

AN EXAMINATION OF ELIHU AND HIS ROLE IN THE BOOK OF JOB

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I examine the character of Elihu and his role within the book of Job and demonstrate how he, unlike the so-called “three friends” (Job 2:11),¹ offers words of divine wisdom to Job at a crucial point in the narrative. Although the prologue reveals that Job’s suffering is rooted in Satan’s accusation against what the LORD has spoken regarding Job’s righteousness (1:6-12), Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar all believe Job is the one to blame. But after defending his own innocence against their slanderous attacks, Job errs by charging God with unjust cruelty (30:21; 32:2; 40:8) and by demanding God (with an oath) to give an account for his deeds (31:35). Elihu then enters the debate and silences all parties with words of wrath (32:2, 5) and wisdom (33:33). Throughout his speeches, Elihu exposes the folly of the retribution theology espoused by the “three friends” (32:3, 5) and rebukes Job for “justifying himself rather than God” (32:2). Ultimately, Elihu proves to be Job’s real friend by directing Job’s eyes away from himself and back onto the LORD who “does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous” (36:7).

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references will be taken from the New King James Translation (1982: Thomas Nelson).

INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to his commentary, Seow writes, “The Hebrew book of Job is by all accounts an exquisite piece of literary art that has its rightful place among the most outstanding compositions in world literature.”² Because of this, the book of Job has been read and pondered by many over the years, which inevitably has given birth to a wide variety of interpretations. In particular, interpretation surrounding Elihu’s speeches (Job 32-37) and their role in the book of Job has been anything but uniform throughout history. The lack of consensus surrounding Elihu and his speeches initially derives from the language and grammar of the book of Job as a whole. Whybray notes that “the Hebrew in which the poetry of Job is composed is very strange and unlike that of any other Old Testament book. This is particularly true of the vocabulary, which includes a large proportion of words that occur only in this book and whose meaning is consequently debatable.”³ Even translation, let alone interpretation, proves to be most challenging. In his preface to the book of Job, Luther writes, “The language of this book is more vigorous and splendid than that of any other book in all the Scriptures. Yet if it were translated everywhere word for word...no one would understand it.”⁴ The unique vocabulary together with the poetic language and figures of speech, which dominate the core of the book, make navigating the behemoth-filled waters of Job not a task for the faint of heart.

2 C. L. Seow, *Job: Interpretation and Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 2.

3 Norman Whybray, *Job* (UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), vii.

4 Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86), 35:252.

Language aside, however, the character of Elihu himself remains an enigma within the narrative of Job. Shields calls Elihu the “Melchizedek of the wisdom literature—appearing from nowhere to address Job and his friends, then disappearing as the divine storm approaches, never to be heard of again.”⁵ In comparison to the other three friends of Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, there are several oddities surrounding the person of Elihu. First, unlike the others, Elihu is not introduced to the story until the middle of the book when he takes up his speeches in chapter 32. Elihu appears suddenly in the center of the book, gives a rather lengthy and uninterrupted speech directed at Job, and then vanishes just as suddenly as he appears. Furthermore, whereas the LORD specifically condemns Eliphaz and his two friends at the end of the book for what they have spoken to Job (42:7), Elihu is oddly excluded.⁶ However, neither is Elihu commended by the LORD. No judgment is provided either by God, Job, or the author regarding his speeches. This seems strange given the fact that Elihu’s speeches are significantly longer than the other three. Finally, there is the content of Elihu’s words themselves. Though Elihu presents himself as patient and humble (32:6), he simultaneously seems to lash out in anger at Job and his three friends (32:19) and even appears to suggest that his words have a divine origin (32:18; 33:4). On the one hand, Elihu claims that he desires to “justify” Job (33:32), yet, on the other hand, he condemns Job for contending with God and demanding a day in court with him (33:12-13). With such oddities, readers of Job are often left wondering what to make of Elihu and his role within the book. Should Elihu be interpreted in a negative light alongside the other three friends and therefore be criticized for the words he uttered to Job? Or should Elihu

⁵ Martin A. Shields, “Was Elihu Right?” *Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament* 3 no 2 (2014): 155.

⁶ Interestingly, in the pseudepigraphal writing the Testament of Job, Elihu’s speech is labeled “arrogant” and he is the only friend who is not forgiven by the LORD for his words to Job. Instead, he is cursed as “the only evil one” who “will have no memorial among the living” (T. Job 42:1; 43:5, 17).

rather be seen in a more positive light as the only one (in addition to the LORD) who spoke rightly to Job and therefore be praised for his words of wisdom?

The enigma of Elihu has been underscored throughout history. Interpretation surrounding him and the role of his speeches in the book of Job has been anything but uniform. According to Seow, early Christian interpreters were mostly critical of Elihu due to the explicit condemnation of him contained in the non-canonical book the Testament of Job.⁷ Gregory the Great characterized Elihu as a proud youngster, who, although he may have thought correctly concerning God, had become “puffed up with the pride of learning” and sought his own glory rather than God’s.⁸ However, some church fathers understood Elihu positively. Commenting on Elihu, Chrysostom sees him as someone who did not seek his own honor but displayed the “greatest proof of wisdom” and “ardor for God” in patiently waiting to speak after his elders and only when he believed it was necessary to do so.⁹ Medieval Jewish commentators were also favorable towards Elihu, interpreting God’s silence about Elihu in the epilogue as evidence of his innocence.¹⁰

At the time of the Reformation, interpretations surrounding Elihu continued to be wide-ranging. Although he was not writing specifically on the book of Job, Luther reveals his criticism of Elihu in a comment to Jerome Emser in 1521. In defending the supremacy of Scripture, Luther compares Emser unfavorably to Elihu stating, “You, together with Elihu, who also mocked the saintly Job, suffocate from your great [rhetorical] skill.”¹¹ In contrast, however, Calvin praised

7 Seow, “Elihu’s Revelation.” *Theology Today*. 68 no 3 (2011): 254.

8 Manlio Simonetti and Marco Conti, *Job*, vol. 6 of Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 164.

9 Simonetti and Conti, *Job*, 166.

10 Seow, *Job*, 33.

11 Luther, *Luther’s Works*, 39:159.

Elihu as an example of a young, zealous man who patiently defended the honor and the truth of God when his name was blasphemed by his elders.¹² Schreiner even notes that Calvin esteemed Elihu so highly that he considered him to be a mouthpiece of God.¹³

In modern times, Elihu is predominately disparaged by interpreters. Curtis criticizes Elihu as a “muddle-headed” fool and an unsympathetic “fanatic and bigot.”¹⁴ Although less vicious, Reyburn writes that “Elihu’s words add little of substance to the book.”¹⁵ Many, like Longman, argue that Elihu is essentially superfluous to the story because they believe that his speeches contribute nothing new to the previous dialogue.¹⁶ Gray even goes so far as to say that Elihu “disrupts the literary structure of the book and barbarously impairs the dramatic effect of God’s reply to Job.”¹⁷ This sentiment has led a majority of scholars to categorize Elihu’s speeches as an “intrusion” into the story which were a later interpolation added by a redactor who was “dissatisfied” with the text’s original form.¹⁸ While Clines admits that all of this

12 John Calvin, *Sermon on Job 32:4-10*, trans. Arthur Golding (London 1574), https://www.truecovenant.com/calvin/calvin_sermons_job_32_04etc.html.

13 Susan E. Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Calvin’s Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 131-135.

14 John B. Curtis, “Why Were the Elihu Speeches Added to the Book of Job?” *Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 8 (1988): 93.

15 William Reyburn, *A Handbook on the Book of Job* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 589.

16 Tremper Longman III, *Job* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 62.

17 John Gray, *The Book of Job* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 392.

18 David Freedman, “The Elihu Speeches in the book of Job,” *Harvard Theological Review* 61 (1968): 51. Since the rise of higher criticism, most scholars have doubted the originality of Elihu’s speeches. C. L. Brinks writes, “It is typically not advisable to use the word ‘consensus’ when it comes to speaking about scholarship on Job, but enough force of scholarship backs up the claim that the speeches of Elihu are secondary that one might dare to use it in this case” (“Who Speaks Words Without Knowledge? A Response to Wilcox and Brimson,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 no 2. (2010): 197-8.). However, as August Pieper has pointed out in the past, critics have “no shred” of historical evidence to doubt Elihu’s originality. Pieper observes that until the nineteenth century, “the whole body of historical tradition knows absolutely nothing of the idea that these discourses are spurious” (“The Book of Job in Its Significance for Preaching and the Care of Souls,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay Files*, trans. T. Jeske (2013), 19.). In support of the originality and placement of Elihu’s speeches, Seow notes that fragments of four MSS of Job were found in the caves of Qumran, the most substantial, 4QJob^a, dates to the first half of the first century BC. The significance of this manuscript is that it contains several portions of Elihu’s speech and in their current position after chapter 3 (*Job* 1-21, 5).

hostility over Elihu is overblown,¹⁹ he still proposes a “relocation” of Elihu’s speeches to make better sense of them within the flow of the book.²⁰

But not all modern scholarship is in agreement. Some speak more positively of Elihu, even praising him as Job’s “real friend”²¹ and a divine “spokesman of grace.”²² Rather than seeing Elihu’s words as an intrusion into the story, others, like Wolfers, understand them as an “integral part of the original Book of Job.”²³ Seow defends the importance of Elihu when he writes: “Instead of seeing the Elihu speeches as an interruption, one should consider them a necessary transition from the passionate and self-righteous asseveration of Job (31:40) to the overwhelming response of the theophany. Without the Elihu speeches, the movement from Job’s asseveration to the answer from the storm-wind would have been too jarring.”²⁴ But even among those who accept the canonical form of Job as original, there remains no consensus regarding how one should view Elihu and his speeches. For example, Pieper defends Elihu and affirms that he has spoken rightly to Job, while he also criticizes Elihu for failing both to empathize with Job and to rebuke him with “gentleness and kindness.”²⁵ Similarly, Estes likewise sees both negative and positive aspects in the character of Elihu. He writes:

[Elihu] finds the arguments of both Job and the friends lacking, but in his own speeches, Elihu does not significantly move beyond what has been said previously. In the structure

19 David J. A. Clines, *The Book of Job 21-37* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 710.

20 Clines, “Putting Elihu in his Place: A Proposal for the Relocation of Job 32-37,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (2004): 243.

21 Walter L. Michel, “Job’s Real Friend: Elihu,” *Criterion* 21 (1982): 29-32.

22 Alfred von Rohr Sauer, “Salvation by Grace: The Heart of Job’s Theology,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 37 no 5 (1966): 267.

23 David Wolfers, “Elihu: The Provenance and Content of His Speeches,” *Dor le dor*, 16 no 2 (1988): 90.

24 Seow, *Job*, 37.

25 August Pieper, “The Book of Job in Its Significance for Preaching and the Care of Souls,” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay Files, trans. T. Jeske (2013), 41

of the book, however, he prepares the way for Yahweh to appear, especially by his concluding hymn in chapter 37, which anticipates the rhetorical questions probing nature that dominate the divine speeches in chapters 38-41.²⁶

The diverse and at times diametrically opposed viewpoints surrounding Elihu simply prove the challenge in interpretation. Thus, in this paper, I will examine Elihu and his speeches and explore what role they play within the book of Job. Is the content of his words similar to that of Job's other three friends, or does Elihu speak something substantially different? If so, what is he saying? More specifically, was Elihu right in what he said to Job, and, if so, what purpose does he serve in contributing to the overall message of the book of Job?

²⁶ Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 20-21.

LITERARY CONTEXT: (1:1-31:40)

Before examining Elihu's speeches (chs. 32-37), it is necessary to understand the context in which they are set. Elihu's speeches come immediately following Job's concluding arguments (chs. 27-31) and after the three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) have exhausted themselves in a cyclical poetic debate with Job. In particular, the prologue of Job (1:1-2:13) provides crucial details which shape how one understands not only the content of Elihu's speeches but also the role they play within the overall narrative of the book. Therefore, in this section, I will offer two key points from the prologue, provide a summary of the arguments espoused by the three friends in their dialogue with Job, and finally examine Job's closing words before Elihu enters into the fray.

