ELIHU'S SPEECH
Elihu was the son of Barachel. He was the Buzite. He belonged to the family of Ram. He has a far juster and more spiritual conception of the problem than Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar because he has an infinitely higher conception of God. Chapters from 32 to 37 constitute his speech.

Upto this point, the action has resolved around Job and his three friends. The debate among them, growing ever more heated, finally breaks off. They have reached a stand off. Job did not admit to any sin deserving of terrible punishment, and his three friends will not back down from their ideas about suffering. Raymond E.Brown says "If 38:1 followed immediately upon 31:40, no one would ever suspect a lacuna. The critic wishing to make room for his own contribution had to indicate an occasion and reason, why a new character hitherto unmentioned should suddenly break into the discussion".

Suddenly a new voice is heard. Elihu, a young man, has been listening in silence all this time. He can restrain himself no longer. He flares up, first at Job for being so self-righteous and then at the three friends for not coming up with an answer to Job's questions. He refutes all four of them, turning their own words against them.
Elihu is shocked at Job's vigorous self-defence. He is sure that God cannot be unjust. His views are: One must submit to the pain, even if one does not understand it. One should not blame God but must praise Him. God has shown too much of his wisdom and perfection, especially in nature, for anyone to doubt him. He offers a new explanation for Job's pain. Perhaps, he suggests, God gave suffering to Job not as punishment but as a purifying influence. God can use suffering to improve a person, if it is received in the right spirit. Elihu is eager to share his "knowledge and assumes that he can communicate it effectively."

Elihu's speeches stand alone, and no one responds to them. As a result, the book of Job gives no clue on whether Elihu expressed a worthy point of view. Some readers believe Elihu forms a bridge between the flawed theories of Job's three friends and God's own speech. Perhaps his speeches prepare the way for God's speech. Others see them as repeating the same fine-sounding but not quite true advice of Job's three friends.

When God does make an entrance, he dismisses Job's friends and has some mild criticism for Job. But he ignores Elihu entirely. Elihu remains a mysterious figure.
The occasion for the intervention of Elihu is the failure of Job's friends (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar) to answer Job's doubts and fears. This paved the way to the controversy. As Elihu had listened, a twofold anger had burned in his breast against Job because of the confident eyes he was raising unflickeringly towards to refute Job. "Elihu is dismissed as a most conceited and arrogant young man by critics like Hann." His boastfulness is revealed in the following verses:

Now he hath not directed his words against me;
neither will I answer him with your speeches.

(XXXII-14)

I said, I will answer also my part,
I also will shew mine opinion.

(XXXII-17)

But anger blots out a man from balanced humility. He is an oriental man with oriental words which suit oriental ears. In such a setting the boastfulness, so clearly detected by western ears, would assume almost a common place character.

Elihu points out the reason for his silence up to the present stage in the debate: a young man's natural
respect for grey hairs had sealed his lips. But a still more authoritative respect had broken the seal.

But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.

(XXXII-8)

According to Elihu men who are great in age are not always 'great' in their appreciation of spiritual wisdom. Silence now only means greater respect for the person of man than for his God. Elihu was not built on such lines.

Let me not, I pray you accept any man's person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man.

(XXXII-21)

For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my maker would soon take me away.

(XXXII-22)

Since old men have failed to probe into Job's mind and establish truth, Elihu ventures out to speak so that the three friends of Job - Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar should not say that they found him (Job) too clever for them! According to Moffatt "It must be God; not man, who puts him down!" The verses from 17 to 22 graphically depict a man in the grip of


the constraint of what he felt to be the truth of God "Yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel! (I Corinthians.IX-16). Hence Elihu was bursting to speak.

For I am full of matter, the spirit within me constraineth me.

Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles.

(XXXII.18-19)

Denouncing Job's attitude to his sufferings Elihu maintains that he is utterly sincere in speaking directly from his heart and also that he is on exactly the same plane as Job in creaturely dependence upon God.

My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart:
and my lips shall utter knowledge clearly.

