

**PEOPLE OF GOD THINK ABOUT GOD  
GOD AS JUST AND LOVING**

**JOB AND GOD**

**March 4, 2020**

**Job 32-37**

And then there was Elihu!

We have the appearance of a new character with his long, uninterrupted discourse.

*Strong reasons for recognizing these speeches as a later addition:*

Elihu is not mentioned at the start of the story where all the other characters are introduced.

He does not appear in the epilogue.

When God rebukes the friends of Job by name Elihu is not mentioned.

Strong possibility that a later writer valued the ideas presented by Elihu.

Also . . .

Elihu is the only character bearing an Israelite name.

Discourse differs in tone and style from the speeches of the others.

Elihu called Job by name and quoted fragments of his speeches.

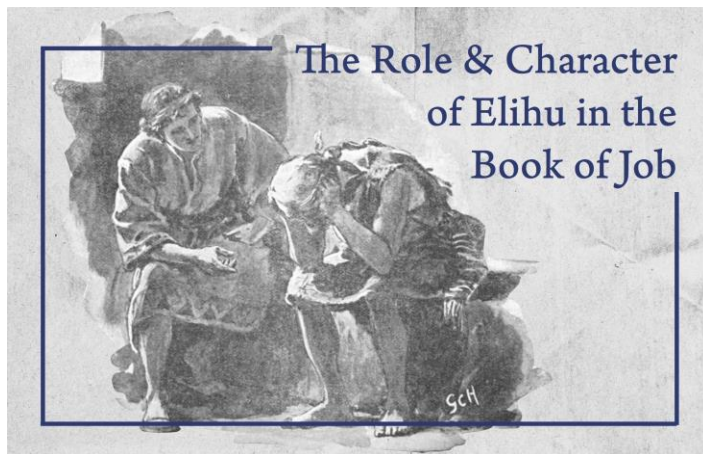
Implies author seemed to have knowledge of the written text ahead of this addition.

He was intent on refuting specific statements to *correct* the others.

Elihu refuted Job and criticized the arguments of his friends as inadequate.

He did not criticize God directly, but anticipated elements of the speech made by God later.

His primary theme was that of wisdom.



**First Speech (32:6-33:33)**

Starts with a long self-justification for speaking.

Contrary to Job, he argued that God does speak to people through dreams and illness in order to lead them to moral insight and to preserve them from destruction.

In Job 33 Elihu starts to answer Job.

He summarized the complaints of Job by drawing on his speeches found in Chapters 9 and 13.

From his perspective Job saw himself as innocent who believed God treated him like an enemy.

Elihu centered on the process of *moral regeneration*.

It is the recognition of wrong-doing, restoration, and reconciliation.

Elihu concluded his first speech with an offer to teach Job wisdom.  
Further evidence that this is a later writing.  
Such a speech would come from the Persian and Hellenistic periods (6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> Century BC).

### **Second Speech (Job 34:1-37)**

Chapter 34 is a very different kind of speech from Chapter 33.  
Chapter 33 is addressed specifically to Job.  
Next chapter is addressed to a general audience of the wise.  
Presents almost a philosophical reflection on the nature of God and his governance of the world.

Similar to Job 33 Elihu refuted the claim that God took away the rights of Job.  
Elihu defended the just governance of God by appealing to the absolute sovereignty of God.  
Elihu described the sudden and surprising ways in which God overturned the wicked.  
He renewed his call for the judgment of all *righteous-thinking* people.  
God always shows concern by warning and correcting humans so as to save them.

### **Third Speech (Job 35:1-16)**

Elihu directly challenged Job again concerning the validity of his words about himself and God.  
Complaints by Job: No benefit came from refraining from sin because God did not notice him.  
Speech opened with a rhetorical question about Job evaluating himself correctly.  
At the end of the speech there is a statement of judgment (words of Job are empty and ignorant).  
He offers reasons why certain complaints against oppression do not seem to receive a response.  
People who merely cry aloud receive no answer.  
A prideful person who does not turn to God in suffering is evil in the eyes of Elihu.  
It did not occur to Elihu that he was afflicted by the sin of pride.

### **Fourth Speech (Job 36:1-21)**

Elihu summarized many of the same themes previously addressed.  
In this final speech no words from Job are cited.  
Instead Elihu turned attention to his own speeches.  
He asked Job for patience so he could continue to state what he had to say about God.  
He once more ascribed righteousness to God.  
Elihu once more stressed the sovereign power of God.  
He alluded to the receptiveness of God.  
Finally he appealed to the powerful mind of God.