Two Key Points from the Prologue (1:1-2:10)

The first key piece of information the author wants his readers to know from the prologue is that Job's righteousness is grounded in his fear of God. The book begins by introducing Job as a man who was "blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1). This description of Job is even repeated twice by the LORD himself (1:8; 2:3). While Job possessed great wealth and a large family, what made him so great and unique was his relationship toward God. His religious piety is highlighted by the fact that he regularly offered burnt offerings to God on behalf of his children as a precautionary measure in case they had

“sinned and cursed God in their hearts” (1:5). These sin offerings not only reveal Job’s devotion to God but also his understanding of sin and the need for atonement. When Job, therefore, is described as being both “blameless and upright,” it does not mean that he was without sin. Rather, Job’s righteousness and outward piety were rooted, like all the Old Testament saints, in their fear of God.

While this story takes place outside of Israel, Walton and Longman point out that “in many ways Job thinks like an Israelite and believes what Israelites were supposed to believe.”²⁷ Whereas the notion of “fear” in modern English is often used negatively to connote a sense of anxiety or dread, Scripture uses this term in a more positive sense. Commenting on the meaning of the Hebrew verb “fear” (פָּחַד), Longman writes, “The verb has a semantic range that goes from what might be called respect or awe to utter terror. Indisputable, however, is the basic premise that to fear Yahweh is to stand in a subservient position to him, to acknowledge one’s dependence on him.”²⁸ To fear God means to entrust oneself to God and follow His commandments (Exod 14:31; Deut 10:12-13; Ps. 31:19; 40:3; 112:1; 115:11; 128:1; Eccl 12:13; Isa 50:10). In this way, the fear of God should be understood as synonymous with the New Testament notion of “faith” in God. Indeed, the writer to the Hebrews links fear and faith together when he writes, “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” (Heb 11:7). This verse is intriguing not only because it ties faith with fear, but also because it ties faith and fear with righteousness. In Scripture, righteousness is not something that is earned, but rather something

²⁷ John Walton and Tremper Longman III, *How To Read Job* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 25.

²⁸ Longman, *Job*, 332.

that is declared by God based on faith. The reason Abraham was righteous, or justified, in the sight of God was not because of something he did, but rather because he believed in the promise of God and demonstrated fear of God by willingly sacrificing his son (Gen 15:6; 22:12; cf. Rom 4:1-3). In the same way, Job is described as “blameless and upright” not because he was righteous in and of himself, but rather, because he feared God and believed in Him “who justifies the ungodly” (Rom 4:5). Moreover, nowhere in the prologue does Job himself claim to be righteous. Rather, it was the LORD who praised Job before the sons of God and declared him to be “blameless and upright,” calling him his “servant” (Job 1:8; 2:3). Thus, Job’s righteousness was ultimately grounded in his fear (or faith) in God.

The second key point of the prologue is that the suffering Job experiences in this book did not come as a result of his sin. Contrary to what his three friends will later claim, Job has done nothing to deserve this suffering; Satan is the one lying behind it all. While it is true that all of humanity is subject to the consequences of the fall, and therefore no one (including Job) is exempt from the guilt and curse of Adam’s sin (Rom 5:12, 18), to explain Job’s suffering in this way completely undermines what the divinely inspired author reveals to us in the prologue. The reason Job suffers is that Satan has called into question the integrity of his faith. Interestingly, it is the LORD who first directs Satan’s attention to Job when he boasts of how righteous he is: “Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?” (Job 1:8). However, Satan is skeptical. He questions the legitimacy of the LORD’s assessment of Job’s piety and replies, “Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely

curse You to Your face!” (1:9–11). Satan’s accusation is that Job’s fear is sourced out of a “love of self” rather than “love of God.”²⁹ And so, in an attempt to expose the emptiness of Job’s religion, Satan challenges the LORD to put Job’s fear to the test. The LORD accepts Satan’s challenge and permits him to afflict Job. Ironically, Job’s suffering came not because he was sinful but rather the opposite—Job was so righteous that it provoked Satan to attack him with the purpose of proving his faith to be false.

It is important to keep the above details in mind as we examine the character of Elihu because they serve as a guide in interpreting the core arguments at play. These details reveal what is at stake in the drama about to unfold, namely, that Job’s faith is on trial. While Job remains in complete ignorance of the reason for his suffering, the reader is fully aware. Not only is Job’s faith on trial, but the LORD himself has been called to the stand. When Satan calls into question Job’s fear of God, he is actually calling into question what the LORD himself has spoken concerning his “servant Job” (1:8). To accuse Job is to accuse God. If Satan succeeds in discrediting Job’s fear by afflicting him, then the LORD will be proven wrong. If Job ultimately listens to the foolish advice of his wife and does not hold fast to his integrity but instead curses God (2:9), then God will be shown to be a liar regarding the righteousness of Job. And while the prologue ends with the author reaffirming the innocence of Job (2:10), nothing is said about his innocence moving forward. And so, as the story continues, the reader is positioned to ask himself: will Job continue to fear God and hold true to his faith? Or will Satan get the best of him and thereby prove God to be wrong? Thus, the prologue reveals that the story of Job is less about *why* the righteous suffer and more about *how* the righteous respond to suffering. When it comes to the question of Elihu’s character and how one is to interpret his speeches, one must keep in

²⁹ H. H. Rowley, *Job* (London: Oliphants, 1976), 31.

mind the overall drama at play behind the scenes in the book of Job. With these key details in mind, we will now summarize the arguments of the three friends throughout the three speech cycles.

The Speech Cycles of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (4:1–26:14)

For most of the book, Job has an ongoing conversation, or even debate, with his three so-called “friends,” Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. These friends first came to Job in chapter two after they heard about “all the adversity that had come upon him” (2:11). While initially, they sat in silence with Job for a week, they soon found many words to say to him. Each of the three friends speaks to Job in turn and essentially tries to offer him an explanation for his suffering. The exchanges between Job and Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have been traditionally understood by most commentators to be structured into three cycles of speeches, beginning in 4:1 and ending in 26:14.³⁰ A friend speaks, and then Job offers a reply. This pattern is repeated three times for each friend, with the exception being Zophar, who only speaks twice to Job.

Two things should be noted regarding these cycles of speeches. First, while each of the three friends offers a slightly different critique of Job, they all essentially argue that Job must have done something wrong to deserve his suffering. Robert Alden correctly observes that “the overarching message of the three friends is that suffering is the consequence of sin,” and therefore, “Job must be a sinner.”³¹ Consider what each has to say to Job. Eliphaz says, “Those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same...Is not your wickedness great, and your

³⁰ Andrew E. Steinmann, “The Structure and Message of the Book of Job,” *Vetus Testamentum* 46, no. 1 (1996): 86. In opposition to this traditional view, however, Steinmann makes a convincing case that this section contains two four-speech cycles (94-95).

³¹ Robert L. Alden, *Job* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 23.

iniquity without end?” (4:8; 22:5). Bildad asserts, “If you were pure and upright, surely now He would awake for you, and prosper your rightful dwelling place....Behold, God will not cast away the blameless, nor will He uphold the evildoers” (Job 8:6, 20). Zophar declares to Job that “God knows deceitful men; he sees wickedness also....If iniquity were in your hand, and you put it far away, and would not let wickedness dwell in your tents; then surely you could lift up your face without spot; yes, you could be steadfast, and not fear” (Job 11:11, 14-15).

The three friends believe that God relates to humanity based on what has been called the “retribution principle.” This is the belief that, because God is good and just, the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked will suffer.³² Waters writes, “For most ancient peoples, the quintessential principle of life was that God (or the gods) rule with predictive, moral, and compensative order.”³³ One’s circumstances, then, become indicators of whether one is in or out of favor with God. According to Robert Gordis, the retribution principle was “universally accepted throughout the ancient Near East, from the Nile to the Euphrates.”³⁴ Although Walton and Longman provide several examples from ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian literature where suffering is not viewed as necessarily correlated to one’s wickedness, nevertheless they argue that the people still believed in some form of the retribution principle.³⁵ And so it is not surprising to find Job’s friends operating on the basis of a similar philosophy when they speak

32 In his article, “Elihu’s Theology and His View of Suffering,” Larry J. Waters argues that since Scripture does teach a form of the “retribution principle,” that God will ultimately punish the wicked and reward the righteous, it is better to speak of the view held by Job’s friends rather as “compensation theology.” Waters writes that because “compensation theology” demands that the “righteous will always prosper and never suffer” it “represents a fixed formula that became a distortion of the true principle of retribution...that God is somehow under obligation to exact payment according to a principle that confines Him to the limitations of human interpretation of how good or bad a person is or acts” (“Elihu’s Theology and His View of Suffering,” *Bibliotheca sacra*, 156 no 622 (1999):149-52.).

33 Larry J. Waters, “Elihu’s Theology,” 149.

34 Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965), 137.

35 Walton and Longman, *How to Read Job*, 92.

with Job. They look at Job's tremendous suffering and conclude that he must have sinned against the LORD. This philosophy also explains why they are so angry with Job throughout the dialogue. If Job is right, that he did nothing to deserve his punishment, then the world does not operate according to the retribution principle. If they are wrong about God and how he operates in the world then, in their mind, that means what they do has no direct correlation to what happens in their lives. If divine retribution is not true, then that means they cannot predicate the blessings they receive in life with any amount of certainty based upon what they do but are instead subject to the whims of their Creator. And thus they are unwilling to let Job defend himself because it would mean for their entire worldview to be shattered. But as we turn to Elihu and his speeches, we must ask whether or not Elihu is operating out of the same retribution principles as espoused by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

The second thing that should be observed regarding these speeches is that, in the end, the LORD explicitly condemns Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar for what they said to Job (42:7). In fact, they have erred so grievously that God's "wrath is aroused" against them and he commands them to offer burnt offerings in response (42:8). God even asks Job to intercede for them in prayer. This is critical in interpreting the content of their speeches and the role they play in the book. If God did not explicitly condemn these three, one might reasonably conclude that they were right in what they said to Job. On the surface, much of what they say about God is true and could be understood rightly according to what is revealed in Scripture. For example, Eliphaz says, "Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty. For He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole" (5:17-18). Eliphaz's words no doubt reflect the same wisdom Solomon would centuries later speak to his son: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom

the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights” (Prov 3:11–12). But truth does not exist in a vacuum. While one initially might be tempted to praise Eliphaz for such wisdom, because he is ultimately rebuked by the LORD, the reader must dig deeper than what appears on the surface and interpret his words within the greater context of the story. The reader will remember that Job’s suffering did not come as a result of anything he did but was initiated by Satan in the prologue. Thus, Eliphaz’s words, although true, are wrongly applied to Job in his situation. He is wrong to conclude that Job’s suffering is proof that God is chastening him for something he has done.

God’s condemnation of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar will become important as we examine Elihu and his speeches. Whereas they were explicitly condemned by the LORD, Elihu is strangely absent from any verdict given by God. He is neither praised nor condemned. Given how many more words Elihu spoke compared to the other three (his speeches are almost as long as the three friends’ speeches combined), it is odd that nothing would be said of him at the end of the book. If Elihu was also wrong in what he said to Job, why does the author fail to mention him at all? While some have suggested that Elihu’s absence at the end of Job is evidence that his speeches were of such poor quality that they were not even worth rebuking, a careful reading of his speeches makes such conclusions about his character highly unlikely. In contrast, this oddity instead shows that Elihu contributes something substantially different from his friends. Indeed, his words do not warrant a rebuke at all because, unlike the others, what he says to Job is both true and right.

