

# Elihu's Speech – Part 1

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – Elihu contends against the speeches of Job's friends, and rebukes Job for his assertions
2. aim – To cause us to return to the sovereignty of God in the midst of every situation, good or bad
3. passage – Job 32:1-37:24

### b. outline

1. Elihu Asserts His Right to Speak (32:1-22)
2. Elihu Rebukes Job's Conclusions (33:1-34:37)
3. Elihu Defends the Majesty of God (35:1-37:24)

### c. opening

1. a **review** of the book up to this point
  - a. in **1:1-5**, we are *introduced to Job*, a man who is both wealthy and righteous
    1. **e.g.** he demonstrates his fear of the Lord by offering sacrifices on behalf of his children
  - b. in **1:6-2:10**, we get a glimpse into the *heavenly councils*, two gatherings *by God* of his angelic servants – in *each*, God *proclaims* the nature of Job as righteous before Satan
    1. Satan questions this righteousness of Job, and God allows him to attack Job, first economically, then physically upon his person
    2. **we know why**: Job's righteousness **is of the declaration and purpose of God**, and nothing Satan can do will change Job's status – God's intention is to demonstrate *his* purposes in Job
  - c. in **chap. 3**, Job gives an *initial* lament in response to Satan's attack – he laments *even having been born*, or having to experience such things in life
    1. his reaction to suffering flows out of his *concupiscence*, the tendency of the flesh *even in the righteous man* to doubt the goodness of God *even in the midst of suffering*
  - d. in **chaps. 4-25**, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar attempt to persuade Job that his suffering has been caused *by his own sin* – **i.e.** if he will simply confess before the "deity," his suffering will be abated
    1. across three (3) rounds, Job responds to each speech (asserting his righteousness), and his *understanding* seems to grow as to the *real* intention of God behind his situation
    2. **Calvin**: although their *conclusions* are wrong, these friends *do* make some good points (**e.g.** that God's justice *must be* satisfied over sin)
  - e. in **chaps. 26-31**, Job makes his *final* appeal
    1. he will *again* assert his own righteousness, that he has *not* sinned to deserve suffering
    2. and, he will *continue* to lament that he has no way to defend his cause before an *infinite* God
    3. **note**: Job will make good points from a good foundation *poorly* (**Calvin**):
      - a. **i.e.** no one can counsel God in how he is to think or act (leading Job to fall into some *fatalism*)
      - b. **remember**: Job is a *man of his time* = he does not know the *fullness* of the biblical revelation **available to us** (**e.g.** that God *has* taken notice of the state of human beings, and has **[now]** entered into his own creation in order to redeem the corrupted)
    4. **summary**: Job is afflicted by God (through Satan) to demonstrate an *eternal* purpose, and Job (and his friends) try to "figure out" what it all means – but, in the end, the friends' assertion is demonstrated to be false (and rejected!), but, while Job's response *grows*, settling more and more into the *sovereignty of God*, he still comes up "short" in discerning its *eternal purpose*
      - a. **specifically**: Job seems to justify *himself* over the *sovereign purposes of God* – **i.e.** that it is *all about Job*, rather than **the sovereignty of God on display in him**
2. the **entry of Elihu** into the discussion
  - a. **note**: **32:1-5** are written (in the ESV) in *narrative* form, as compared to the *poetic* form – **i.e.** the author inserts an *historical* note at this point, to explain the appearance **and substance** of Elihu
  - b. Elihu is a Buzite = Buz, a nephew of Abraham through his brother Nahor (**Genesis 22:21**)
    1. **again**: putting Job in the timeframe c. 2000BC, in the days of Abraham
    2. Elihu is the *only* Hebrew name in this book – **i.e.** "*he [Yahweh] is God*" (the son of Barachel = "*may God bless*") – implying that the author *may* see him *uniquely* (**see below**)
  - c. Elihu has *obviously* been sitting and listening to Job and his friends
    1. no other mention of him is given, so we must *assume* he arrived *as one of* Job's friends
      - a. and ... he waits to speak because he is *the youngest* (**v. 4**) – the first part of his speech (**32:6-22**) is an *apologetic* for his age *over against* their "seeming" wisdom (**see below**)

