faith***

Lesson Eleven: Elihu’s Speeches and Conclusion

(Job 32:1 - 37:24)

***Objective:*** Be able to describe Elihu’s explanation for human suffering.

1. **Elihu’s first speech (32:1-33:33)**
   1. Elihu was motivated to enter the discussion (32:1-5).
      1. There was a hiatus in the debate because the friends felt the uselessness of responding to Job and Job had his final say (v. 1).
      2. We are introduced to Elihu who has hitherto not been mentioned in the book, but was obviously a spectator to the conversation between Job and his friends.
      3. In deference to the greater age of the three friends and Job, Elihu had been quiet, but now his wrath has been kindled against all four.
         1. His wrath against Job was because Job was more interested in justifying himself than God (v. 2).
         2. His wrath against the friends was because they had condemned Job while not having an answer to his dilemma (vv. 3, 5).
   2. Elihu explained his intervention in the discussion (32:6-14).
      1. He had refrained from entering the discussion until “age” had spoken, but it had become obvious that age did not guarantee wisdom (vv. 6-9).
      2. He had listened carefully to the friends’ words, but they had not convinced Job and he cautioned them against arguing that only God could answer Job (vv. 10-13).1 
         1. The NLT has an interesting translation: “And don’t tell me, ‘He is too wise for us. Only God can convince him’” (v. 13).
         2. It doesn’t seem to me, however, that the friends were ready to accede to Job’s wisdom!
      3. Elihu did not intend to use their ineffective arguments (v. 14).
   3. Elihu spoke of his eagerness to speak (32:15-22).
      1. This section seems almost to be a soliloquy with Elihu speaking to no one in particular.
      2. He noted the silence of the friends and then affirmed that he would “declare [his] opinion” (vv. 15-17).
      3. He compared his eagerness to speak to the pressure of fermenting wine with no way to give off the gases produced (vv. 18-20).
      4. He expressed his intention to not show any partiality or to flatter (vv. 21-22).
   4. Elihu encouraged Job to listen and respond if he can (33:1-7).
      1. He affirmed the truthfulness of what he was saying (vv. 1-3).
      2. He also reminded Job of his common humanity with Job, indicating that he would not terrify or pressure Job as Job had accused God of doing (vv. 5-7; see 9:34; 13:21; 23:15).
   5. Elihu quoted Job’s claims (33:8-11).
   6. Elihu responded to Job’s claims (33:12-30).
      1. It seems that Elihu first chastised Job for suggesting that God needed to explain His actions; God did not need to give account to man (vv. 12-13).
      2. Elihu affirmed, however, that God **does** speak to man for the purpose of instruction (vv. 14-18).2
      3. Elihu suggested that God also uses pain to chastise and teach men (vv. 19-30).
         1. The affliction of a man is described. The description actually fits the case of Job quite well (vv. 19-22).
         2. God shows His graciousness by revealing to the afflicted man the reason for his suffering and preserving the man from death (vv. 23-26).
         3. The “he” of verse 27 is the man who was suffering (NKJV). It is uncertain just **when** he said what is attributed to him in that verse.
            1. From the KJV, it appears that the man is making a confession of sin which precedes and is the cause of his release from suffering.
            2. From the ESV and others, his comment in verse 27 follows his deliverance.
            3. From the NKJV, it is unclear.
   7. Elihu again encouraged Job to listen and answer if he can (33:31-33).
2. **Elihu’s second speech (34:1-37)**
   1. Elihu appealed to his listeners to reason along with him (vv. 1-4).
   2. Elihu quoted Job’s complaints (vv. 5-9).
      1. Job had accused God of unfairness/injustice.
      2. Elihu maintained that by his words, Job had joined the company of the wicked.
   3. Elihu asserted the justice of God (vs. 10-30).
      1. It is unthinkable that the Almighty would commit iniquity; He repays men according to their works (vv. 10-12).
      2. Note Gibson’s comment on verses 13-15:3
         1. *The idea of these verses is that since God is ‘All-Sovereign’ He can have no motive for injustice, and that the fact of His sustaining the world is a practical proof of His goodness and lovingkindness.*
      3. Elihu pointed out the unseemliness of questioning God’s justice (vv. 16-18).
      4. God shows no partiality; the rich and the poor are both His creation (vv. 19-20).
      5. Elihu declared that the wicked are not hidden from God and He overthrows them (vv. 21-28).
      6. No one is able to resist His judgment (vv. 29-30).
   4. God is not subject to man (vv. 31-33).
      1. This section is difficult because of the poor quality of the text and so the difference in translations is considerable.4
      2. It appears that Elihu was trying to get Job to see that God does not have to behave on man’s terms.
   5. Elihu charged Job with wickedness (vv. 34-37).
      1. Elihu asserted that he had the support of wise men in his estimation of Job’s conduct (vv. 34-35).
      2. Elihu believed that Job had spoken like a wicked man and should be punished accordingly (v. 36).
      3. He charged Job with rebellion and derision toward God (v. 37; see 27:2).5
3. **Elihu’s third speech (35:1-16)**
   1. Elihu quoted Job’s complaints (35:1-3).
      1. Note the difference between the ESV and NKJV in verse 2:
