

Elihu Speaks Words of Wisdom

A younger man named Elihu has been listening. He rebukes both Job and his friends, offering a different perspective on suffering as discipline and refinement from a loving God.

Job 32:1-22 • Job 33:1-33 • Job 36:1-26 • Job 37:1-24

CHARACTERS: Elihu, Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar

THEMES: Youthful wisdom, Suffering as discipline, God's majesty, Preparation

SO THESE THREE men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. But there had been a fourth man present, listening to everything—a younger man named Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite. He had waited to speak because the others were older, but his anger had been burning.

He was angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God. He was angry with the three friends because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him. Now Elihu could contain himself no longer.

'I am young in years, and you are old; that is why I was fearful, not daring to tell you what I know. I thought, "Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom." But it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding. It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right.'

Elihu's speeches span six chapters, and they mark a shift in the dialogue. Unlike the three friends, Elihu did not accuse Job of specific sins. Unlike Job, he did not question God's justice. Instead, he offered a third perspective: suffering can be corrective and redemptive, sent by a loving God to turn people from sin and pride.

'God does speak—now one way, now another—though no one perceives it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on people as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn them from wrongdoing and keep them from pride.'

Elihu suggested that God might afflict someone not as punishment for past sin but as prevention of future sin, or to develop character. 'He is chastened on a bed of pain with constant distress in their bones... Their soul draws near to the pit, and their life to the messengers of death. Yet if there is an angel at their side, a messenger, one out of a thousand, sent to tell them how to be upright, and he is gracious to them and says to God, "Spare them from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for them"—then that person can pray to God and find favor with him.'

This was closer to the truth than the friends had come, though still not the complete picture. Suffering could indeed be disciplinary and redemptive. But Job's suffering was neither punishment nor discipline—it was a test of genuine faith, unknown to Job himself.

Elihu also challenged Job's demand to argue with God as an equal. 'Why do you complain to him that he responds to no one's words? For God does speak—now one way, now another—though no one perceives it.' Job had been demanding answers, demanding a court case with God. Elihu insisted that God's ways of speaking are beyond human comprehension, His purposes inscrutable.

Most importantly, Elihu prepared the way for God's own speech. He painted a picture of God's greatness—His control over nature, His wisdom in creation, His power in the storm. 'Listen to this, Job; stop and consider God's wonders. Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash? The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress. Therefore, people revere him, for does he not have regard for all the wise in heart?'

As Elihu spoke of the storm, an actual storm was gathering. The voice that was about to speak would make all human words seem like whispers.

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