Understanding of God's care for the righteous who are afflicted is more complex than in psalms.  
Here it includes redemption by means of affliction.  
Elihu interpreted a time of affliction as an occasion for God to disclose the sins of the people.  
God also provided an opportunity for repentance.  
For Elihu arrogance was the distinguishing feature of the sinner's wrong-doing.

From 36:22-37:25 Elihu starts to anticipate the speeches from God.  
He described the wonders of God as Lord of such things as the weather.  
He reminded Job of his comparative powerlessness and ignorance.  
In this account, the wonders of God testify to the righteous providence of God.

## **Job 5-7**

From Eliphaz we heard the traditional understanding of misfortunes:

Human beings are inescapably subject to death.

Rallying against the inevitability of the human condition is foolish.

Anger of Job is misplaced, and he should not expect assistance from God.

In Job 5:8-16 Eliphaz shifted the focus from human nature to divine nature.

He also shifted away from uncontrolled anger to committing the situation to God.

Eliphaz urged Job to orient himself to God.

He supports his own advice by praising God as the one who transforms situations.

Preoccupation of Job with death in Job 3 closed off both hope and the possibility of a future.

Eliphaz attempted to restore that possibility to Job.

## **Word of the Day – Macarism**

In Job 5:17 a macarism is a statement in the form – *Happy is . . .*

Sayings are frequent in Proverbs and the Psalms (and the Beatitudes).

What is striking here is Eliphaz uses it in connection with something painful.

Misfortune as *discipline* from God was the moral thinking of the ancient Near East.

In Psalm 6 and 38 the writers acknowledged their suffering as divine discipline.

Difference was that they prayed that God would not discipline them in anger.

Eliphaz made his statement following the expression found in Proverbs 3:11-12.

Divine discipline is understood as motivated by love (such as a father for a son).

In Job 5:19-26 Eliphaz shifts the focus to the sustaining protection of God at times of distress.

Imagery evokes the life-giving power of God.

God sustains a person even in the midst of calamity.

God is the source of strength that prevents a person from shattering entirely.

Source of strength also enables that person to flourish once more.

In Chapters 6 and 7 Job replied with a spirited defense of his own.

He made a sharp indictment against his friends and bold accusations against God.

Chapter 6 is primarily concerned with a justification for the manner in which Job spoke.

He insisted that such frankness was necessary for true dialogue with his friends.

His criticism focused primarily on the failure of his friends to take his words seriously.

He expected them to respond to him with the same degree of integrity that he exhibited.

In Chapter 7 Job continued to justify his need to speak without restraint.

He reflected on the human condition in general and of his own condition in particular.

Directly addressing God he mediated on the fleeting quality of human life.

In 7:12-21 Job addressed God in words utterly without parallel in the Bible –

God had a misplaced and inappropriate obsession with inspecting and punishing behaviors.

His words were even more shocking because of his use of sarcasm and satire.

When Job used both in his speech he defied all the conventions of traditional piety.

### **Job 38:1-38**

We now experience the presence of God and his first speech with some familiar traditions.

In the Bible a storm often accompanies a divine appearance.

Name of *Yahweh* is associated with theophanies.

In the *Book of Job* the friends name God as *El, Eloah, Elohim, and Shaddai*.

Use of the name of *Yahweh* is only found in the divine speeches.

At the start *satan* alleged that Job's respect for God was based only on the blessings he received.

His assumption was that if everything were lost then Job would curse God.

Now there is a face-to-face encounter between God and Job.

Decisive word has yet to be spoken.

But the dialogues from the friends changed the nature of what was at stake.

No longer was the question simply whether unconditional piety existed (or not).

One needed to know how such an understanding could be meaningful.

Job made justice the central value.

Notion of radically unconditional piety was at best meaningless and at worst outrageous.

Task God faced was to articulate a vision that was meaningful and profound.

In his very first words God sets both the tone and theme.

His question raised the issue of Job's position that he could challenge the counsel of God.

God emphasized that it was not the humanity of Job that disqualified his challenge.

It was that Job spoke without knowledge.

Rhetorical questions confronted Job with the limits of his knowledge and capacity.

It contrasted the knowledge of Job with the wisdom and resourcefulness of God.

God started with vivid pictorial images of the cosmos.

In Job 38:12-15 there are ironic echoes of the opening speech by Job.

In Job 38:16-21 God questions Job about his experience of the four dimensions of the world:

Great deep / Underworld / Expanse of the earth / heavens

Starting in Job 38:22 the poem turns to meteorological phenomena and then to the constellations.



