



## Job - Chapter Thirty Two

### **II      Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God (continues)**

#### **Summary of Chapter Thirty Two**

This chapter is the first of six in which a new, much younger character called Elihu strongly rebukes his elders. He has listened to the arguments of Job and finds fault in his claims to self-righteousness rather than in the righteousness of God. He also rebukes the three friends for claiming to have knowledge and wisdom which they falsely apply to Job's situation. Elihu has respectfully waited for his opportunity and has let the elders speak. Now his words pour out like champagne released from a shaken bottle.

#### **II.d      Job 32:1-37:24 - Elihu: Suffering as a Discipline**

The opening verses of this section introduce the person and perspective of Elihu (32:1-5) and are followed by an uninterrupted section of his speeches. These include an announcement of his intention to speak (32:6-22) and an initial challenge to Job (Chapter 33), a general dispute against what Job has asserted (Chapter 34), a description of Job's place before God (35:1-16), and a lengthy section that describes and defends God's majesty (36:1-37:24).

Elihu is not addressed in the Lord's speeches that follow immediately after his own, nor is he referred to in the description either of the prologue (1:1-2:13) or the epilogue (42:7-17). Interpreters have differed on how to understand the function of Elihu's speeches in light of this lack of explicit reference or evaluation. While the Lord's response to Job will include some vocabulary and references that are similar to portions of Elihu's speeches, he does not commend either Elihu's suggested reasons for Job's suffering or his anger against Job.

#### **II.d.i      Job 32:1-22 - Elihu Rebukes Job's Friends**

Refer to the chapter summary above.

## II.d.i.1 Job 32:1-5 - Introduction: Elihu and his Anger

The brief narrative section preceding Elihu's speeches indicates that Job's three friends have nothing more to say to Job (v.1), introduces Elihu (v.2a), and describes his perspective on what has transpired (vv.2b-5). The section contains repeated statements that indicate the manner in which Elihu takes up his speech: he 'burned with anger' because no answer had been given to Job.

<sup>1</sup> So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. <sup>2</sup> Then Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became angry. He was angry at Job because he justified himself rather than God; <sup>3</sup> he was angry also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, though they had declared Job to be in the wrong. <sup>4</sup> Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job, because they were older than he. <sup>5</sup> But when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouths of these three men, he became angry.

### Job 32:1-5

So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. At the end of Job's persuasive arguments in Chapters 28-30, his friends had nothing more to say. They still thought that Job was completely wrong but they felt he was so confirmed in his own opinions that it was useless to keep the discussion going.

Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram. Elihu's introduction includes a reference to his father and family that is more explicit than that of any of the three friends; refer to Job 2:11, 4:1, 8:1 and 11:1. The reference may be included for the way it signifies Elihu's understanding of his role, e.g. Barachel may mean either 'may God bless' or 'God has blessed', or possibly his need for further introduction in light of his youth.

Because he appears, dominates all discussion and then abruptly leaves, some modern commentators think that he was not really part of the story and was inserted into the account later by the author or another editor. However, as he is the only one with such a precise genealogy then it seems likely that he was a real character and was indeed a part of the original account.

He was angry. Although Elihu burned with anger against both Job and his friends, when the same phrase is used of the Lord in the epilogue, his anger burns only against the three friends because they had not affirmed what was right about the Lord, as Job had done: <<*After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has'*>> (Job 42:7).

He was angry at Job because he justified himself rather than God. Apparently, Elihu was a silent listener at the whole dialogue up to this point. He was angry against Job because he felt that Job justified himself rather than God. Elihu felt that Job was more concerned about being right himself than God being right. The reader can easily understand how Elihu felt this. Yet what he did not understand was that both Job and God were right. The friends had forced themselves and Job into a false dilemma: either Job is right or God is right. They could not see or understand how both were right, although the Lord would later rebuke Job for the way in which he presented his case.

He was angry also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, though they had declared Job to be in the wrong. Elihu was also angry at Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar because they had failed to solve the controversy while at the same time they were, in Elihu's opinion, too harsh against Job.

Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job, because they were older than he. Out of respect for his elders, Elihu held back for as long as he felt he could: <<*You shall rise before the aged, and defer to the old; and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord*>> (Leviticus 19:32). Now, he felt that he simply had to speak out. Paul counselled Timothy to also have the courage to speak out despite his youth: <<*Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity*>> (1 Timothy 4:12).

But when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouths of these three men, he became angry. Elihu's expectation was clearly that his elders would have sufficient wisdom and knowledge to come to the correct understanding of the situation or they would have kept silent themselves if they could not judge rightly. When Elihu came to the conclusion that they were critical of Job for the wrong reasons he became angry with them and felt that he must have his say.

#### II.d.i.2 Job 32:6-22 - The Voice of Youth

Elihu's opening speech is a repetitive declaration of what the opening narrative section has described (vv.1-5): Elihu has waited to speak because he is younger than the three friends; but now that it is clear to him that they do not have an answer for Job, he feels compelled to speak. Elihu directs this section primarily at the friends and emphasises his right and intention <<*to declare my opinion*>>.