Job's Final Speeches (27:1-31:40)

After the three cycles of speeches, Job then offers two final speeches without interruption (27:1-28:28 and 29:1-31:40). Choon-Leong Seow sees these speeches as signaling the end of the cycles of debate.³⁶ He points to the unique introductory formula used, “Moreover Job continued his discourse (לְמַשָּׁל) and said,” (27:1; 29:2). This is the first time the word לְמַשָּׁל is used when introducing someone’s speech in Job. The Hebrew word could simply refer to discourse in general or a wise saying, but it is also used to convey the sense of a “taunt” or a “song of jest.”³⁷ These two final speeches therefore can be seen as taunts offered in response to the feigned wisdom of his so-called “friends.” In Job’s eyes, he has won the debate with his friends. He would have to lie to admit that they were right in accusing him of evil (27:4, 5). Job maintains his integrity and holds fast to his righteousness (27:5, 6). They have failed to provide an adequate answer for his suffering and instead have only proven their lack of understanding by their many empty words (27:12).

Viewing Job’s final two speeches as a taunt against his opponents helps one make the best sense of chapter 28. Whereas many scholars see this chapter as either unoriginal to Job or unrelated to the subject matter at hand, Roy Zuck believes its content and placement are fitting to Job’s refutation of his three friends.³⁸ Because there are no textual breaks in this speech, it should simply be seen as a continuation of Job’s taunt toward his friends. Scott Jones suggests that rather than praising wisdom, this poem critiques “the modes by which ‘sages’ like Job’s friends

36 Seow, “Elihu’s Revelation,” 257.

37 Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (NV, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Pub. 2000), 648. See also Job 17:6; Is. 14:4; Micah 2:4; Hab. 2:6.

38 Roy B. Zuck, “Job’s Discourse on God’s Wisdom: An Exposition of Job 28,” in *Sitting with Job: Selected Studies on the Book of Job*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 299.

seek out wisdom.”³⁹ Job is ridiculing the hypocrisy of his friends. In accusing Job of being responsible for his suffering, Job’s friends were professing to be wise, to know, in Zophar’s words, the “deep things of God” (11:7). Eliphaz speaks of receiving a secret word from the voice of a spirit who tells him of Job’s error (4:12-19). Bildad claims to be wise when he elevates himself as a judge alongside the Almighty and accuses Job and his sons of sin (8:3–6). Zophar presumes to know the “secrets of wisdom” when he says to Job, “Know therefore that God exacts from you less than your iniquity deserves” (11:6). For Job’s friends, the “secrets” of wisdom center on God’s justice applied according to the retributive principle. This “wisdom” is able to discern the hidden mind of God and his purposes by looking at the world around them. As a result, this kind of “wisdom” leads them to conclude that Job is suffering because of his sin. Therefore, in chapter 28 Job responds to all of their arguments by exposing the folly of their attempt to reach that which is inaccessible to man and remains “hidden from the eyes of all living” (28:21).

But that which is unknown to man is known to God. After rebuking his friends for being “wise in their own eyes,” Job then goes on to speak of how true wisdom is known only to God—for He alone “knows its place” (28:23). And not only does God know wisdom, Job says that God has revealed what wisdom is to man: “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding” (28:28). Job’s words not only reflect the wisdom found in the writings of Solomon (Prov. 3:7), but more importantly, they reflect the very words God first attributed to him at the beginning of the book (1:1, 8; 2:3). Seow writes, “By its echo of the prologue, this ending of the poem in Job 28 implies that wisdom is manifest through one as

³⁹ Scott C. Jones, *Rumors of Wisdom: Job 28 as Poetry* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 238.

thoroughly perfect as Job was before the tests.”⁴⁰ Job showed himself to be wise in how he related to his Creator, in his fear and worship of God. This relational understanding of wisdom stands in stark contrast to the so-called “wisdom” of his friends. Job’s friends betray their own foolishness by centering their understanding of wisdom on a theology of divine retribution. Job, on the other hand, sees wisdom from God’s perspective, who declares wisdom in more relational terms, in man’s fear of the Lord. Longman points out, “Wisdom in the Bible is not a body of knowledge but rather a relationship. The wise must have a dependent relationship with God that makes them listen to him.”⁴¹

Contrary to what Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had taught, wisdom is not found by probing into the hidden mind of God and trying to discern reality according to the visible world. They had knowledge of God’s justice, but wrongly applied it to Job’s situation when they began to draw conclusions from what they saw. That kind of speculation is a fool’s errand, Job says. In this way, they are “forgers of lies” and are “all worthless physicians” (13:4). Rather, Job confesses that wisdom is rooted in the true worship of God, in man’s recognition of his relationship to his Creator. And here, God leaves no place for guesswork or theorizing. Job emphatically states that God has revealed to man what wisdom is—“the fear of the Lord” and “to depart from evil” (28:28). This is nothing other than what is taught in the First Commandment. Biblical wisdom means, in the words of Luther’s *Small Catechism*, to “fear, love, and trust in God above all things”(SC 351.2).⁴² Godly fear is synonymous with faith in God. To fear God

40 Seow, “Elihu’s Revelation,” 259.

41 Longman, *Job*, 334.

42 Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 351.

means to take God at his Word, and to trust in Him despite what one may see, think, or experience.

But Job does not merely confess this truth about wisdom at the end of chapter 28—Job has defended this position throughout the entire book thus far. True wisdom expresses itself in worship, even when everything is stripped away and one is left destitute and naked before the LORD (1:20-21). For wisdom accepts both good and adversity from God, without question (2:10). Because God is man’s Maker, Job knows that it is foolish to “contend” with God and try to “reason” with Him (9:3). Job himself even says, “If it is a matter of strength, indeed He is strong; and if of justice, who will appoint my day in court? Though I were righteous, my own mouth would condemn me; though I were blameless, it would prove me perverse” (9:19-20). To take God “to court,” Job says, would lead him to “speak and not fear Him, but it is not so with me” (9:35). Even though at times he seems to falter and express feelings of hopelessness (3:1-3; 6:4; 7:16; 10:1-3; 19:8-12), nevertheless Job’s faith in God remains: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (13:15). Instead of running away from God, Job turns to God in prayer and pours out his heart before him. He has been on an emotional roller-coaster, being pushed and pulled in every direction by the worthless medicine of his friends. And amid despair and doubt, Job somehow finds the strength to hold on and say, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (19:25-27).

And yet, Job’s tune suddenly changes when he begins his final speech in 29:1-31:40. After offering this beautiful confession of faith in 28:28, Job continues to open his mouth and say things that are not in harmony with the wisdom he just described. Instead of fearing God, Job

begins to contend with God, practicing the very thing which he had previously condemned (9:3). In chapter 29 he reflects on the ease and comfort of his life before his affliction. When God's favor was with him, Job says, he was honored as a source of help, joy, justice, counsel, and comfort among men (29:12-14, 21, 25). Job says that he "sat as chief" and "dwelt as a king in the army" (29:21). But then in chapter 30, he complains how his affliction has disgraced him, how he has now become a "taunting song" and a "byword" among men (30:9). Even worse than this his affliction, Job takes umbrage at the ruin of his reputation (30:15). His name has been dragged through the mud (30:19). Instead of princes stopping to listen to him (29:9), now even the "sons of fools" and "sons of vile men" mock him (30:8). Because he refuses to accept that his suffering has come as a result of his sin, Job is seen as a sinner and a hypocrite (20:5).

As a result of his tainted reputation, Job decides to take his stand against God. He accuses God of cruelty (30:21) and of being the source of his shame (30:22). Job appears to be carrying out the logical conclusions of his friends' arguments. But while they assumed Job was to blame for his suffering, because he knows he did not sin, Job wrongly concludes that God must be the one to blame. If what his friends have said is true, then Job is unjustly suffering. For it would be unjust for God to punish the righteous. And so in chapter 31, after laying bare the evidence of his own righteousness, recounting proof after proof of his innocence, Job demands a day in court with God. He says, "Oh, that I had one to hear me! Here is my mark. Oh, that the Almighty would answer me, that my Prosecutor had written a book! Surely I would carry it on my shoulder, and bind it on me like a crown; I would declare to Him the number of my steps; like a prince I would approach Him" (Job 31:35-37).

There is great consensus among scholars that chapter 31 drips with legal metaphor.⁴³ Drawing on parallels from Akkadian legal literature, Michael Dick reads this chapter as “an oath of innocence,” which was a “defendant’s appeal for a civil trial after pre-trial arbitration had failed.”⁴⁴ Job’s righteousness has been put on trial, and now he demands to hear from God himself on the matter, believing the Almighty will vindicate him. If this is what is intended by Job, then this scene depicts something similar to that of the Apostle Paul before Festus when he makes his appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11).⁴⁵ However, Seow thinks this understanding is insufficient and misunderstands the broader context of Job’s speech. He writes, “For Job is charging his (divine) adversary with offense, with accusations already being leveled in the preceding chapter, most blatantly in 30:21.”⁴⁶ Job is not merely defending himself, but is going on the offensive and accuses God of wrong. Seow, therefore, believes Job’s “oath of innocence” in chapter 31 has more in common with a late seventh-century (BC) Hebrew legal inscription which records the complaint of a plaintiff about an abuse of power on the part of his superior.⁴⁷ If viewed this way, then Job’s demand for a court date with God becomes much more pronounced. He orders God Almighty (Shaddai) to answer for what he has done to him. Job is so confident of his words that he even signs an imaginative mark with the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet (tāw) and solemnly swears using the Hebrew oath formula. “Like a prince,” Job says he will boldly approach God in order to prosecute him (31:37). Job knows he is a righteous man; he just spent the last chapter proving it in so many words. In Job’s mind, the problem is not with him

43 Seow, “Elihu’s Revelation,” 260.

44 Michael Dick, “Job 31, the Oath of Innocence, and the Sage,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 95 (1983): 31.

45 Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms*, 102.

46 Seow, “Elihu’s Revelation,” 260.

47 Seow, “Elihu’s Revelation,” 260.

nor is it with his so-called “friends.” Ultimately, the problem resides with God. Longman adequately sums up the legal tension of this chapter:

[Job] has been accused and believes that God is the one who has accused him. Accordingly, he wants a written indictment. He wants to know what he has been charged with. Job knows he has been charged with some crime because he buys into the retribution theology of the three friends. He is suffering; therefore, God is treating him like a sinner. But what is the charge? He demands an answer.⁴⁸

It should be noted that Job’s oath goes beyond the language typically seen in the laments offered to God in the Psalms (cf. Pss 26:1-2; 77:1-3). This is no mere cry for mercy, as are the prayers of the psalmists (4:1; 6:2; 9:13; 25:16; 27:7; 30:10; 31:9; 51:1). Job is demanding that God answer to him for treating him like a sinner. The three friends have made him lose sight of true fear of God and now Job brashly addresses God. Whereas the suffering psalmists place their ultimate hope in God’s vindication, Job here finds greater confidence in his own righteousness than he does in God’s justice. Longman notes this distinction: “The difference, and it is a deep and important one, is that Job believes God is treating him, though innocent, as a sinner, and God does not care. The sense conveyed by the psalmists is that of confidence that once God looks at his case, God will recognize that he is not a sinner and will not allow him to suffer that fate.”⁴⁹ Job is therefore beginning to push the envelope in his relationship with God by accusing him of wrong. Earlier, when Job desires to present his case before God (23:4–5), he does so with fear and allows room for God’s sovereignty (23:13–15). But now, his fear of God is apparently absent. His demand for God to give an account of his actions is diametrically opposed to the humility and fear of the LORD he displayed at the beginning of the book. He is failing to live by

48 Longman, *Job*, 364.

49 Longman, *Job*, 366.

the very wisdom he just preached to his friends in chapter 28. Seow highlights the tension between Job's faith in chapter 31 and the faith he displayed earlier in the book:

At the end of the first test (1:21), as well as the second (2:10), his response is one of acceptance of divine freedom and sovereignty; the justice or injustice of human suffering is beside the point and God's character is completely irrelevant. Now, through what one may regard as the end of Job's third test (chs 3-31), Job portrays divine giving and taking as a matter still to be resolved judicially, and his declaration of innocence becomes a direct accusation of God.⁵⁰

Throughout the cycle of speeches from his three friends, Job's faith has been under attack. The accusatory finger has been pointed again and again at him. And now it seems his faith has reached its limits. Job's faith in God is balancing on a razor's edge.

