**Harmony Church – Chronological Bible Study Guide – Job Chapters 32-37**

**Video:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQwnH8th\_fs**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQwnH8th_fs)

**The Mystery of Elihu**

**Job 32-37 — Elihu Confronts Job**

**Elihu, whose name means “he is my God,” appears from nowhere. He is neither named among the friends who come to comfort Job in the Prologue nor among the friends in the Epilogue whom God rebukes. He only appears here in Job 32-37.**

**Elihu (Hebrew: אֱלִיהוּא ’Elihu) is a critic of Job and his three friends in the Hebrew Bible's Book of Job. He is said to have been the son of Barachel and a descendant of Buz, who may have been from the line of Abraham (Genesis 22:20–21 mentions Buz as a nephew of Abraham).**

**He pops on the scene out of nowhere: “Then Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, burned with anger” (Job 32:2). He speaks a few times and then vanishes. God clearly vindicates Job and condemns Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (Job 42:7-8), but he says nothing about Elihu.**

**Casual readers of Job barely notice Elihu. If they have the guts not to skip from chapter 2 to chapter 38, their eyes glaze over long before they meet Elihu in chapter 32. They sink in a bog of poetry; words swirl together into an indistinguishable mire, and Elihu comes and goes while readers are still gasping for air. Some don’t realize he’s not one of the “three friends.”**

**In addition, we’re clearly told that Elihu is young (Job 32:4, 6), raving mad (Job 32:2, 3, 5 – four times!), and full of criticism for Job (Job 33:12, 34:7-8, 34:35-37, etc.). Yet God clearly claims that Job has “spoken of me what is right” (Job 42:7-8). What’s all the fuss? This case should be closed.**

**First Speech (32-33): Job is self-righteous and God disciplines such.**

Elihu is confounded by the silence of the friends after Job’s monologue (32:15) and he cannot sit idly by while God is defamed by Job. So, he must answer (32:17) or else he will burst like new wineskins (32:19). And he will tell it straight without flattery and without deference to their age. After this introduction, Elihu addresses Job directly (33:1-33). The Spirit of God, he claims, moves him to speak and he will do so out of the uprightness and sincerity of his heart (33:3-4).

Elihu gets to his point by quoting Job in 33:9-11. He summarizes Job’s protestations of innocence (cf. 9:21; 10:7,13; 13:24,27; 16:17; 19:11; 23:10; 27:5; 30:21). But the quotations are not exact. Elihu uses a word for “pure” or “clean” that only appears here in the Hebrew Bible. Further, Elihu absolutizes Job’s words, e.g., “without transgression” and “there is no iniquity in me.” Though Job did view God’s attack as an expression of hostility, Job never intimated that God invented sins (“occasions”) in order to assault him. Elihu denies Job’s innocence, but this is the substance of the Prologue.

Elihu believes, contrary to Job’s perception of divine silence, that God is actually speaking to Job in the circumstances of his suffering. Elihu contends that God is speaking through Job’s nightmares (33:15-18) and through the pain Job endures (33:19-22). And now, it seems, God is speaking to Job through Elihu, a messenger (angel) of God (33:23). Elihu will mediate God’s grace to Job. If Job repents and prays to God, then God will refresh him and repay Job for his conversion (33:26-28). According to Elihu, God is using this suffering in order to move Job to repentance (33:29-30). Job must confess his sin (33:27). This, Elihu assures Job, is wisdom (33:33). This is the same message that Job heard from his three friends in the dialogue and significantly parallels Eliphaz’s first speech in Job 4-5.

**Second Speech (34:1-37).**  **Job deserved suffering and God is just.**

Now Elihu addresses the friends (“wise men,” 34:2) and speaks of Job in the third person (cf. 34:5). He talks to the friends about Job in front of Job, which appears rather insensitive. His imprudence is indicated by his second misquotation of Job (34:5-6; cf. 9:15, 20; 13:18; 16:8; 27:2, 6). He quotes him as saying he is “without transgression” (34:6). And he accuses Job of walking with the wicked and sharing the company of evildoers (34:8). He proves this by quoting Job again in 34:9: “For he has said, ‘It profits me nothing to take delight in God’.”

But this is the opposite of what Job actually said in 21:15-16 (cf. 9:22; 21:7; 24:1). Job quotes the wicked as saying that there is no profit in serving God, and he explicitly rejects that orientation. Elihu’s approach entails that the satan was correct–Job only serves God for profit and now has cursed God when God failed him. Elihu has manipulated Job’s words.