2. he responds *to all their assertions* – **i.e.** he will address *both* Job *and* his friends for the theories they put forth throughout the three rounds of their speeches
    - a. **note:** the author tells us *up front* why Elihu will speak, and gives *great hints* as to what his speech will include, *even before recording it*
  3. he “burns with anger” (or is “filled with wrath”; **vv. 2, 3, 5**) that *both* sides are wrong:
    - a. **at Job:** “because he justified himself rather than God” (**v. 2**) = Job is more concerned about his *own* situation and his *own* answers than he is about *God’s intentions*
      1. **note:** Calvin here reads “because he said he was more righteous than God” = that he put the importance of his *own* righteousness above that which God intended over him
    - b. **at the friends:** “they found no answer” (**v. 3**) = they assume the *simplistic* (and erroneous) view that Job suffers just because of his own sin, a view *demonstrably false*
      1. **note:** in **v. 1**, the author suggests the friends “ceased to answer Job” because they cannot “fend off” his assertion of his own righteousness (**a temper tantrum?**)
      2. **again:** for Job to be “righteous in own eyes” is *not* to assume he believes he is *self-righteous*, but that he *sees himself* as righteous, not as a profligate being punished
    2. **from God:** although God will also “burn” with anger (**42:7**), he is *not* actually angry with Job (only his friends), implying that Elihu may be *missing* some of what Job has been arguing
      1. or, that **God’s perspective is infinitely higher** than the five of them put together ...
  - d. Elihu serves a number of *possible purposes* in being included here:
    1. he *may* serve (in small measure) as the *intermediary* (or *vindicator*) that Job had been looking for – **i.e.** someone to “take up his case” before God (**see 16:18-21; 19:23-25; 23:2-2-5**)
      - a. although Elihu *castigates* Job for his perspective, he does point Job *in the right direction*
    2. he applies *inspiration* to the situation (**see 32:8**), whereas the speeches up to this point are based largely on *tradition* and *observation* – Elihu *seems* to bring *God’s own words* (a prophetic voice) into the conversation (followed *directly* by God himself in **chaps. 38-41**)
    3. he *seems* to anticipate *and articulate* the stance that *God himself* will take – rejecting the “human” view given by Job and his friends, Elihu turns the attention to *God’s vantage point*
    4. he *reorients* the entire debate – he turns the focus *away from Job* (and the problems of human morality, suffering, righteousness, etc.) to *God alone* as the grounds of certainty and hope
  - e. but ... Elihu **struggles** under the same “limitations” that Job’s friends do (**IMO:** his speech is the **most difficult** to fit into the structure of the book):
    1. he *might* overstate his contribution – he knows *no more* of the *actual* reasons for Job suffering than the other actors in the story (**i.e.** he has an *inflated* view of his own wisdom vs. theirs)
    2. he makes *some* arguments that “overlap” with Job’s friends (**e.g.** he does have a tendency to blame suffering on *personal* sin, at times)
      - a. **e.g.** he implies that Job’s sufferings are not because of his *former* sins, but as **warnings over possible future sins** (read **33:14-18**)
      - b. **i.e.** this would be *virtually* the same argument that Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar make ... that “the deity” is bringing suffering to Job to *prevent* him from sinning (not just as punishment)
    3. he draws conclusions that are *significantly different* from God’s own reply
      - a. **i.e.** God simply **ignores** Elihu – true, there are some elements that are *repeated* from Elihu by God, but (in the end) God never *congratulates Elihu* for getting it “right”
      - b. **i.e.** like Job’s friends: says many good things, comes up with the wrong conclusion
  - f. **IOW (the best we can say):** Elihu’s speech builds *suspense* by delaying the final outcome; he does not provide any *substantial answer* to Job, but he does seem to *reorient* the discussion away from the “self-focused” perspective of both Job and his friends
    - a. **i.e.** Elihu is the “curtain” that rises before the main character enters the stage ...
3. the **structure** of the speech of Elihu
  - a. in **chap. 32**, Elihu gives an *apologetic* for his speaking, over against the “wisdom” of the others
  - b. in **chaps. 33-34**, Elihu *rebukes* Job and makes his case for *why* Job is *actually* suffering, under the inherent justice of God (specifically, as a warning to *future sin*)
  - c. in **chaps. 35-37**, Elihu *puts* Job “in his place” before a God who is just, with a defense of the greatness and majesty of God himself
  - d. **today:** just a *short* examination of Elihu’s opening apologetic ...