This change in Job's disposition is crucial to understand as we examine the character of Elihu and the role he plays. Elihu enters the story only after Job has apparently taken up the retribution theology of his so-called "friends," and directly accused God of injustice. For what else could explain his suffering? And so the reader of Job, still mindful of the prologue, is now led to ask himself this question—does Job *still* "fear God for nothing" (1:9)? Is Job still a righteous man? Or has he proven himself faithless by demanding a court date with God? And more importantly, will Satan be vindicated in the accusations he made to God at the beginning of the book? Will God be proven wrong about his servant Job?

And thus, it is with these questions in the balance, that Elihu enters into the conversation. In the next section, we will examine the content of his speeches and show the evidence which suggests that he, unlike the other three, speaks rightly to Job. Indeed, it will be shown that Elihu speaks as God's prophet to Job, one who is sent to prepare the way for the climactic entrance of God at the end.

⁵⁰ Seow, "Elihu's Revelation," 262.

AN EXAMINATION OF ELIHU (32:1-37:24)

Elihu Enters (32:1-5)

Job's final words have silenced Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar. The narrator tells us that they ceased to answer Job, "because he was righteous in his own eyes" (32:1). Their retribution theology proved to be an inadequate explanation for Job's suffering. Their wisdom was shown to be empty because Job's situation did not fit into their belief system. In their mind, Job could not possibly be righteous because he was suffering. And yet, Job insists upon his innocence. The data did not compute. Their arguments proved fruitless. Job has answered everything they have thrown at him. And so they could no longer contend with Job. And now out of frustration, Job calls upon God to answer him with an oath. But instead of God showing up, the reader is introduced to a mysterious young man named Elihu.

Elihu's entrance comes as a surprise to the reader. He was not mentioned before this and so seems to appear out of nowhere. The young Elihu has been waiting in the wings it seems, patiently listening to everything being said. But now he can hold his silence no longer, as he bursts onto the scene in "wrath" (32:2, 3, 5). Elihu's sudden appearance has led many to doubt his originality. But as we saw earlier, there is simply no good reason to doubt either his inclusion or the placement of his speeches. After examining the content of his speeches more carefully, it will be shown that, despite his criticism over the years, Elihu's speeches are not only original to the text, but instrumental in advancing the overall story and message of the book of Job.

Elihu is introduced by the author with the only genealogy in the book. He is “the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram” (32:2). One must not pass over quickly the name “Elihu.” In Scripture, names often communicate some truth about their character or how God will uniquely use them. Adam’s name is related to the Hebrew word for “ground” (אֲדָמָה), the very substance from which he was made (Gen 2:7). Adam named his wife Eve, which resembles the Hebrew word for “living” (חַיָּה), because she would become “the mother of all living” (Gen 3:20). Abram’s name means “exalted father,” which the LORD changed to Abraham, meaning “father of many,” when he promised to make him “the father of many nations” (Gen 17:5). Names are repeatedly used by God to convey significant meaning about a person. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that God might be communicating something about the person of Elihu through his name. Elihu could either mean “he is my God” or “he is God.” Could this name hint at what kind of role Elihu takes on in the story of Job? Although Clines ultimately comes to a different conclusion regarding the character of Elihu, he does admit the names of Elihu and his father are notable.

If there is any significance in the names themselves, it may be that Elihu, ‘he is God,’ could suggest that this speaker will be the one who best upholds the divine honor, the wisdom equivalent perhaps of his near prophetic namesake Elijah, ‘Yahweh is God.’ His father’s name Barachel may suggest ‘God blesses’ or ‘may God bless!’ perhaps an implicit denial of the cruel and unjust character of the God whom Job has been depicting.⁵¹

Elihu’s name could indicate that he, unlike the other three friends, will accurately represent God to Job. Elihu clearly sees himself as a mediator for Job, calling himself Job’s “spokesman before God” (33:6) who “speaks on God’s behalf” (36:2). Of course, his name could also be ironic if his words do not prove to be substantially different from that of his friends and he continues to offer

⁵¹ Clines, *Job 21-37*, 713.

Job empty words. However, as we examine the content of his speeches, Elihu will be shown to live up to his name.

In the opening prose of chapter 32, the author includes a few specific details about Elihu that shape how readers should interpret his forthcoming speeches. Just like the prologue of the book guides the reader in understanding the message of Job, so does this introductory prose guide the reader in understanding the character of Elihu. First, Elihu is depicted as being angry. Four times in these opening verses alone, Elihu is described as “being aroused with anger” (32:2-3, 5). The narrator tells us that Elihu is angry at both Job, “because he justified himself rather than God” (32:2), and Job’s three friends, “because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job” (32:3). Whereas Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar were introduced to us by the author as those who came to Job to “mourn with him, and to comfort him,” (2:11), Elihu arrives in a fury of hot anger. Why such a difference? Some point to Elihu’s anger and his inability to constrain himself from speaking (32:18-20) as evidence that he is nothing but a youthful hothead, as “an arrogant youngster, even a buffoon, who claims much but in fact says nothing new.”⁵² However, Elihu’s wrath seems to foreshadow the same righteous anger the LORD will later show toward Job’s three friends (42:7). Prior to Elihu’s entrance, with only one exception, the word “anger” (אָרָא) has solely been used to describe the anger of God (4:9; 9:5, 13; 14:13; 16:9; 19:11; 20:23, 28; 21:17). This reminds the reader that not all anger in Scripture is evil. In fact, wrath is one of God’s divine attributes; a loving God must hate all that opposes his holy will (Ps 5:5). When God’s own people rebelled against him by worshipping the golden calf, God burned with wrath against them (Ex 32:10). If one automatically assumes Elihu’s wrath is itself evidence for viewing him negatively, one would have to then question God’s anger later in

⁵² Seow, *Job*, 97.

the book as well. Thus, it is best to interpret Elihu's wrath, along with Hartley, as "righteous indignation, for he sees the whole dialogue between Job and the three friends as having been argued poorly on both sides."⁵³

If Elihu's anger is taken as a positive expression of righteous anger, then how do we explain Elihu's anger against Job and the three friends? Remembering the context of chapter 31 from above, combined with the reason the author provides us, "because he justified himself rather than God," the answer becomes plain. Job has demanded a day in court with the Almighty, swearing it with a solemn oath. Job has declared himself to be in the right and God to be in the wrong. Hence, he has "justified himself," he has declared himself righteous instead of allowing God to do so. This is what lies at the heart of Elihu's critique of Job and what distinguishes his speeches from that of the three friends. Job has called God to the stand, accusing him of injustice. The LORD himself even draws attention to this very critique later in his speech to Job saying, "Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified?" (Job 40:8). Instead of humbly trusting in the God who justifies him, Job's faith is beginning to curve inward upon himself. And this is what gets young Elihu angry. Elihu is concerned that Job is in danger of moving his heart away from a place of wisdom, no longer fearing God above all things. Indeed, Elihu believes Job has already erred in contending with God and demanding a court date with him (33:12–13). Luther seems to agree when he writes that "out of human weakness [Job] talks too much against God, and in his suffering sins."⁵⁴ Out of love, then, Elihu's wrath comes like that of a friend whose wounds ultimately bring healing (Prov 20:30; 27:6).

53 John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 429.

54 Luther, *Luther's Works*, 35:251.

As for Job's three friends, Elihu is angry with them because they accused Job of wrong yet failed to provide him with any proof of such accusations (32:3, 5). All they could do was point to Job's suffering and conclude that Job must have committed some sin. Yet they could never actually tell Job what sin he had committed. Job was able to defend himself against every accusation and show the baselessness of their claims. Furthermore, Elihu is also angry at them because, as Hartley rightly identifies, "in their failure to have an answer to Job they put God in the wrong."⁵⁵ Their strict adherence to a theology of retribution led Job to wrongly conclude that God must be the one who was, in the words of Longman, "morally capricious."⁵⁶ Either Job has sinned and God is just, or Job is just and God has sinned. And because Job proved himself to be righteous, only one conclusion remains. And it was this conclusion that drove Job to invoke his oath and demand for God to give an account for his actions. Thus, in wrongly accusing Job, the three friends malign the Almighty. In the speeches that follow, Elihu will address the three friends and expose the folly of their so-called "wisdom" of their retribution theology.

Behind Elihu's wrath lies the heart of the message of Job. In stating the grounds for his anger directed against both Job and his three friends, the author employs the same legal language that has been repeatedly used throughout the dialogue: "righteous," "justified," and "condemned." Indeed, this language harkens back to the beginning of the book of Job in the prologue when Satan, the accuser, presented himself before the heavenly courtroom of God and called into question Job's righteousness and fear of God. When viewed through the lens of the prologue, Elihu is angry that Job's friends are essentially taking up Satan's accusation against God, namely, that Job is not a righteous man—he does not truly fear God. Furthermore, Elihu is

⁵⁵ Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 430.

⁵⁶ Longman, *Job*, 381.

angry with Job because he is beginning to buy into the theology of his three friends. Rather than placing all of his hope in his Redeemer, Job's faith is beginning to turn inward upon himself. And if this trajectory continues, if Job gets his court date with God and comes before him in his current state, Job might curse God to his face, the very thing Satan said that Job would do (1:11; 2:4). Given such high stakes, it is little wonder why Elihu is so angry.

Not only is Elihu depicted as being angry, but the author also depicts him as being younger than the others: "Now because they were years older than he, Elihu had waited to speak to Job" (Job 32:4). While one might be tempted to accuse Elihu of being brash, particularly given his anger, credit must be given to him for patiently waiting all this time to speak. As Proverbs says, "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Prov 10:19). By restraining himself from butting in earlier in the dialogue, not only does Elihu uphold the social customs of his day, but he also demonstrates profound wisdom for someone so young. Robert Alden notes, "Elihu is commendable because of his respect for his elders. In proper Semitic fashion, the oldest speak first; the young must wait their turn."⁵⁷ On the one hand, Scripture, as in Ancient Near Eastern cultures, often associates youthfulness with foolishness and unrestrained passion (Prov 22:15; Jer 1:6; 2 Tim 2:22).⁵⁸ But on the other hand, Scripture often upholds youth and children as exemplary models of faith, even using them to shame those who are considered "wise." Consider the words of the psalmist: "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts" (Ps 119:99–100). Jesus welcomed little children to come to him and even rebuked his adult disciples for attempting to keep the children from him (Matt

⁵⁷ Alden, *Job*, 316.

⁵⁸ Longman, *Job*, 381.

19:13-14). The Apostle Paul encourages Timothy, saying to him, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12).

Seow connects the youthful wisdom of Elihu with that of the wisdom found in the patriarch Joseph and the prophet Daniel, whom God used in special ways to make known his mysteries where the so-called “wise men” had failed (Gen 41:8; Dan 2:12—14, 18, 21).⁵⁹ This trope of a young man shaming the wise is carried on from the prose introduction into Elihu’s speeches, as he repeatedly refers to Job’s three friends sarcastically as “wise men” and “men of understanding” (Job 34:2, 10, 34). In this way, Elihu’s speeches can be viewed in part as a continuation of Job’s taunt of their so-called “wisdom” from chapter 28. While commentators like Daniel Estes understand the author’s focus on Elihu’s anger and youth to “subtly suggest to the reader that Elihu’s words may not provide a reliable assessment of Job’s situation,”⁶⁰ the biblical evidence strongly suggests otherwise. Elihu’s speeches should *not* be judged as some uncontrollable burst of emotion, but rather as words of wisdom that have their origin in God (32:8).