         1. **Job 35:2 (ESV)** **2** “Do you think this to be just? Do you say, ‘It is my right before God,’
         2. **Job 35:2 (NKJV)** **2** “Do you think this is right? Do you say, ‘My righteousness is more than God’s’?
      2. The quotation in verse 2 does not appear to be an actual quotation of Job but rather Elihu’s percep­tion of Job’s opinion/attitude.
      3. While the quotation of verse 3 does not seem to be an “ipsissima verba” quotation either, it does seem to convey the sense of Job’s words in 9:28-31.
   2. Elihu replied to Job’s assertions (35:4-8).
      1. The reference to “friends” (v. 4) perhaps means others with Job’s attitude rather than his three friends.6
      2. He pointed out to Job that a transcendent God is not affected (helped/harmed) by either man’s righteousness or wickedness (vv. 5-7).
      3. Elihu did not appear to be saying that God was indifferent to man’s behavior (see 36:5-15).
      4. Other men are the beneficiaries of a man’s behavior (v. 8).
   3. Elihu explained God’s failure to relieve some suffering (35:9-13).
      1. The oppressed cry out (v. 9), but God does not answer (v. 12).
      2. Elihu suggested that the reason God didn’t answer is that those who cry out frequently do so with no intention of recognizing the sovereignty of God or glorifying Him--they are too proud (vv. 10-12).
      3. Driver and Gray describe the “empty talk” of verse 13 in this fashion: *“mere empty complaining (9), not the voice of true religious trust (10ff).”* 7
   4. Elihu rebuked Job (35:14-16).
      1. The sense of verse 14 is unclear, as a consultation of different translators will make amply plain.
         1. Some think that the whole verse is a sort of paraphrase of Job’s complaint, with verses 15-16 containing Elihu’s answer (the ESV seems to support this view). If this is correct, Job was claiming that he had presented his case and could not find God to hear it and Elihu counseled him to be patient--God knew his circumstances and would act. In verses 15-16, he affirmed that Job, because God had not acted swiftly, had indulged in vain and foolish talk.8
         2. The NKJV suggests that Elihu encouraged Job to be patient, trusting in God’s justice.
         3. Others suggest that all of verses 14-15 are the complaint of Job (see the NIV) with verse 16 being Elihu’s commentary on the foolishness of Job.9
      2. Job had said that he wished for a face-to-face meeting with God to present his case (e.g., 23:3-5).
4. **Elihu’s conclusion (36:1-37:24)**
   1. Elihu reaffirmed God’s righteousness (36:1-15).
      1. Elihu requested Job’s patience for he had more to say (vv. 1-4). If Elihu was speaking of himself in verse 4, as seems likely, his arrogance was somewhat overwhelming (see 37:16).
      2. Elihu supported his affirmation of God’s righteousness by describing His justice.
         1. He exalts the righteous and cuts off the wicked (vv. 6-7).
         2. If the righteous ***do*** suffer, their pain is disciplinary in its nature. Whether they enjoy prosperity or perish in the future depends on whether they properly receive God’s chastise­ment (vv. 8-12).
      3. Elihu described those who will not turn from their sin and he pictured their end (vv. 13-15).
         1. Notice the similarity between Elihu’s speech here and that of Eliphaz (chapter 15).
         2. The NKJV translates “perverted persons” in verse 14. The “cult prostitutes” (ESV) is probably a reference to male temple-prostitutes (see 1 Kings 14:24; Deuteronomy 23:17).10
   2. Elihu cautioned Job (36:16-25).
      1. Elihu applied the principles just noted to Job as an explanation for Job’s continued suffering (vv. 16-17).
      2. He warned Job lest his rashness cause God to destroy him suddenly, reminding Job that he (Job) could not stop such a judgment (vv. 18-19).
      3. Elihu admonished Job to choose to bear his suffering rather than to turn, in his discouragement, to iniquity (vv. 20-21).
      4. Elihu continued his warning to Job by implicitly asserting that no one has the right to teach or admonish God (vv. 22-23).
      5. Man’s proper response to God is to magnify Him (vv. 24-25).
   3. Elihu illustrated God’s greatness/power (36:26-37:13).
      1. Elihu drew Job’s attention to God’s working in nature, particularly to His control of the weather (e.g., clouds, thunder, snow, rain, wind, etc.).
         1. He mentioned several purposes behind God’s actions: judgment or correction (36:31; 37:13); provision of food (36:31); mercy (37:13).
         2. By several of his statements (e.g., 36:29; 37:5, 7), it becomes apparent that Elihu’s purpose was to impress Job with the helpless­ness of man compared to God’s power.
      2. In my opinion, Elihu successfully and beautifully sustained his proposi­tion, **“God is great”** (36:26).
   4. Elihu challenged Job (37:14-23).
      1. In connection to the previous section, Elihu asked Job a number of questions designed either to show his inability to understand God’s actions or Job’s powerlessness in comparison to God’s strength (vv. 14-18).
      2. Elihu, with a bit of sarcasm, asked Job what men should say to God. By rhetorical question, he then affirmed that for man to speak ignorantly would be to invite destruction--something Elihu had no wish to do (vv. 19-20).
      3. Elihu spoke of the transcendence of God, but affirmed that man can trust Him to be fair and, as a result, men reverence Him.
      4. In a final jab, Elihu stated that God did not regard those who were “wise in their own conceit.” 11