<sup>6</sup> Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite answered:

‘I am young in years,  
and you are aged;  
therefore I was timid and afraid  
to declare my opinion to you.

7 I said, “Let days speak,  
and many years teach wisdom.”  
8 But truly it is the spirit in a mortal,  
the breath of the Almighty, that makes for understanding.  
9 It is not the old that are wise,  
nor the aged that understand what is right.

#### Job 32:6-9

I am young in years, and you are aged. Elihu came as a young man among older men and because of this he was willing to hold his words until this time.

But truly it is the spirit in a mortal, the breath of the Almighty, that makes for understanding. Elihu acknowledges that all wisdom comes from God: <<*With God are wisdom and strength; he has counsel and understanding*>> (Job 12:13), <<*Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart*>> (Psalm 119:34), and: <<*If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you*>> (James 1:5). Elihu believed that just because Job and his three friends were older, it did not mean that they were the only ones with the spirit in a mortal, and the only one who had received understanding from the Almighty. Elihu plays on the words spirit and breath in his early speeches, here and also in Job 33:4 and 34:14, in the way most likely to evoke Job’s earlier plea in Job 27:2-3 as he asserts his own right to speak.

It is not the old that are wise, nor the aged that understand what is right. The reaction from Job and his three friends at these words of Elihu can only be imagined. They were probably united together for the first time in a long time; they might not agree with each other but they certainly all would disagree that this young upstart could be wiser or have more understanding than they did. Elihu believed that the older men - for all of their supposed wisdom - did not understand the matter at all; he thought that the old men were wrong and that the young men (in particular, himself) were right. The thinker and writer G.K. Chesterton wrote this about men like Elihu: “I believe what really happens in history is this: the old man is always wrong; and the young people are always wrong about what is wrong with him. The practical form it takes is this: that, while the old man may stand by some stupid custom, the young man always attacks it with some theory that turns out to be equally stupid.”

10 Therefore I say, “Listen to me;  
let me also declare my opinion.”

- 11 'See, I waited for your words,  
I listened for your wise sayings,  
while you searched out what to say.
- 12 I gave you my attention,  
but there was in fact no one that confuted Job,  
no one among you that answered his words.
- 13 Yet do not say, "We have found wisdom;  
God may vanquish him, not a human."
- 14 He has not directed his words against me,  
and I will not answer him with your speeches.

#### Job 32:10-14

Therefore I say, "Listen to me; let me also declare my opinion." From this request for the attention and ear of Job, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, it can be assumed that there were sour and disdainful faces on the older men. Yet Elihu pressed forward, asking to be heard with the same patience he has shown throughout these lengthy proceedings between Job and his three adversarial friends.

I gave you my attention, but there was in fact no one that confuted Job, no one among you that answered his words. Elihu was frustrated because Job's friends did not put him in his place the way he thought they should. The reader can imagine Elihu following the debate, thinking of what he would say in response to Job and being frustrated that the answers of Job's friends were not as brilliant as the answers in Elihu's mind.

- 15 'They are dismayed, they answer no more;  
they have not a word to say.
- 16 And am I to wait, because they do not speak,  
because they stand there, and answer no more?
- 17 I also will give my answer;  
I also will declare my opinion.
- 18 For I am full of words;  
the spirit within me constrains me.
- 19 My heart is indeed like wine that has no vent;

like new wineskins, it is ready to burst.

<sup>20</sup> I must speak, so that I may find relief;

I must open my lips and answer.

<sup>21</sup> I will not show partiality to any person

or use flattery towards anyone.

<sup>22</sup> For I do not know how to flatter –

or my Maker would soon put an end to me!

### Job 32:15-22

They are dismayed, they answer no more; they have not a word to say. Elihu noted that Job's friends were exhausted by the debate. In the mind of Elihu, it was fortunate that he still had so much energy and so many words to express himself, because now he could start where the three friends had left off.

For I am full of words; I must speak, so that I may find relief. As in v.8, Elihu claims he is not speaking by choice but by necessity. Elihu may be thinking he is like a prophet, but the reader must judge whether he is right. Elihu certainly was full of words; for this and the next five chapters he will drone on and on, unable to shut up and unable to let anyone else speak. It is by far the longest single speech in the Book of Job, longer than even God's speech in later chapters.

The reader should note that already Elihu has spent a chapter simply introducing his speech. He has not even started on the real points he wants to make. Such long introductions and wordy methods are characteristic of Elihu and he was not the last man on this earth to use too many words: <<*Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few*>> (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

I will not show partiality to any person or use flattery towards anyone. For I do not know how to flatter – or my Maker would soon put an end to me! Elihu was determined to flatter no man, except himself. In this obviously self-flattering introduction to the speech, Elihu has clearly presented himself as smarter, wiser and having more understanding than any of the four other men with him. Elihu seems painfully unaware of how he sounded and looked.