A Summary and Analysis of Elihu’s Words (32:6-37:24)

In this section, I will summarize and analyze the content of Elihu’s words and show how his speeches are substantially different from that of Job’s three friends. By the end of the analysis, it will be shown that, instead of accusing Job of bringing suffering upon himself, Elihu provides Job with godly wisdom and helps realign his heart back to a position of faith in and fear

⁵⁹ Seow, “Elihu’s Revelation,” 263.

⁶⁰ Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms*, 104.

of God. Elihu's words reveal a necessary and timely rebuke to Job in order to prepare him to meet his Maker with humility and respond in faith (42:6).

Unlike the other three friends, Elihu's speech is uninterrupted and is the greatest in length, spanning over six chapters. However, because the author includes a brief introductory formula on four separate occasions ("Elihu answered and said"), Elihu's words have been typically categorized into four separate speeches (32:6-33:33; 34:1-37; 35:1-16; 36:1-37:24).⁶¹ Thus, each speech will be addressed separately below.

An important question to keep in mind as one approaches these speeches is then: Whom is Elihu addressing? Failing to correctly identify to whom Elihu is speaking throughout his speeches can lead one to misunderstand Elihu. While most of Elihu's words are directed at Job specifically, much is spoken to the so-called "wise men" (34:2) and the "men of understanding" (34:10). Who are these "wise men"? Is this a general term Elihu employs to speak to any who wish to be wise? That is unlikely. The introductory remarks about Elihu's wrath directed at both Job and his three friends strongly suggest that he is speaking to both Job and his three friends specifically in his response. Therefore, it is more likely that Elihu is using the terms "wise men" and "men of understanding" sarcastically in reference to the three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.⁶² They were already taunted for their so-called "wisdom" by Job in chapter 28. And now Elihu, angry for what they said to Job, is picking up his taunt against them and uses these terms to heighten the irony and draw attention to their foolishness. To help the reader identify to whom Elihu is speaking, the author consistently employs the Hebrew plural when addressing the three friends and the singular when speaking directly to Job. This

⁶¹ Robert V. McCabe, "Elihu's Contribution to the Thought of the Book of Job," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 2 (1997):49.

⁶² Clines, *Job 21-37*, 768.

distinction often gets missed in treatments of Elihu, but as will be shown below, is vitally important in understanding Elihu's position.

Elihu's First Speech (32:6-33:33)

In his first speech, Elihu addresses Job's friends first in verses 6-22, and then Job in 33:1-33. Elihu begins by providing an apologetic preamble for what he is about to say. While some characterized his introductory remarks as "pompous,"⁶³ the words themselves show signs of humility. Elihu expresses that he was at first reluctant and even afraid to speak because he was "young in years" (32:6). The use of the plural pronoun "you" (אַתָּם), combined with the speech about Job in the third person in v. 12, indicates that Elihu is specifically addressing the three friends and not Job with these words. Elihu is giving the grounds for why, even though he is younger, his words must be heard. Even though he waited, Elihu speaks of a "spirit," which resides in him, saying that "the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding" (32:8). Because "spirit" is in parallel with "the breath of the Almighty," it is likely the Holy Spirit is in view here. For the Spirit not only gives life (Gen 2:7), but He is also the source of wisdom and understanding (Isa 11:2; Dan 5:11; Eph 1:17). Elihu is claiming that he utters words of Spirit-given understanding.

In verse 18 he implies that the answer and opinion which he is about to give, that the words of which he is so full, are the very words the Spirit within him compels him to say (32:17-18). Elihu is answering Job's question posed to Bildad earlier in the dialogue: "To whom

⁶³ So claim Alden (*Job*, 313) and Longman (*Job*, 385).

have you uttered words? And whose spirit came from you?” (Job 26:4). He is juxtaposing the divine wisdom he has received from the Holy Spirit with earthly, even demonic, wisdom of the three friends. Shields writes, “Elihu highlights revelation as a source of wisdom rather than the wisdom of the elders. In short, Elihu’s wisdom is more deuteronomistic or prophetic than proverbial and hence exists removed from the wisdom of Job’s other friends, anticipating the revelation that follows.”⁶⁴ Although they were “great men” and “aged,” they did not understand Job nor provide him with an adequate answer (32:9-10). In fact, their so-called “wisdom” of retribution theology led Job to doubt God’s goodness and even accuse him of injustice. August Pieper goes so far as to say that in accusing his Creator of injustice, Job has uttered words of blasphemy.⁶⁵ Thus, this type of “wisdom” can only have its source in the author of blasphemy himself—Satan. And so, like the Apostle Paul, Elihu contrasts the worldly wisdom espoused by the three friends with the divine wisdom taught only by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:4, 13). True wisdom is not something that can be found by man but must be revealed to him by God. In this way, Elihu is not portrayed as a typical sage who has gained wisdom through age and experience. Rather, as Seow points out, “the characterization of Elihu is more akin to those of the prophets, who are typically angry, frequently eccentric, and always claiming to bring the truth that comes to them by divine revelation.”⁶⁶

Elihu then transitions in chapter 33 and directs words to Job specifically. Once again he gives a defense for what he is about to say, claiming for a second time that his wisdom, unlike the three “wise men,” is sourced in the Holy Spirit. “Now, I open my mouth; my tongue speaks in my mouth. My words come from my upright heart; my lips utter pure knowledge. The Spirit

⁶⁴ Shields, “Was Elihu Right?” 159.

⁶⁵ Pieper, “The Book of Job,” 39.

⁶⁶ Seow, *Job*, 97.

of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:2–4). Intriguingly, Elihu calls Job by name twice in this first speech (33:1, 31). None of the three friends has ever addressed Job by name. By speaking his name, combined with the Hebrew particle of entreaty (אֵלֶי), Elihu comes to Job on a more relational level, as a real friend would. It is clear from the onset that Elihu is taking a different approach than that of his friends. Instead of trying to prick and prod Job until his sin is uncovered, Elihu says that he has come to be Job’s “spokesman before God” (33:6). He desires to “justify” Job (33:32). Elihu is on Job’s team. He wants to defend Job against the slander of the devil and his three mouthpieces (the three friends), but not in the way Job has defended himself in accusing God of wrong. Like a loving friend, Elihu assures Job with words of comfort before he begins to critique him, saying to him, “Surely no fear of me will terrify you, nor will my hand be heavy on you” (33:7). Although he will speak bluntly to Job about his “oath of innocence,” Elihu wants Job to know that he ultimately has his best interest in mind.

After presenting to Job his defense for why he should listen to him in 33:1-7, Elihu rebukes Job for asserting his own righteousness while at the same time accusing God of wrong. Because Elihu does not always quote Job’s arguments verbatim, often summarizing using words not spoken by Job, such as “innocent,” some commentators, such as Longman and Whybray, believe Elihu is putting words in Job’s mouth and thus misconstruing his position.⁶⁷ However, Elihu is not misrepresenting Job’s position. McCabe writes:

Though Job does not specifically use the terms אָוֵן, “innocent,” and טָהוֹר, “clean,” these adjectives are valid assessments of Job’s argument of innocence. Elihu has further described Job in v. 9 as being “without transgression” and “free from iniquity.” Both descriptive phrases are drawn from passages like 13:23. . . . Job, in effect, is suggesting that he is “without transgression (עֲשׂוּנָה)” and “free from iniquity (רְשָׁעִים).” Elihu’s correct

⁶⁷ Longman, *Job*, 386 and Whybray, *Job*, 155.

description of Job's position is further supported by 31:1–40. This chapter, containing Job's oath of innocence, is also a clear affirmation that he has been living a life free of overt sin. Therefore, Elihu's summation of Job's declaration of innocence along with his freedom from overt sin is a fair representation of Job's position.⁶⁸

But Elihu is not rebuking Job for claiming to be free from sin—it is the context in which he makes these claims that gets him angry. In asserting his innocence from guilt, Job is at the same time accusing God to be “His enemy” (33:10). Elihu is rebuking Job not for some unknown sin that has been the source of his suffering, but rather for contending with God and for demanding Him to give an account to Job (33:13). Seow writes, “While Elihu does not say that Job has done anything to bring suffering upon himself, he cannot abide by Job's claim that his suffering as an innocent person must then be an indictment of God's character.”⁶⁹ Because God is “greater than man,” Job should not think that he can make such demands against the Almighty (33:12-13). In this way, Elihu says Job is “not righteous” (32:12). Here we see the theme of righteousness (קִיָּאָ) repeated once more. According to Elihu, Job has erred by presuming he is righteous (32:2). Ragnar Anderson writes, “Elihu puts his finger on Job's self-righteousness and complaint about God. Job has dared to ignore the dividing line between Creator and creature; he has made a cognitive image of God in order to become a judicial counterpart to him.”⁷⁰

For this reason, Elihu goes on to speak of how God's ways are beyond the comprehension of man (33:14). God often conceals his divine purposes from man (“seals their instruction”) to humble him, to keep back “his soul from the Pit, and his life from perishing by the sword” (33:16-18). He speaks of how God uses suffering as a means to discipline man (33:19) and to redeem him so that he might “be enlightened with the light of life” (33:30). Elihu is not

68 McCabe, “Elihu's Contribution,” 52.

69 Seow, “Elihu's Revelation,” 264.

70 Ragnar Anderson, “The Elihu Speeches: Their Place and Sense in the Book of Job,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 66 no 1 (2015):84.

trying to explain why Job is suffering in this particular instance, but rather teaching him that there are other possible explanations for why people suffer, even when they have done nothing to deserve it. As Seow notes, “For Elihu, the guilt or innocence of the sufferer may be beside the point. Suffering may not be punitive at all but purposive; it may be ‘to uncover human ears,’ (33:16a), that is, render one more open to the word of God.”⁷¹ Instead of seeing suffering through the lens of the law (suffering rooted in punishment), Elihu invites Job to view suffering through the lens of the gospel (suffering rooted in love). God’s world is not as black and white as the three “wise” friends have painted it. God’s greatness means he is not bound or restricted to follow some external, mechanical, legalistic virtue of justice. Contrary to what some may think, God takes no pleasure in watching his creatures suffer, but rather wants to show himself to be “gracious to him” (33:24).

According to Elihu’s wisdom, for those whom God chastens, a “messenger” might be found for him, a “mediator, one among a thousand,” to pray on his behalf before God and so deliver him from “going down to the Pit” (33:23-24). This mediator will even find a “ransom” for him. This type of speech shows once again how markedly different Elihu’s position is from that of the other three. Lessing and Steinmann argue that Elihu provides a more advanced theology which “maintains that God’s goal in permitting people to suffer is to bring them to everlasting life (33:29-30). Elihu sees suffering not as simply punishment for sin as the friends do, but as serving the cause of faith.”⁷² Elihu shifts the focus away from Job’s misery and onto a mediator whom God sends to rescue him from his misery, “to bring his soul from the Pit” (31:30). It is as if Elihu utters these words in direct response to Job’s words back in chapter

⁷¹ Seow, “Elihu’s Revelation,” 266.

⁷² R. Reed Lessing and Andrew E. Steinmann, *Prepare the Way of the Lord: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2014), 290.

