

JOB 32-37

Besides the three friends, there is a fourth who has also come – Elihu. We are told that he has been sitting there all this time, listening to the exchange between Job and his friends. As he listens and as the exchange becomes more heated, Elihu becomes more agitated, so much so that once Job and his friends come to a lull in their exchange, Elihu bursts out with his own response to Job.

Elihu begins in 32 by rebuking Job's friends for having nothing more to say to Job in response to Job's presumption toward God. He has waited all this time to speak because he is younger than the others and has deferred to them as is proper. But no longer will he keep silence. Elihu also claims that he is speaking as much from his heart (19-20) as from his head.

In 33-37, Elihu covers some of the same ground as Job's friends have already done, except with a certain clarity of emphasis that comes across more convincingly. Job claims he is clean and righteous, that God is in the wrong, that God refuses to give answer to Job's claims. First of all, declares Elihu, God is speaking all the time. God speaks in everything that happens in the world, in everything that happens to us human beings. What is happening to Job is a communication from God. Why must Job continue to resist this communication by refusing to accept what's happened to him as a judgment from God? Why does he not receive his suffering as a spur to repentance rather than become presumptuous in his claim of innocence? God is not only the cause of suffering as a chastisement and humbling of our wickedness. God is also merciful. Whether through the prayers of others on our behalf or the fruit of our own repentance, God spares us, at times, and other times, restores us. At times we don't even get what we deserve but get off lightly. Job has spoken wrongly about God on all sides.

Secondly, declares Elihu, God can never be in the wrong. God knows more, understands more and can do more than we can. Even if we may think in our foolishness that God may be in the wrong, our faith should convince us otherwise and restrain our thoughts and our tongue. Job has failed on this point repeatedly.

Elihu's final words sum up the thrust of his argument most eloquently: "Therefore mortals fear him; he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit." (37:24)