### **Job 38:39-39:30**

We transition to the second part of the divine speech.

Animals were powerful symbols in all human cultures but were perceived differently.

In ancient cultures anything considered *wild* was seen negatively.

Example: Desert waste was a hostile and dangerous place in contrast with an inhabited land.

Desert was a symbol of chaos.

Divine punishment took on the form of making a city into an uninhabited wilderness.

Those that lived in desolate places and ruined cities took on the characteristics of those places.

Wild animals were also part of this pattern of opposition and enmity.

Divine punishment was often depicted as letting wild animals savage a land.

Predators attacked people and livestock.

In ancient Near Eastern art we have illustrations of this kind of perception regarding animals.



#### **Royal Hunt**

Kings hunted a variety of animals (virtually all of the animals listed in Job 39).

It was not simply a recreational activity but a symbolic act. Just as the king protected the integrity of the land against hostile human enemies, so he enacted his role as protector of the land against any hostile forces as represented by animals.



#### **Lord of the Animals**

Numerous representations of a divine figure flanked by wild animals which he held in each hand.

Gesture was one of control.

Once more most of the animals represented in the *Lord of the Animals* motif are also represented in Job 39.

A wild force was limited by a divine power.

Motif of the *Lord of the Animals* was sometimes combined with that of the *world tree*.

Animals turned their heads to eat from the tree while also being restrained by the divine figure.

In this way the themes of abundance and control of the wild were brought together.

All these traditions provide important background for the meaning of the divine speech.

All but one of the individual sections are introduced by the familiar rhetorical questions. Each one served to point out the limits of Job's knowledge and ability. Each one also underscored the power and wisdom of God. Each section included a closely observed description of the animal in a characteristic activity. Elsewhere in the Bible references to animals were brief and incidental. Animals were presented in ways that challenged human perception.

### **Job 40:1-5**

Following the questions of the first divine speech God demanded an answer. Job had reproached God publicly and God responded. Now Job must answer. Job acknowledged the difference in status between himself and God. Job engaged in an act of self-humiliation as he implicitly acknowledged his impropriety.

### **Job 40:6-42:6**

Focus of the second speech was tight and intense. Now after a brief introduction Job is directed to *look at Behemoth*. Without transition the focus shifted to *Leviathan*. Figuratively speaking Job was brought face-to-face with Leviathan. Immediately afterwards Job uttered his second response and withdrew his challenge. Even more than the wild animals of Job 38-39 Leviathan represented the frightening. It bore the terror of the chaotic in its very being.

Name *Behemoth* is the *plural of majesty for an animal* or animal par excellence. No Biblical or non-Biblical instances are found of this name. In Job its extraordinary power found its artistic representation in images of repose and security. In contrast Leviathan was rendered in images of violence, fire, and turmoil. Leviathan was the name of a sea monster with which Yahweh, Baal, and Anat did battle.

Outline of Job's response is clear. He started with a confession of God's effective power. Job incorporated the words of God into his own speech. It suggests that Job now views himself from the perspective of God. More explicitly Job accepted the judgment of God. However it is not clear that Job understood the substantive meaning of the divine speeches.

If the divine speeches had nothing to say to Job except that pain is part of life then it is worthless. Challenge was to see how the pain could lead to comfort and strengthen the afflicted. Divine speeches enabled Job to take up his life once more. Living beyond tragedy required the ability to receive and to give. Divine speeches also challenge Job's understanding of where the presence of God may be found. Like many who suffer, Job experienced himself as godforsaken. For him the presence of God was found in the peace and fulfillment of the family circle. He found it impossible to experience the presence of God in the desolation. Vivid image of God *satisfying the desolate wasteland* with rain suggest that Job is wrong. There is no place or no condition beyond the sustaining power of God's presence.

**Job 42:7-17**

Immediately following Job's reply to God the voice of the narrator returned. Conclusion seems to presume a significantly different story line from the one just enacted. Restoration of Job clashes with the moral complexity of the dialogues and divine speeches. On the one hand the *happy ending* provides a smooth and satisfying conclusion. It is seen as an act of the free grace of God and Job experiences reconciliation with God.

On the other hand the ending seems like a disruption. Left more open-ended it frees the frame story and the dialogue for further moral deliberation. *Book of Job* models a community of voices struggling to articulate a range of perspectives. Each one contained valid insights as well as blindness to other dimensions of the problem. At different times and in different circumstances one of the voices may seem more powerful.

**Assignment for March 11**

Knowing the Unknowable God  
From the *Gospel of John*  
Chapters 1, 14, and 16