9: “For He is not a man, as I am, that I may answer Him, and that we should go to court together. Nor is there any mediator between us, who may lay his hand on us both. Let Him take His rod away from me, and do not let dread of Him terrify me” (Job 9:32–34). Although the Hebrew word Job uses for “mediator” (מִשְׁפָּט) differs from the word Elihu employs (מַלְאָכִי), the idea of a “middle-man” or “arbiter” lies behind both words. A distinction could be made, however, in the type of “mediator” understood by Job and Elihu. Whereas Job perhaps envisioned a human mediator, Elihu seems to suggest a more divine mediator, for he parallels it with “messenger” or “angel,” and speaks of the mediator finding a “ransom.” The word “ransom” calls to mind ideas of atonement and redemption in Scripture (Exod 21:30; 30:12; Num 35:31; Ps 49:8; Prov 13:8; 21:18; Isa 43:3). This meaning of “ransom” by Elihu is solidified by his use of “redeem” later in 33:28. Elihu could be identifying himself as such a divine mediator, or perhaps he is referring to another. Regardless, Elihu is clearly functioning as a type of mediator for Job. He depicts himself as someone who not only speaks to God on Job’s behalf (Job 33:6), but also as someone whose earnest desire is to “justify” him (33:32). Commenting on 33:32, Clines writes:

[Elihu’s] goal is Job’s restoration, not to prove Job is in the wrong. A key element in his speech has been the cameo depicting the righteous man in danger of his life who is redeemed by the intervention of an angel; Job must surely be intended to identify with such a person, and to believe that his future will be as fortunate. For that to happen, Job will of course have to confess that he has been in the wrong, will have to reconsider his claim to perfect innocence, and will have to withdraw his charges against God.⁷³

At the end of Elihu’s first speech, he gives Job an opportunity to respond should he have anything to say (33:31-32). But Job does not. And so Elihu continues to speak and further teach Job real wisdom (33:33).

⁷³ Clines, *Job 21-37*, 742.

Elihu's Second Speech (34:1-37)

Hearing no response from Job, Elihu now turns his attention back to the three friends, to the so-called “wise men” (34:2). When commentators imply that Elihu is speaking broadly to any number of hearers (including, but not limited to Job and his three friends), their interpretation of the speech is inevitably affected. Contrary to what Longman writes, the exact number of hearers *is* important for our understanding of the speech.⁷⁴ Elihu has two different rebukes for the two different parties present. By noting the shift from plural to singular, Elihu's second speech can be divided into three sections, with the first (vv. 2-15) and last (vv. 34-37) sections addressed to the three friends, and the middle (vv. 16-33) addressed to Job.⁷⁵

In the first section of this speech, Elihu revisits some of the words Job has spoken and then rebukes the three friends for leading Job to accuse God of injustice. Even though he was suffering, Job claimed that he did nothing to deserve it. He said, “I am righteous” (34:5-6). The idea of righteousness once again comes to the forefront of the debate. Job's justification is at stake. But the three friends contested Job's claim, “What is man, that he could be pure? And he who is born of a woman, that he could be righteous?” (15:14). In calling into question Job's righteousness, they have made Job to be a liar (34:6). They have slandered his name and made him drink down “scorn like water” (34:7). In this sense, Job has been made to appear as if he “walks with wicked men” (34:8). His reputation has been ruined by these three friends and their accusations against him. Instead of being a source of wisdom, Job is now numbered with transgressors. This notion of a ruined reputation reflects the words Job spoke before making his

⁷⁴ See Longman, *Job*, 391.

⁷⁵ Although Clines rightly sees Elihu addressing the friends in vv. 2-15, he fails to see Elihu picking up his address to the friends again in vv. 34-37. The problem is that Elihu uses the key address “wise men” again (which applies to the three friends) and speaks of Job in the third person. How can Elihu be speaking to Job and about Job at the same time?

“oath of innocence” in chapter 31. Elihu here should not be seen as joining alongside the three friends in calling into question Job’s righteousness, as many commentators suppose.⁷⁶ Rather, he is exposing how their so-called “wisdom” has led Job to accuse God of injustice and wrongly conclude that “it profits a man nothing that he should delight in God” (34:9). According to their theology of retribution, the one who delights in God should, in turn, expect only good from God. But from Job’s perspective, this was not true. Job was righteous and yet he suffered. The only explanation then, according to their theology, is that either Job is lying or that God must be unjust. And since they had no answer for Job’s claims, Job began to point the finger at God.

But, Elihu says to them, “Far be it from God to do wickedness” (34:10). In Elihu’s mind, the three friends are just as guilty as Job in accusing God of injustice because their theology could not make sense of Job’s righteousness. Despite what the three friends had taught, God’s justice would not be violated if he allowed the righteous to suffer. They did not allow room for God to operate according to his own wisdom. Although they were generally right about how God does indeed repay “man according to his work” (34:11) (in this sense, divine retribution is correct), they were wrong in asserting that God’s justice means that the righteous will never suffer. For the Almighty is not subject to any human notion of retribution. There is no law or principle that even God must follow when it comes to his rule over man. For “who gave Him charge over the earth? Or who appointed Him over the whole world?” (34:13).

Then, in vv. 16-33 Elihu changes from the plural to the singular as he directs his speech to Job. In these verses he rebukes Job for condemning God who is “most just” (34:17). Job has forgotten that the God of whom he has demanded an answer is the King of the universe (34:18). God is incapable of showing partiality, whether to the rich or the poor, “for they are all the work

⁷⁶ So Whybray, *Job*, 159 and Estes, *Handbook*, 107.

of His hands (34:19). Elihu assures Job that God does indeed see the “ways of man” and that there is no darkness that can hide the evil deeds of wicked men (34:21-22). In the end, God will punish the evildoer (34:25-28). Clines writes, “Even if God appears to be inactive in just rulership, behind the scenes he is controlling the fate of nations and individuals alike.”⁷⁷ Furthermore, because God is sovereign, it also means that He “hears the cry of the afflicted” (34:28). Elihu asserts this in opposition to Job’s prior accusation of God being cruel: “I cry to You, but You do not answer me. I stand up, but You [do not]⁷⁸ regard me. But You have become cruel to me” (30:20). Contrary to what Job may feel and experience, God *is* listening to him. Although God may appear quiet and at times hide himself, he is still very much near and, as Elihu will later articulate, ready to give mercy (37:13). From these words, it is clear that Elihu’s view of God’s justice differs from that of the three friends. Seow writes, “Unlike the friends, then, Elihu does not restrict God’s freedom to act beyond what any doctrine stipulates. He does affirm the doctrine of retribution and he defends the character of God, including God’s oversight over the world. Yet he also concurs with Job that God may be silent when the needy cry out, and God may ‘hide his face.’”⁷⁹

In response to such a view, in vv. 31-33 Elihu offers Job more suitable words to speak to his Maker instead of the borderline blasphemous demands he previously uttered. Job will later remember these words when he finally repents before God and admits, “I uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (42:3). But rather than forcing Job into submission, Elihu tells him, “You must choose and not I; therefore speak what you

⁷⁷ Clines, *Job 21-37*, 786.

⁷⁸ This variant reading is supported by one Hebrew MS and the Vulgate.

⁷⁹ Seow, “Elihu’s Revelation,” 266.

know.” By these words Elihu begins to lead Job back on the path of faith, inviting him to once again approach God with fear and humility.

In the final section of his second speech (34:34-37), Elihu directs his words back to the three friends. He addresses them sarcastically again as “men of understanding” and as “wise men,” (34:34) and then quotes what they have said concerning Job. While many English translations close the quotation at the end of v. 35, it is also plausible to see the quotation continuing until the end of the chapter.⁸⁰ Clines notes the significance of such a decision:

It makes a good deal of difference whether we ascribe v. 36, with its cruel demand that Job should continue to be ‘tried,’ and that ‘to the utmost,’ to Elihu or not. The wording, however, suggests strongly that vv. 36-37 continue to cite the ‘men of understanding,’ since it is they who refer to Job by his name and in the third person both in v. 35 and v. 36, and it is improbable that Elihu, who has been addressing Job in the second person in vv. 31-33, should now use third-person language of him.”⁸¹

Given such rationale, Elihu should not be viewed here as indicting Job, as many commentators assert. Rather, he is drawing attention to the irony of such claims made by so-called “wise men.” In condemning Job of speaking “without knowledge” yet failing to provide him an answer for his suffering, they have shown themselves to be fools and thus justly warrant a divine rebuke (42:7-8). Instead of explaining Job’s suffering by falsely accusing him of wrongdoing, Elihu will provide a better answer for him in his third speech.

⁸⁰ So the *Jerusalem Bible* and *New American Standard Bible* translations.

⁸¹ Clines, *Job 21-37*, 784.

Elihu's Third Speech (35:1-16)

While some commentators struggle to follow the logic of Elihu's words in this speech,⁸² Clines argues that Elihu's thought is rather "largely intelligible and, more than that, quite original."⁸³ Elihu begins his third speech by quoting Job's claim that his "righteousness (קִדְּוָה) is more than God's" (35:2). We see the theme of "righteousness" once again predominate the dialogue. In Job's mind, God has seemingly violated the principle of retribution by allowing him to suffer, for suffering would come as a result of sin. However, Job knows (as do the readers) that he did not sin. Therefore, only one explanation remains—God is unjust. If Job is righteous, then God must not be righteous because he has wrongly applied his punishment on someone who did not deserve it. This kind of logic leads Job to even question the point of trying to live a righteous and holy life. If God deals justice and punishment arbitrarily, then what difference does it make whether or not he sins (35:3)?

In response, Elihu directs Job (along with his friends) to "look to the heavens and see" (35:5). When one directs his eyes towards God in his exalted abode, he will see how much higher the "clouds" of divine wisdom are than man and his foolish logic. In vv. 6-9, Elihu clearly distinguishes his position from that of the three friends by moving the debate away from the question of whether or not Job has sinned. He says to Job, "If you sin, what do you accomplish against Him? Or, if your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to Him? If you are righteous, what do you give Him? Or what does He receive from your hand? Your wickedness affects a man such as you, and your righteousness a son of man" (35:7-8). Ultimately, it does not

⁸² In his commentary, Whybray writes, "Some commentators have thought that the author's purpose here was to present Elihu as confused and desperately trying to find new points to make against Job. It may be that it is rather futile to try to make sense of this chapter." (*Job*, 163).

⁸³ Clines, *Job 21-37*, 795.

matter whether Job sinned or not; God is not affected either way. Contrary to the so-called “wisdom” of the three friends, one cannot manipulate God by his good behavior in order to ensure blessings in this life. Ragnar Anderson comments that Elihu “disputes the reasoning that human righteousness or human sins count as benevolent deeds or harmful works against God in some kind of barter with him (vv. 6-7). Instead, wickedness affects other people, just like righteousness benefits them (v. 8).”⁸⁴ In buying into the retribution theology of the three friends, Job has confused the relationship between faith and works. Elihu reminds Job that the point of doing good works is not to receive blessing from God but to be a blessing to one’s neighbor. One can almost hear the Lutheran teaching on vocation in these verses, which Veith so aptly represents when he writes, “Our relationship to God, then, has nothing to do with our works. Our relationships to other people, though, in the world God has placed us in, do involve our works.”⁸⁵ To borrow a phrase from Wingren, it is as if Elihu says to Job in these verses: “Job, God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does.”⁸⁶ In God’s eyes, man’s righteousness (or lack thereof) is of no consequence when it comes to man’s relationship with him. But that only begs the question: what does affect man’s relationship with God? What makes a man acceptable in the sight of God? What does God desire from man, if not his good works? Although Elihu does not specifically mention faith here, in the next verses he describes the cries of one who expresses a heart that trusts in God. Not until the end of his final speech will he plainly call Job to “fear” the LORD (37:24).

84 Anderson, “The Elihu Speeches,” 86.

85 Gene Edward Veith Jr., *God at Work* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 38.

86 Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; rpt. Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 1994), 10.

Then, in vv. 9-16, after answering Job's question back in 35:3 ("What profit shall I have more than if I had sinned"), Elihu begins to address Job's words as quoted in 35:2. In asserting his own righteousness and demanding a day in court with God, Job has cried out in with the "pride of evil men" (35:12). But the Almighty does not listen to such "empty talk" (v. 13). Instead of opening "his mouth in vain" and multiplying his "words without knowledge," Elihu directs Job to humble himself and call upon His Maker "who gives songs in the night, who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth, and makes us wiser than the birds of heaven" (vv. 10-11). Elihu once again distinguishes divine wisdom from the so-called "wisdom" of the "wise men." True wisdom does not make demands from God nor does it look for rational explanations for one's circumstances. Neither does godly wisdom lead one to accuse his Maker of injustice for allowing the righteous to suffer. Rather, Elihu tells Job that, even though he does "not see Him" (the evidence of God's righteousness), God nevertheless remains just (v. 14). John Hartley comments, "Although Job agonizes over the fact that he cannot see God, Elihu wants him to realize that, nonetheless, his case is before God. God has known about it from the beginning. But Job cannot compel God to take any specific course by his laments and complaints."⁸⁷ Instead of doubting God's goodness, Job "must wait for him,"⁸⁸ especially since God has shown mercy by not punishing him for his folly (vv. 14-15). Like the prophet Isaiah, Elihu calls Job to "lift up" his eyes on high and wait upon "the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the

⁸⁷ Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 467.