The spirit of God hath made me, and the
breath of the Almighty hath given me life.

(XXXIII.3-4)

Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead:
I also am formed out of the clay.

(XXXIII-6)

Job had complained that the spectacle of the Divine might numbed and terrified him making it impossible
for him to do himself justice before God either in thought or in word. Elihu sarcastically refers to Job's complaint that the latter could not speak freely in God's terrifying presence. Hence his feelings are:

Let him take his rod away from me and let not his fear terrify me.

(IX-34)

With draw thine hand far from me:
and let not thy dread make me afraid.

(XIII-21)

But such a complaint has no relevance to the verbal warfare in which Elihu wants to involve Job. Hence Job's present assailant is a man like himself.

Elihu rebukes Job for maintaining this integrity and for charging God with hostility to him. Such a charge against the great God whose greatness immeasurably transcends the power or wisdom of man, is totally unfounded. Job seemed to assume that such a God would be prepared to assume the role of a disputant like some party in a petty human squabble. But while God will not speak as a disputant, He will speak (as the mighty God that He is) in ministries of mercy. A.B. Davidson alters the XIII-13: Why dost thou (Job)
contend against Him that He giveth not account of any of His matters?” implying that Job has a grievance against God's silence about his affliction.

Elihu refers to the various ways through which a patient God seeks to give an account of Himself in human affairs. In XV - XVI Elihu says that God speaks through dreams and visions, through which He would leave the seal of His instruction upon human minds and reclaim human beings from evil purposes which land them into death and destruction without His intervention.

In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed;

Then He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.

That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man.

(XXXIII.15-17)

God speaks through pain:

He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain.

(XXXIII-19)
The above verse is analogous to the following verse:

For whom the Lord loveth he chastenth and
scourgeth every son whom he receiveth,

(XII-6)

Suffering may deprive a man of his appetite and of his firm, healthy flesh. It may bring him to the jaws of death, where the destroying angels await him. But it may give God, His chance with the soul. Verse XXXIII-23 speaks of the intervention of the angel of mercy to deprive the destroying angels of their prey by interpreting to the sufferer the meaning of the chastening rod and the correct reaction to it. God has an innumerable number of ministers of mercy under His command. Verses from 24 to 30 (XXX) speak of the results that follow a right response to the approach which a gracious God makes to the sufferer. First, his body regain its health. Second the health of the soul is restored, with the joy which is its inevitable fruit and He accepts it. Man is given back his righteous standing with God. Third, joy of soul issues in joyful witness to others concerning God's dealings with the soul.

Then he is gracious unto him and saith, Deliver

him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom.

(XXXIII-30)
To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.

(XXXII-30)

So Elihu asks Job to speak if he has anything to say which is worthy. If Job cannot say anything the former expects at least to listen to him.

Since silence follows Elihu's challenge to Job, his denunciation of Job's sentiments continues. He appeals to the ears of all intelligent listeners. He tried to distinguish between the words of truth and the words of error. Now the question is in which of these two categories Job's words must be placed. The first of these two is that God has wronged an innocent man, inflicting a wound on him quite capriciously. According to Elihu such words expose Job as a man with a unique and insatiable thirst for scorning, and also a man of faulty opinions due to the impact of the bad company he keeps. In the second place, Job has complained that it is no use for man to be the friend of God.

It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God.

(XXXIV-9)
When Job has complained of unrighteousness in God's dealings with him with all the conviction of his pious nature, Elihu affirms that God is just, and that He has placed man in a moral universe. Man reaps what he sows, whether the sowing is of evil or goodness. He supports his affirmation by various considerations.

According to Eliphaz, the absolute authority belongs to God. He is the omnipotent. Man is utterly dependent upon the breath of God.

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

(Genesis, II-7)

It implies that if human life is maintained by the breath of God, where is there a motive for injustice in God?

