



## Session 8: Elihu, Part 2

### Introduction

**React** to a [podcast](#) from the Bible Project that reviews Elihu's role compared to the role of Job's three friends.

### Elihu's Third Speech

*Job 35:1–16*

Elihu is basically saying, “Job, God doesn’t care. God is so much higher and greater than humans that he does not need people—either good people or bad people.” Is this good or bad advice for people like Job? **Defend** your thoughts.

Respond to a Christian feeling depressed: “So you’re saying it doesn’t matter what I do. I could be good, but God doesn’t take that into account. Or I could be bad, but God will forgive me.”

### Elihu's Fourth Speech

*Job 36:5–31, 37:11–16*

In the first part, is Elihu saying the same thing as the three friends before? **Read** the quotes below and **settle the debate**.

1. Job is no different from any other wicked person whom God is punishing for their sin.

*If this is the “more to be said on God’s behalf” (v. 2), it is disappointing because essentially Elihu reiterated the tired, old theology of retribution—God will kill the wicked and preserve the righteous. In the middle of this section (vv. 8–12) is a discourse on the opportunities that come to the wicked by way of divine discipline, designed to turn them from the broad road that leads*

to destruction to the narrow one that leads to life. To ignore these lifesaving warnings means they will perish just as if they had never been given a chance to repent. All these generalized statements are, of course, aimed directly at Job. In Elihu's opinion he is that unrepentant, arrogant sinner whom God is judging and warning.<sup>1</sup>

2. Job is very different from any other wicked person whom God is punishing for their sin. God is standing beside his servant Job in the midst of his suffering.

*In the fourth discourse (ch. 36–37) 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.<sup>2</sup>*

*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, 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 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.<sup>3</sup>*

In the second part, Elihu is preparing Job for God's appearance to him out of a storm by lifting Job's eyes to the wonders of creation. **Extrapolate the points of comparison** between God bringing a storm of suffering into Job's life and God bringing a storm into this world.<sup>4</sup>

## Conclusion

Envision meeting a person like Job, who is suffering so much that he/she is demanding vindication and questioning God's goodness and fairness in allowing all this bad stuff to happen. How would you correct a person like that—as Elihu did (and not the three friends)?

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<sup>1</sup> Robert L. Alden, *Job*, The New American Commentary 11 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 349.

<sup>2</sup> August Pieper, "The Book of Job in Its Significance for Preaching and the Care of Souls," Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Erik Alair, "An Examination of Elihu and His Role in the Book of Job," Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary senior thesis, 2023, 46–47. In the second sentence, Alair is referring to commentators in position #1.

<sup>4</sup> It seems possible Elihu is making this implicit connection. So Tremper Longman, *Job*, BCOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 406; cited in Alair, "An Examination of Elihu," 51.