⁸⁸ The MT has the word *וַתַּחַוְוֶלְלָהּ*, which is taken from the root word *חַוַּל* meaning "writhe" or "to be in labor." In this sense, Elihu could be referring to an anxious and painful kind of "waiting," which adequately reflects the waiting a sufferer might experience (see Ps 37:7). However, the editors of the BHS propose to read it instead as an imperative *וַתַּחַוְוֶלְלָהּ*, which is taken from the root word *חַוַּל* meaning "to wait," but in a more hopeful and expectant sense, often denoting trust (see Lam 3:26; Isa 51:5). This proposal is based on the likelihood there was a scribal error of metathesis in copying the text. Interestingly, the Old Greek translates the word as *αἰνέσαι*, a word which is used only to ascribe praise to God. Regardless of which word is original, the point is that Elihu is directing Job to "wait" for the LORD.

earth” whose “understanding is unsearchable” (Isa 40:26-31). The one who suffers must refrain from looking at what he sees and by faith humbly entrust himself into the hands of his Maker.

Elihu’s Fourth Speech (36:1-37:24)

In Elihu’s fourth and final speech he shifts the conversation away from Job and his three friends and onto God and his greatness (36:26). Pieper says that in this speech Elihu reaches “the crowning point of his arguments. He directs his attacks especially against Job’s complaint that God, in the use of his omnipotence, is loveless and cruel to the miserable. Elihu demonstrates the opposite: God is love, even when he smites hard with his omnipotence and appears terrifying.”⁸⁹ The majority of the speech (36:1-37:18) is directed at Job specifically, evidenced by both the use of the second person singular and Job’s name (37:14). This speech, more than his others, is closely linked to the style and content of what the LORD will say to Job in chs. 38-41. Seow writes that “scholars have long noticed that much in this speech anticipates the first speech of YHWH (chs. 38-39) in form (as in the use of a series of rhetorical questions to establish the distance between the infinite God and the finite mortal) and in content (as in the appeal to meteorological phenomena).⁹⁰ Just as the LORD will overwhelm Job with a series of rhetorical questions emphasizing his divine transcendence over creation, so Elihu begins to ask Job probing questions as he directs his mind on the “wondrous works of God” (37:14). The intended effect by Elihu is to humble Job and thus prepare him to meet his Maker.

⁸⁹ Pieper, *The Book of Job*, 21.

⁹⁰ Seow, “Elihu’s Revelation,” 267.

Elihu begins by reasserting the claim he made to Job back in chapter 33, namely, that he speaks words of wisdom on behalf of God (36:2-4). Indeed, here he even says to Job that “one who is perfect in knowledge is with you” (36:4). Contrary to what many have said regarding these words, by these words Elihu is not depicting himself as pompous or self-important.⁹¹ Clines sees the language Elihu uses as meant simply to assure Job of his integrity and honesty.⁹² On the other hand, Whybray goes so far as to say that Elihu’s claim to be “perfect in knowledge” is “not only ludicrous, underlining Elihu’s egregious self-conceit, but also close to blasphemy.”⁹³ Whybray believes Elihu’s words to be ironic, since Elihu later speaks of the inaccessible nature of God (36:22, 26) and even uses the same phrase (“perfect in knowledge”) to describe God’s own knowledge in 37:16. Thus, according to Whybray, Elihu appears as an arrogant fool who contradicts himself by claiming to know the unknowable.

But rather than accusing Elihu of “blasphemy” and assuming that he unwittingly speaks out of both sides of his mouth, a more charitable and easier explanation can be found when one considers the doctrine of divine revelation. In God’s infinite wisdom, he has chosen to use fallen, imperfect men to speak His holy, perfect Word (1 Cor 1:21; 2 Pet 1:20-21). If Elihu has indeed been “moved by the Holy Spirit” to speak to Job, as he has previously alluded to (Job 32:8; 33:4), then there is no contradiction on his part to say that he is “perfect in knowledge” while also saying that God is “perfect in knowledge.” Both can be true if Elihu indeed speaks words of divine inspiration. Therefore, Elihu is not simply reassuring Job that he is speaking from an honest heart, as Clines suggests. Elihu is making it clear to Job that he is not merely offering his own opinion on the matter but that he speaks with divine authority and truth, like the prophets

⁹¹ So argues Longman, *Job*, 400.

⁹² Clines, *Job 21-37*, 855.

⁹³ Whybray, *Job*, 165,

and apostles, as God’s Spirit-inspired mouthpiece (36:2). And instead of justifying himself and boasting about how important and clever he is (as the so-called “wise men” have done), Elihu confesses that his “knowledge comes from afar” (i.e., from God) and in humility ascribes righteousness to his Maker (36:3)—the very thing Job failed to do (32:2).

Elihu’s Fourth Speech: Part One (36:5-21)

In 36:5-21 Elihu then offers words of both comfort and warning. He comforts Job by reminding him that, although God is “mighty in strength and understanding,” he does not despise anyone, especially those who suffer (vv. 5-6). Even though the wicked may appear to prosper, in the end, God will not preserve their life but they “shall die as one without knowledge” (vv. 6, 12-14). On the other hand, God will vindicate those who are oppressed, for He “does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous” (vv. 6-7). In stark contrast to the three friends, Elihu draws a direct parallel between those who suffer and those who are righteous in the sight of God. Elihu’s position, therefore, is not simply a “rehash” of the “tired, old theology of retribution” put forward by Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar,⁹⁴ but it stands in direct opposition to it. Whereas they interpreted suffering as proof positive of Job’s unrighteousness, Elihu preaches a theology that depicts the afflicted as the very ones considered righteous (justified) in the sight of God. Although the righteous are “bound in fetters” in this life and “held in the cords of affliction,” Elihu tells Job that God will exalt them to a position of honor, becoming like kings who are seated on thrones forever (vv. 7-8). Instead of using his suffering as an occasion to preach the law, Elihu comforts Job with the sweet promises of the gospel. The three friends viewed

⁹⁴ So argue commentators such as Longman (*Job*, 401) and Alden (*Job*, 349).

suffering as a consequence or result of personal sin, whereas Elihu viewed suffering as an occasion to rejoice in the power and promises of God.

It is almost as if Elihu anticipates the words of comfort our Lord would later offer his disciples in his Sermon on the Mount when he said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:10). The righteous can rejoice in the midst of suffering because they know that by faith they belong to a kingdom that is unseen (John 18:36), that their real citizenship is in heaven where they reign with Christ (Phil 3:20; 2 Tim 2:12), and that because of God’s mercy they have an “inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven” for them (1 Pet 1:4). Even though Job has been made poor and wretched according to earthly standards, by faith Job is seated like a king, forever exalted in the heavenly courts of God—for God had not withdrawn his eyes from his righteous servant (36:7; 42:8). In this way, Elihu’s comforting words also seem to anticipate those of James who wrote: “Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (Jas 2:5).

It is evident how drastically different Elihu’s view of suffering is from that of the three friends. Contrary to what the “wise men” thought, suffering is not incompatible with righteousness. Indeed, according to Elihu, the righteous are often the very ones who suffer in this world, while it is the wicked who appear to prosper (Job 36:19), a paradox Job himself had earlier pointed out in opposition to the three friends (12:6; 21:7-15). The theology of the three friends and that of Elihu differs in a similar way to how Luther distinguished between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross in his Heidelberg Disputation of 1518. The three friends revealed a theology of glory when they attempted to perceive the mind of God through the visible world (Job’s suffering) and in turn, declared a good man (Job) to be evil. In contrast,

Elihu takes up the theology of the cross by refusing to draw conclusions about Job based on what he sees and instead returns to what can be known about God through divine revelation (36:3-4). Despite what Job sees and feels, despite what his so-called “friends” have told him, God does not abandon those whose knees buckle under the weight of the cross.

Indeed, Elihu even demonstrates how God permits suffering in the lives of the righteous, not as a way of punishment, but as a conduit of his grace. Suffering can be used by God in a pedagogical sense, as a form of warning, to open “their ear to instruction” and turn them away from iniquity (36:9-10). God does not deal with people on their own terms and according to their own “wisdom,” but according to his own Word (36:10-12). Contrary to human reason, the affliction itself becomes a means by which God saves the afflicted (v. 15). Like a father who disciplines his son out of love, so God disciplines the righteous because he loves them (Heb 12:5-11). While Elihu does not say this to explain Job’s present suffering (for that would contradict what he already established in his previous speech), he says it to warn Job of continuing the trajectory he is headed on in light of his recent “oath of innocence.” Pieper wonderfully captures Elihu’s thoughts here:

When the Almighty, however, sends affliction to a righteous person, he wishes to remind them of their sins, to humble them, and to preserve them from wrongdoing. . . . For when one’s heart is full of rancor toward God, that person cannot pray—and perishes miserably. Yet God grants to the one who is humbly patient an understanding heart. In the same manner the LORD intends to give joy to Job through these afflictions. If, however, a human being sets himself up as judge over God, judgment will overtake him. He must not let himself be carried away with anger and blasphemy by the greatness of his suffering. Raging will not free you from your misery. Do not conjure up the night of divine judgment which cuts off whole nations! Beware the way of the fool, which naturally is more to your liking than is suffering.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Pieper, “The Book of Job,” 21.

Job has forgotten who God is. The LORD he once worshiped and blessed (1:20-21) has become the God he now questions. In listening to the “wisdom” of the three friends he has taken up their theology of glory. Job is on the verge of becoming like his wife, who spoke “as one of the foolish women speaks” (2:10). And so, after first offering him words of comfort, Elihu out of love also warns Job of the dangerous waters he is currently treading. While his present suffering is extremely painful, and perhaps greater than anything the world has ever witnessed, Job’s proposed alternative (i.e., condemning God of injustice) will result in infinitely greater pain (36:18). Elihu, therefore, calls Job to open his ears to the instruction of the LORD and so return to a posture of fear and once again humbly accept the adversity God has given to him (2:10). In short, Elihu is calling Job to repent of the brash words spoken when he demanded his day in court with God (31:35-37).

Elihu’s Fourth Speech: Part Two (36:22-37:24)

In the second half of his final speech (36:22-37:24), Elihu first directs Job’s eyes and ears away from himself and onto the LORD. Three times he tells Job to “behold” God’s greatness and power (36:22, 26, 30), drawing Job’s attention specifically to God’s inscrutable handiwork in meteorology (i.e., rain, mist, clouds, thunder, lightning, snow, ice, winds, etc.). Because God’s ways are so far beyond human comprehension, it is absurd for anyone to accuse Him of wrong (v. 23). For example, the same rain which brings nourishment for man can also be used by God for judgment (v. 31). Man is therefore in no place to judge God or call into question why he does something because no one but God can “understand the spreading of the clouds” (v. 29). By directing Job’s gaze to the LORD’s wise mastery over creation, Longman writes that Elihu

“wants to emphasize God’s greatness in order to demonstrate to Job the futility of trying to contend with him.”⁹⁶ Throughout the dialogue with his three friends, Job has become so self-absorbed that he has forgotten who the LORD is. In defending his own righteousness before his fellow man (32:1), Job’s vision has curved inward, leading him to foolishly indict his Maker. And so Elihu calls on Job to take his eyes off of himself and instead behold “wondrous works of God” (37:14).