# I. Elihu Asserts His Right to Speak (32:1-22)

## Content

### a. the response of Elihu (vv. 1-5)

1. **again:** Elihu “burns with anger” because he believes the others are all “out to lunch” (see above) ...

### b. the apologetic of Elihu (vv. 6-22)

1. **read 32:6b-10:** Elihu recognizes that wisdom does not come from “age,” but from God
  - a. **true:** in that day, younger men *automatically* deferred to the wisdom of elders in the community; in a sense, *material* wisdom *can* come with age because age = experience
  - b. **however:** *spiritual* wisdom is *not* automatically the result of age; it is possible to be very old in years, but still have little knowledge and understanding of God
  - c. **in the NT:** wisdom is a product of *the Spirit*, what *he* gives to men, in understanding *what cannot be gleaned simply through observation* (1 Timothy 4:6-7, 11-12)  
“If you put these things [truths] before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ... Command and teach these things. 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. **e.g.** “it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand” (v. 8)
    2. **e.g.** “for I am full of words; the spirit within me constrains me” (v. 18)
  - d. **Elihu begins in recognizing the importance of inspiration (revelation) to the conversation**
    1. **it’s never what we believe that matters ... it’s what God believes ...**
2. **read 32:11-12:** Elihu condemns the “wisdom” of Job’s friends, as *hollow* words
  - a. “I waited for your words” (v. 11), “I gave you my attention” (v. 12) = I listened *faithfully* to your arguments and I looked for wisdom; I allowed you the opportunity to speak for I did so
    1. but ... “they are dismayed; they answer no more” (v. 15) = now they have nothing to say
    2. **remember:** it was Job who cut off Bildad mid-speech (chap. 26) – **i.e.** Elihu suggests that Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have nothing more to say *because their arguments are shallow and repetitive*, and they cannot stand before the argument that Job has made
    3. **LOW:** Elihu *swiftly condemns* Job’s friends – he “sweeps” their argument away quickly and spends the rest of his speech speaking to Job (and to the “wise men” in a general sense; 34:2)
3. **read 32:17-21:** Elihu “bursts” forth with his own opinion, arguing he now has the authority to speak
  - a. “my belly is like wine that has no vent; like new wineskins ready to burst” (v. 19) = the *imagery* of new wine fermenting in a wineskin; as the fermentation process releases gases, the wineskins expand, sometimes bursting if they are old and weakened
    1. **e.g.** Jesus uses the same imagery in **Matthew 9:17** to describe the new reality in those who are disciples of Christ, not needing (any longer) to keep the “old” religious system (**i.e.** fasting)
    2. **ITC:** Elihu uses it as a *metaphor* for needing to “bleed” the wineskin – thoughts and opinions have been building up in him and he needs to *let them out*
  - b. “I will not show partiality to any man or use flattery toward any person” (v. 21) = my opinions will “cut across” everybody’s position – I’m staking *my own place* to stand *against all* of yours
  - c. **Elihu argues that it is his turn to speak because he has words from the Almighty (v. 8)**
    1. **what we know:** it is *God’s words* (in 1:8; 2:3) that have set in motion all of these speeches
      - a. it is *God’s declaration* of Job as righteous that is the **key speech** of this book – Elihu’s message, albeit interesting, **will not add to the point** (and God will speak next)
      - b. **i.e.** in the end, it’s only what God has revealed that really matters ... the **blowiating** of human beings, albeit “interesting”, **cannot alter the plans and purposes of God**