In the second place Elihu argues that the very continuance of the rule of God speaks of justice in that rule. The charge of injustice is serious enough, one to make against earthly monarchs, for justice wielded in an unjust way has the seeds of ruin in it. Then how can such a charge be made against the creator of all men, whether princes or paupers, who shows partiality to neither prince nor pauper,
but cares for all alike? Again, where is there a motive for injustice.

Upto now in chapter XXXIV Elihu has been moving on somewhat a theoretical ground. He now turns to more practical considerations. According to Elihu God's omniscience guarantees His justice. People and princes feel alike the weight of God's might. Divine knowledge of human ways and judgement upon them are simultaneous.

In a moment they shall die and the people shall be troubled at midnight, and pass away; and the mighty shall be taken away without hand.

(XXXIV-20)

Therefore he knoweth their works, and he overturneth them in the night, so that they are destroyed.

(XXXIV-25)

The argument in verse 29 is very sharp. Elihu moves from a general contemplation of God's working in history towards Job's case. The implication is whether nations or individuals are passing through days of quiet enjoyment of God's presence, or days when they lose sight of His face in the midst of trials, they must take the way of
uncomplaining submission to His will. Hence His justice is fairly administered for the good of men. According to Strahan Elihu then asks Job if any man who uses the language of penitence will presume to dictate to God the chastisement he should receive." Elihu emphatically dissociates himself from Job. He calls for the verdict of thinking men with regard to Job's rebellious words. For Elihu, Job's rebellion is more terrible than his trials.

Job hath spoken without knowledge, and his words were without wisdom.

My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end because of his answers for wicked men.

(XXXIV.35-36)

To Elihu since Job's words lack insight let the trials be continued for his own good until he surrenders that rebellion. He adds rebellion to his sin scornfully claps his hands among us and multiplies his words against God.

Job had argued that righteousness brings no advantage to the righteous man. Refuting Job's complaint, Elihu says that human virtue or vice cannot bring any advantage to the transcendent God.
For he hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God.

(XXXIV-9)

Elihu's reply is that human virtue or vice cannot bring any advantage to the transcendent God. It is other men, and not God, who have reason to be concerned about human conduct. Elihu proceeds to demolish certain considerations which might seem to support Job's contention that no advantage is attached to righteous conduct. There is the problem of unanswered prayer. Elihu believes that when prayer is unanswered it is empty. It is a case of:

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly.

(James IV-3)

The inference is drawn that a deep religious note is missing from the prayer. It is the cry of pain, which does not raise man any higher level than the level of the beasts. The divine teacher has loftier altitudes of trust in store for man.

Behold, God exalteth by his power:

who teacheth like him.

(XXXVI-22)
But none saith, where is God my maker
who giveth songs in the night.

(XXXV-10)

The night symbolises the night of suffering. God can teach the teachable, even through suffering.

The thought of God as a teacher intent on steering man through a rough and thorny maze of pain to a deeper experience of Himself, gives us an important distinction, between Elihu and the friends. For them God appears to move characteristically as a sovereign or judge.

A.B. Davidson interprets the verses 14 and 15 of the Chap. 35, thus: "Yea when thou sayest, thou seekest Him not, the cause is before Him; therefore wait thou for Him."

Similarly, Moffatt also interprets Hush! "Only wait for Him." In Verse 15 Elihu says that God is quite lenient in His treatment of those whose approach to Him is shallow. This leads some people to take advantage of Him. If Job continues to multiply words without knowledge he will fall into this danger. Elihu requests Job to bear with him a little longer so that he may impart more knowledge on God's behalf. He says that he gets knowledge from afar and he ascribes justice
to his Maker. At the same time he assures that his words are not false and one who is perfect is with him. He cautions Job to be aware of the fact that God is gracious and mighty. He also tells Job that God's providence is trustworthy who adamantly opposes the wicked and vigilantly superintends the righteous. Even when they are cramped and constrained by affliction, the Divine Teacher is intent on leading them through to a large place where they acknowledge and renounce the transgression that had involved them in affliction. He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil. Obedience to the Teacher leads to happiness but disobedience to the ruin. The hypocrites do not pray with the content of trust in their prayers. The content of the trust in prayer is pleasing to God.