Yet, on the basis of this misapplication of Job’s words, Elihu appeals to the friends (the verb in “hear” in 34:10 is plural) to judge Job. God does only what is just and repays the wicked for their deeds. The point, it seems, is that the friends should see what happened to Job as a just judgment.

In 34:16, Elihu turns attention to Job (“hear” is now singular). He condemns the way Job has approached God. Job has no right to speak to God as he has. It is Job who is unjust and Job’s accusations against God are a case of the pot calling the kettle black (34:17-20).

Elihu clearly considers Job one with the “evildoers” (34:22), burdened with “wickedness” (34:26), and sharing the life of the “godless” who afflict the poor (34:28-30). And he appeals–in the second person singular (“you, Job”; 34:30-34)–to Job to repent, to choose submission. Job’s arrogance is beyond measure, and Elihu wishes that he “were tried to the limit” (34:36) though it is difficult to imagine what more Job would need to endure in order to fulfill Elihu’s wish-prayer.

**Third Speech (35:1-16). Job is wicked and God is transcendent.**

Elihu now rehearses the same argument based on divine transcendence that Eliphaz and Bildad employed. In attempting to apply the meaning of the chasm between God and humanity, Elihu–like the friends–undermines the dignity of humanity. What is God to humanity? Nothing, according to Elihu. But actually humanity is highly valued by God and worth his attention, as the Prologue indicates (cf. Psalm 8).

This high view of transcendence, however, means that God will not hear Job, according to Elihu. He again quotes Job in 35:2, “You say, ‘I am in the right before God’.” On this ground, Job expects God to listen and hopes for vindication. Elihu regards this as the height of arrogance. If oppressed humanity cries out and God does not answer, why should Job expect God to answer him (35:9-15)? Elihu concludes that Job speaks “words without knowledge,” but the ignorance Elihu perceives is Job’s mistaken notion that God would actually listen to Job’s arrogant cries for relief.

**Fourth Speech (36:1-37:24).**  **Job must listen and God is active.**

Strikingly, Elihu claims integrity (“perfect in knowledge.” 36:4), and he uses the same word that describes Job in the Prologue (“blameless;” 1:1, 8; 2:3, 9). Who do we believe? Whose integrity is in tact?

Elihu assures us that God “does not keep the wicked alive” and “does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous” (36:6-7). When the righteous are afflicted because of their sins, God will “complete their days in prosperity” if they will listen, repent and serve God (36:9, 11). And if they do not listen, then they will die with the wicked (36:12). Elihu is responding to Job’s question about the prosperity of the wicked (36:17-23) and he assures Job that they will be punished, even dying in their youth (36:13-14), but God wants something better for Job if only Job will repent (36:15-16).

It is at this point that Elihu prepares us for the Yahweh speeches. As he speaks of the transcendence and mystery of God within the world–who can prescribe the way for God? (36:23)–Elihu anticipates Yahweh’s own accounting of his transcendence. “Surely God is great, and we do not know him” (36:26). He even anticipates Yahweh’s questioning of Job. “Do you know…” (37:15-16)?

Elihu grounds the greatness of God in God’s presence in the creation. From 36:27 to 37:13 Elihu offers a doxological poem on God’s activity within creation. God sends rain on the wastelands and his voice thunders over the land. All creation “accomplish[es] all that he commands” (37:12). Moreover, God is active for a purpose–“for correction, or for his land, or for love” (37:13). God is at work within the creation to accomplish his purposes.

What does this mean for Job? Elihu will not leave Job with any doubts (37:14-24). “Hear this, O Job,” Elihu announces. Given God’s sovereign work within the creation, “mortals fear him” but “he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit” (literally, “heart”; 37:24). Job, did you hear it?

According to Elihu, Job is conceited and arrogant. Job does not fear God. God will not listen to Job. God will not answer Job because God does not listen to the pleas of the wicked. Only if Job would repent, then God would answer him.

Elihu was probably more surprised than anyone when God showed up and answered Job.

**Conclusion-** Confusion abounds over Elihu because he sounds like Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, drawing the same conclusion: Job has sinned. But as we penetrate the poetry, we see that what Elihu means by his conclusion is not what they mean by it. His four speeches ring with incredible truth desperately needed by any innocent sufferer:

God has not been silent; he speaks through your pain (Job 32-33).

God is not unjust; he will eventually strike the wicked (Job 34).

Righteous living is not pointless, though we are insignificant next to God (Job 35).

You’re in no place to criticize God; remember to fear him (Job 36-37).

And God reinforces Elihu’s fourth point with some of his most aggressive and fear-inducing words in all the Bible (Job 38-41). May we all repent of justifying ourselves and remember to fear him.