But Job’s vision is not his only sense which needs realignment. Elihu also calls on Job to open his ears to the LORD and “hear attentively the thunder of His voice, and the rumbling that comes from His mouth” (37:2). The imperative followed by the infinitive absolute of the Hebrew verb *שמע* expresses the intensity with which Elihu speaks to Job. At the beginning of chapter 37, Elihu depicts images of a thunderstorm and closely associates them with the “voice,” “breath,” and “command” of God (a theme which the LORD himself picks up in 40:9). The same God who first spoke creation into existence continues to speak forth his creative power when he sends forth lightning and thunder, snow and ice, whirlwinds and thick clouds (vv. 2-11). The storms which cause beasts to flee to their dens (v. 8) and man’s heart to tremble (v. 1) are “turned by His guidance, that they may do whatever He commands them on the face of the whole earth” (vv. 11-12). Commenting on the Hebrew wisdom term *תְּהִלָּה* (translated as “guidance”), Habel writes that Elihu depicts God as “a cosmic navigator guiding the clouds like ships or chariots on their appointed courses across the sky.”⁹⁷ Longman points out that “Ancient Near Eastern peoples associated the storm with the power of the storm god (in Canaan, Baal), but faithful Israelites (and Elihu) rightly recognized that the storm was under the control of the one

96 Longman, *Job*, 403.

97 Habel, *The Book of Job*, 514.

and only God, Yahweh.”⁹⁸ By showing the connection between God’s voice and the violent thunderstorm, Elihu is not merely reminding Job of the almighty power of God; he is offering him comfort in the fact that nothing happens, not even the seemingly random and uncontrollable forces of nature, except by the command and will of God. It is possible that Elihu’s point in all this is to draw a parallel between the devastating effects of storms and Job’s present suffering.⁹⁹ Thus, if the elemental forces of nature are all guided by God’s voice, how much more the misery and torment experienced by those created in his own image?

Furthermore, Elihu even offers Job three possible reasons as to why God may send these storms: “whether for correction, or for His land, or for mercy” (v. 13). The first reason, “for correction,” comes from the Hebrew word **שִׁבְט** which means “rod.” In wisdom literature, the “rod” is used as a corrective instrument to drive foolishness from the heart of a child (Prov 22:15). Such a powerful tool in the hands of a loving father was the rod that, when used on his son, it is described as being able to “deliver his soul from hell” (23:13-14). Interestingly, the word **שִׁבְט** only occurs two other times in the book of Job and is used by Job himself on both occasions. Job calls for God’s “rod” to be taken from him (Job 9:34) and then later laments how the wicked prosper and do not have the “rod of God” upon them (21:9). Perhaps Elihu is suggesting here to Job that, although storms (and even Job’s present suffering) may appear to be evidence of God’s judgment, they are actually signs of God’s fatherly care for the eternal well-being of his children.

The second reason Elihu says that God sends storms is simple: to nourish the land. God sends storms to bless humanity with food and water (Acts 14:17). Unlike the first reason, this

⁹⁸ Longman, *Job*, 405.

⁹⁹ Longman suggests that “Elihu may be speaking not just of storms of nature, but also the storms of suffering” (*Job*, 406).

reason seems to carry no moral connotations. For the LORD satisfies the desires of “every living thing” (Ps 145:16) and “sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt 5:45). In offering this reason to Job, Elihu could be reminding him that storms are sent not because of any moral failure on his part or because he is in danger of losing his soul, but simply because God wants to bring about some kind of blessing.

The third reason is perhaps the most surprising of all: “for mercy” (Job 37:13). The Hebrew word translated as “mercy” (רַחֲמִים) is extremely rare in Job, appearing only two other times (6:14; 10:12). In Scripture, this word is often associated with the covenantal love of God (Exod 34:6-7; Deut 7:9), the kind of “persisting love that God as covenant king shows his people.”¹⁰⁰ While Elihu claims that sending a storm to water the land is evidence of God’s general love for his created world, he takes things one step further in saying that God sends storms to demonstrate his covenantal love. But how does a storm show God’s mercy? Anderson offers one possible explanation: “The most dramatic events in Israel’s history were occasions when God used the most destructive storms to give His people the victories promised in His covenant, that is, to do [mercy].”¹⁰¹ God sends storms in order to deliver his people from their enemies, such as when he sent thunder, hail, and fire on the Egyptians (Exod 9:23). However, if Elihu is drawing a parallel between God’s sovereignty over storms and Job’s present suffering, then how is God’s mercy shown when Job is on the receiving end of such a storm? This is difficult to answer. And yet, it is this very explanation which the Apostle James would later affirm: “Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (Jas

¹⁰⁰ Longman, *Job*, 407.

¹⁰¹ Francis Anderson, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1976), 266.

5:11). In some way, Job's suffering enabled him to better understand the mercy of God.

Similarly, Elihu is claiming that God directs storms to showcase his mercy.

After directing Job's eyes and ears onto the LORD and his sovereignty over the storm, Elihu concludes his final speech with these words: "As for the Almighty, we cannot find Him; He is excellent in power, in judgment and abundant justice; He does not oppress. Therefore men fear Him; He shows no partiality to any who are wise of heart" (Job 37:23–24). Instead of calling into question God's justice and accusing him of cruelty (30:21), Job is instructed by Elihu to humble himself before the Almighty and simply fear him. Rather than "justifying himself" (32:1), Job must entrust himself to the One who is "excellent in...abundant justice" (37:23). Job's righteousness and justification are to be found not by looking inward, but upward. These final words of Elihu simply recall what Job himself confessed previously before his brash oath: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom" (28:28). In this way Elihu is not bringing new revelation to Job, but rather calling him back to a posture of faith in the LORD. Those who are wise in heart fear the LORD. The phrase "wise of heart" occurs only one other time in 9:4 when Job asks the question: "How can a man be righteous before God? If one wished to contend with Him, he could not answer Him one time out of a thousand. GOD is wise in heart and mighty in strength. Who has hardened himself against Him and prospered?" (9:2–4). It seems that Elihu had been keenly listening to the dialogue between Job and his three friends. He skillfully reminds Job of his own words in an attempt to both warn him from continuing down this path of self-justification and contention against God, and to call Job to return to the faith he once so boldly confessed.

CONCLUSION

After examining his speeches within the literary context of the book of Job, the evidence appears to favor a more positive understanding of Elihu who, unlike Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, speaks that which is right to Job at just the right time. From the moment the author introduces Elihu into the narrative he provides certain clues for his readers that Elihu is about to say something substantially different to Job than the feigned wisdom espoused by the three so-called “friends.” In defense of Elihu, Seow writes, “The narrator makes it clear in the introduction to the Elihu speeches that the young man’s anger with Job has nothing to do with Job’s prior guilt but with Job’s condemnation of God. Elihu denies Job’s claim that his suffering as an innocent person is an indictment of divine character.”¹⁰² Although he is young and timid, and though he displayed great patience as he listened to his elders endlessly debate (32:4, 6), after Job utters his oath against the LORD, demanding the Almighty to answer him, Elihu could no longer hold back his wrath (32:2). But rather than giving himself over to frustration, Elihu is compelled to speak by God himself—for his words come from the pure knowledge of the Spirit (32:18; 33:3-4). Whereas the three so-called “friends” condemn Job of sin and assert that he justly deserves his suffering, Elihu’s purpose in speaking with Job is to justify him (33:32) and serve as his spokesman before God (33:6).

To be sure, Elihu does rebuke Job for erring. However, unlike the others, Elihu does not link Job’s suffering with personal sin. Rather, Elihu chastises him because, in the midst of his

¹⁰² Seow, *Job*, 98.

suffering, Job spoke sinfully against the LORD (33:12-13). Wilson summarizes the distinction well: “Whereas the friends pointed to sin in Job’s past life, Elihu looks at sinful attitudes in Job’s present life...For Elihu, then, the issue is not whether Job’s sin caused his suffering, but rather whether Job has spoken wrongly in the course of the debate. This change of focus seems to give Elihu a different attitude to Job, for he does not have to create a catalog of past sins in order to justify God.”¹⁰³ In demanding his day in court with God (31:35), Job moved from a posture of true fear and faith in God to one of self-justification. In contending against the Almighty Job is guilty of the very sin which he himself condemned earlier in the dialogue (9:2-3). Thus, Elihu is justified in his wrath against him.

And more than that, Elihu proves to be a better friend than the other three because he provides Job with the wisdom he needed. In preaching a theology of retribution to Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar turned Job’s faith inwards, directing his eyes away from the LORD and onto himself and his own righteousness. Instead of helping him, they misled Job into accusing God of wrong. Whether they realized it or not, the three so-called “friends” proved to be no friends at all. By their words, they showed they were really in the service of Satan, who desired to see Job fall from faith and curse God to his face (1:11). And perhaps Job would have done just that had not Elihu intervened before he came face to face with his Maker. But Elihu does intervene and, after rebuking him for his brash words, helps lift Job’s eyes off of himself and his circumstances and back onto God (37:24).

In response, Job says nothing to Elihu. Silence. This breaks the pattern of Job always chiming in to get the last word in the argument. He has nothing to say in response because Elihu, unlike the three so-called “friends,” has indeed spoken words of wisdom (6:24). By refraining

¹⁰³ Lindsay Wilson, “The Role of the Elihu Speeches in the Book of Job,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 55 no 2 (1996):86.

from answering Elihu, Job tacitly admits that he is right. Earlier in the dialogue Job offered to remain silent if any of his friends would prove to be his teacher (6:24). Yet, time and time again Job was able to refute his three friends. But now when Elihu has finished his four-speech monologue, Job has nothing to say. Elihu even gave Job an opportunity to answer him (33:32) if he had anything to say. And yet nothing is said. Instead, the LORD simply arrives in a whirlwind and seamlessly carries on where Elihu left off.

While it is true that the LORD does not explicitly commend Elihu, His speech and subsequent actions achieve the same effect. The LORD likewise asks Job a series of questions that direct Job's eyes upward instead of inwards. The LORD, like Elihu, rebukes Job for condemning Him and justifying himself (40:8). And how does Job respond? Does he curse God as Satan had hoped? Far from it. Twice Job acknowledges his vileness (40:4; 42:6). Twice Job confesses that he has erred in uttering brash words to God (40:5; 42:3). In the end, Job speaks to the LORD for the last time saying, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:5–6). It is important to note that the repentance in view here is not a "blanket admission that [Job] is a guilty sinner before God," as Cherney points out, but rather a "targeted and specific acknowledgement...that during the dialogues he had pressed a claim that he now realizes was absurdly presumptuous and inappropriate."¹⁰⁴ By humbly repenting of the oath he swore back in chapter 31, Job returns to a posture of fear of God and thus proves true what the LORD had said about him to Satan from the prologue (1:8). "In this way," Steinmann observes, "Elihu prepares Job for God's message. When God does speak, he takes up where Elihu left off... Then he calls on Job to give up his questioning and return to his simple, trusting faith. This is what Job does. And so, as the

¹⁰⁴ Kenneth A. Cherney, "Exegetical Brief: Did Job 'Repent'? (42:6), *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 109 no 2 (2012): 137.

prologue promised, we see Job's faith bend, but never break. Therefore, he maintains his integrity and refuses to curse God."¹⁰⁵ From the beginning to the end of the book, what made Job "blameless and upright" in the sight of God was not the fact that he was perfect or righteous in and of himself, but rather, because he entrusted himself to the One who alone is "just and the justifier" (Rom 3:26). Far from discrediting his faith, Job's repentance proved it was truly genuine. Job's weakness served to demonstrate what God had said about him to Satan was right, namely, that Job was indeed a "blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8). Elihu helped Job see that he did not need to justify himself before others because the LORD himself was his justification. For it was God, not Job, who first declared him to be righteous from the outset. And if what God says is true, then it does not matter what Satan or anyone else may say. For as the Apostle Paul says, "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies" (Rom 8:33).

¹⁰⁵ Steinmann, "The Structure and Message of the Book of Job," 99.

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