**Endnotes:**

1Gibson, p. 179. 2Jackson, p. 70. 3Gibson, p. 187.

4Driver and Gray, pp. 300-302. 5Gibson, p. 190. 6Gibson, p. 192.

7Driver and Gray, p. 307. 8Jackson, p. 73. 9Gibson, p. 193

10Jackson (p. 73), Driver and Gray (p. 311), and Gibson (p. 196) all concur in this.

11Gibson, p. 202.

***Study & Discussion Questions:***

1. Why had Elihu waited to enter the discussion of Job and his friends?
2. Why was Elihu angry with Job? With the friends?
3. What figure did Elihu use to describe his eagerness to speak his piece?
4. Elihu quoted Job four times in chapters 33-34 (33:9-11, 13; 34:5-6, 9). What point was Elihu trying to answer in each case?
5. With what sin did Elihu charge Job in the end of his second speech (34:36-37)? Was he right? Had Job sinned in that way?
6. What complaint of Job did Elihu quote in 35:3?
7. What did Elihu think was the reason that God did not relieve the suffering of some men despite their cries (35:9-16)?
8. What seems to be Elihu’s point in 36:26-37:13?
9. Discuss Elihu’s answer to Job’s suffering as compared to the doctrine of the friends. Is his explanation any different? Is Elihu, in your opinion, any closer to the truth?