

Bible Study Guide: Job 32–37

Overview

The dialogue between Job and his three friends has reached an impasse. Job has steadfastly maintained his integrity, while Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have insisted that his suffering proves he must be guilty of hidden sin. Neither side has persuaded the other.

At this point, a new voice enters the discussion. Elihu, a younger man who has patiently listened to the entire debate, speaks because he is dissatisfied with both Job and his three friends. Unlike the others, Elihu does not argue that all suffering is direct punishment for personal sin. Instead, he begins redirecting Job's attention away from demanding answers and toward God's wisdom, justice, and sovereign purposes.

Opening Question

Have you ever found yourself so focused on understanding *why* God allowed something that you lost sight of *who* God is?

Job 32

Elihu enters the conversation after remaining silent throughout the earlier debates out of respect for the older men. However, when Job's friends can no longer answer him, and yet continue condemning him, Elihu can no longer remain silent.

Unlike the three friends, Elihu does not appeal primarily to age or experience as the source of wisdom. He acknowledges that older people often possess greater understanding, but insists that true wisdom ultimately comes from the Spirit of God.

Elihu declares that he will speak honestly without showing favoritism or flattering anyone. His concern is not winning an argument but defending God's honor. Although his confidence occasionally borders on boldness, his desire is that the truth about God's character be upheld.

Read Aloud: Job 32:8–9

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Elihu wait until everyone else had finished speaking before entering the discussion?
 2. Why is careful listening an essential quality of wise and godly counsel?
 3. What can we learn from Elihu's commitment to speak truth without favoritism or flattery?
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Job 33

Elihu addresses Job personally rather than speaking about him. He respectfully asks Job to listen carefully before responding, assuring him that he does not intend to intimidate or overpower him. Although Elihu believes Job has spoken wrongly about God, he approaches him as a fellow human being created by the same God.

Elihu first challenges Job's repeated complaint that God has remained silent. He argues that God is not silent at all; rather, God speaks in ways people often fail to recognize. Sometimes He warns through dreams, at other times through suffering. According to Elihu, these gracious interventions are designed to turn people away from pride, preserve them from destruction, and draw them into deeper dependence upon Him.

Elihu then describes suffering as one of God's instruments of instruction. Physical affliction may awaken a person to spiritual realities that prosperity often obscures. While Elihu incorrectly assumes that Job's suffering is exposing pride, he rightly recognizes that God can use painful circumstances to accomplish loving purposes. Suffering is not always punitive; it can also be corrective, protective, and sanctifying.

Read Aloud: Job 33:26–28

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Elihu believe Job has misunderstood God's silence?
2. How can suffering become a means of God's instruction rather than merely His punishment?
3. What does this chapter teach us about God's desire to rescue, restore, and preserve His people even through difficult circumstances?

Job 34

After Job remains silent, Elihu continues by defending God's justice. He quotes several of Job's earlier statements, particularly Job's claim that God has denied him justice despite his innocence. Elihu argues that such conclusions wrongly accuse God's character. Because God is perfectly righteous, it is impossible for Him to act unjustly or pervert justice.

Although Elihu correctly defends God's justice, he wrongly concludes that Job's continued insistence on his innocence must reflect rebellion rather than honest confusion. In this respect, Elihu shares the same weakness as Job's three friends: he interprets Job's suffering through assumptions rather than through knowledge of God's hidden purposes. Nevertheless, his central message remains true; God is always just, even when His ways are beyond our understanding.

Read Aloud: Job 34:10–12

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Elihu insist that it is impossible for God to act unjustly?

2. How does God's impartiality distinguish Him from human judges and rulers?
3. Why is it dangerous to assume that God's delay in judging evil means He is indifferent to it?

Job 35

Elihu next addresses Job's repeated question of what value there is in living righteously. Job had never claimed that righteousness was meaningless, but his suffering had led him to wonder why obedience seemed to bring no earthly advantage. Elihu responds by shifting the focus away from what people contribute to God and toward God's complete self-sufficiency.

Elihu explains that human righteousness does not make God more glorious, nor does human sin diminish His greatness. God is entirely independent of His creation. Our obedience primarily affects our relationship with Him and our relationships with one another. While God delights in righteousness, He is never dependent upon it.

Read Aloud: Job 35:9–16

Discussion Questions

1. Elihu distinguishes between crying out because of suffering and sincerely seeking God. What is the difference?
2. How can difficult circumstances reveal the true desires of our hearts?
3. Why do you think Elihu continues directing Job's attention toward God's character rather than answering all of Job's questions?

Job 36

Elihu begins the final portion of his speech by once again defending God's righteousness. He insists that God's greatness never compromises His justice. Although God is infinitely powerful, He does not abuse His authority. Instead, He faithfully governs the world with wisdom, justice, and compassion.

Elihu introduces an important perspective that has not been emphasized by Job's three friends. Rather than viewing suffering only as punishment for sin, he explains that God may also use affliction to instruct His people. Hardship can expose pride, deepen dependence upon the Lord, and call His people to greater obedience. While Elihu mistakenly assumes this explains Job's suffering, he rightly recognizes that God often uses trials to accomplish loving purposes in the lives of His children.

Read Aloud: Job 36:22–26

Discussion Questions

1. How does Elihu's understanding of suffering differ from that of Job's three friends?

2. Why is it important to recognize that God may use suffering for purposes beyond punishment?
3. Elihu repeatedly directs Job's attention from his circumstances to God's greatness. How can focusing on God's character strengthen our faith during difficult seasons?
4. Why do you think Elihu concludes his speech by pointing to God's work in creation rather than attempting to answer all of Job's questions?

Job 37

Elihu concludes his speeches by calling Job to consider the majesty of God displayed in creation. Rather than explaining *why* Job has suffered, Elihu invites him to marvel at *who* God is. He repeatedly asks Job to "consider" the wonders of God's works, reminding him that the Creator's wisdom far exceeds human understanding. If mankind cannot fully comprehend the ordinary workings of creation, neither can we expect to comprehend all of God's purposes.

The chapter concludes with a fitting transition to the Lord's appearance in chapter 38. Elihu declares that God is clothed with awesome majesty and perfect justice. Therefore, the proper response is not to accuse God or demand explanations from Him, but to approach Him with reverence and humility. Though Job still has unanswered questions, he is now prepared to hear directly from the Lord Himself.

Read Aloud: Job 37:14–24

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Elihu repeatedly direct Job's attention to God's work in creation rather than to his own suffering?
2. How does reflecting on God's greatness help us maintain perspective during seasons of uncertainty?
3. Why is humility an essential response when we encounter truths about God that exceed our understanding?
4. As God prepares to speak in the next chapter, what lessons do you think Job, and we as readers, are meant to learn from Elihu's final words?

Seeing the Gospel

Like Job, we will not always understand why God allows suffering. Yet because of Christ, we know that God is both perfectly wise and perfectly good. The God who governs creation is the same God who accomplished our salvation through His Son. Therefore, even when His purposes remain hidden, we can trust His character, knowing that His wisdom never fails and His plans are always accomplished for His glory and the good of His people (Romans 8:28).