Elihu applies the action of the mighty and gracious God, which has been generally enunciated to Job's particular case. The greatness of the ransom is evidently a reference to the severity of the afflictions through which he is passing. Nothing else can win for him that larger trust in God to which he is being called through his afflictions. His own strength certainly cannot do it. Job frequently expressed desire to meet God in judgement. The idea expressed in (XXXVI-21) is logically difficult. The first part expresses a warning against turning to iniquity. The
second part states that this has been done already. The Complete Bible renders the second part - Because for this you were tried by suffering. There will be a change if only he will behold the God of sovereign might, the mighty teacher who is answerable to no one. So Elihu exhorts Job to down on his knees before such a God. That is the place for man. Thus Elihu's evaluation of Job is the opposite of God's evaluation:

And the Lord said unto Satan,

Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?

(I-8)

a perfect and uprightman ............ and still he holdeth fast his integrity although thou moved me against him, to destroy him without cause.

(II-3)

Elihu calls the phenomena of Nature to witness to the might of God.

Also can any understand the spreadings of the clouds, or the noise of his tebernacle?
Behold, he spreadeth his light 
upon it, and covereth the bottom of 
the sea.

(XXXVI. 29-30)

The noise thereof sheweth concerning 
it, the cattle also concerning 
the vapour.

(XXXVI-33)

Verse 31 speaks of the thunderstorm both as a minister of God's judgement and of His mercy. The helplessness of man before the severity of the weather implies a timeless reminder that he is a mere creature and not the creator. The clouds move in accordance with the Divine command on ministries of discipline or mercy to man or land. The weight of testimony of the wonderous works of God to the God operative in them is now applied to Job's case. It ought to make him a reverent listener to the word of the Lord spoken through such impressive testimony to the might of God. Man must confess the imperfection of his knowledge when confronted by the phenomena of Nature.

"Human understandings of the ways of God with man is similarly conditioned by the limitations of the human mind. Such limitations make it impossible in the first
place, for man to address God aright. Firstly, by presumptuous speech a man is running the risk of destruction. Secondly a man cannot appear boldly before a God whose majesty must completely behind him. Thirdly these limitations mean that man cannot understand God aright. Moffatt's translation makes it very plain that The almighty God is beyond our minds. He is supreme in power and rich in justice. He violates no right. In view of such human limitations, man's proper role is to lean not on his own intelligence but on God in reverential fear.

According to Elihu, God the supreme judge, will not tolerate any attempt to explain or criticise His actions.

The critic felt that the friends' speeches had not done justice to the traditional wisdom teaching and that a better case could be made for it. He had the courage to dramatise his criticism in speech form, to create another character as his spokesman and to integrate his own contribution quite skillfully, into the great master work he had studied so closely. Hence this section is to be regarded as an integral part of the canonical book and its author, whoever he was, as having had the grace of inspiration.
Doctrinally, the critic disapproves Job's self-assertion before God and his insistence on his own integrity and blamelessness. But he also disallows the exclusively retributory function ascribed to suffering by the friends. Affliction, according to him, may be a warning, a paternal admonition from God against man's tendency to 'hubris'. If the man promptly humbles himself, God restores him to His favour. If he is obstinate God will further punish him for his obstinacy, but with the purpose of leading him to repentance. Thus Elihu disagrees with the friends on the grounds of suffering, stressing its medicinal purpose, but in practice, his advice to Job is the same as theirs. On the other hand, he forcibly reminds Job of God's infinite superiority to man, and he anticipates divine speeches of chapters 38, 39, 40 and 41 by insisting on God's sublimity and the mystery of the divine plans. He admonishes Job and praises the divine goodness and mercy.

Raymond E. Brown S.S. interprets Elihu's comment on Job in (XXXIII.19-22 & 23-24) thus: "God's second way of speaking to men is by affliction itself. Job's sufferings therefore had a medicinal purpose; they were meant to keep him humble but by his rebellious reaction he has revealed his pride."
REFERENCES


