

A Guide To The Reader

Pastor recommends that to obtain maximum benefit from his comments you read in full from the Bible every reference whenever one appears. Otherwise the reading of the comments is simply a skimming over the surface. They are rather designed to make you stop and meditate and even look up further references as the Holy Spirit guides you. Do pray before you read that the Holy Spirit will be your Tutor and that the time you spend will be time spent with Him.

Job 32

Who is Elihu? We only have the information contained in verse 2 and also what he actually says. It is difficult to construct a theology from his words which could be called essentially different from that of the friends. Buz is mentioned in Genesis 22.21 as a son of the marriage of Nahor (Abraham's brother) and Milcah, an older brother to Bethuel the father of Rebekah. If Aram be the same as Ram (simply a shortened form) that name first appears in Genesis 10.22 as a son of Shem and this latter Aram named probably after him. Elihu, then, would appear not to have been an Edomite.

What brought him into this conversation, indeed into Edom at all? Was he a passer-by who lingered when others passed on? The other friends "had made an appointment together to come to mourn" with Job (2.11) but the same is not said of Elihu. He does not appear to offer anything significant, for all his protestations that he has somewhat to offer. He appears to see himself as a mediator and when speaking from that perspective appears to be more gentle than at other times. Certainly some of his words stand in scriptures in their own right as profitable, but once again, much of what he says is not applicable to Job himself.

The words of 38.2 are the most crucial in forming an evaluation of his worth to the debate. When God says, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" is He referring to Job or Elihu? If He is referring to Job it is a relatively gentle rebuke to his ill-judged words wrought out of his misery and is virtually saying to him, "An end of all this now – "Gird up thy loins like a man"" (38.3).

If, however, as I think, He is referring to Elihu then the dismissal is rather more disdainful. As if He were saying that this man is irrelevant, imposing himself, uncalled for. This view is supported by the fact that no further mention is made of him, he is completely ignored, which is consistent with the dismissive tone of the words, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" Bearing in mind that in 42.7 God says of Job that he has "spoken of me the thing that is right" it seems unlikely that words concerning darkening counsel refer to Job. Furthermore the friends are reinstated at 42.7-9; by which we are probably to infer that under the direction of the Lord they accepted the clear principals of the evangelical faith implied in their new beginning by sacrifice. No such thing is said of Elihu. Job certainly confesses that he had hidden counsel without knowledge (42.3) which may not be the same as actually darkening counsel; certainly it is to be allowed that when a man confesses his faults he will enlarge the iniquity of them in his own sight before the Lord.

All in all it seems that Elihu was a self-opinionated younger man who had not yet come to the maturity of the older friends, being unable to contain himself. He appears to come from the same entrenched background of the fear of God passed on from his forefathers but without any concept of Job's true evangelicalism. However, he does bring a contribution of some memorable sayings as we shall see.

32.1. The three friends at least were not guilty of wanting to have the last word. Job says that he has no more to say and that he desires to speak no more on the subject. The friends feel that as they have not persuaded him out of his deeply held position they must leave him to it. They thought him "righteous in his own eyes." Doubtless it seemed like that, but they were wrong. They did not understand that he did indeed see himself as a sinner, unrighteous before God, but that he also saw himself as a sinner saved by free grace alone.

32.2. Elihu put it a different way. "He justified himself rather than God." If a man's conscience is clear, he may say so. Job's conscience was clear of the offences which the friends had tried to foist on him. He never thought of doing anything other than humbling himself before God and giving Him the glory. "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (1.21). Each party misrepresents him, reminding us that human perception is not necessarily accurate or just.

32.3-4. Elihu's wrath is mentioned in verses 2,3 and 5. The scripture teaches us that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1.20) and, though that particular scripture was written many years afterwards, it states an abiding principle, always and everywhere true. Perhaps this disqualifies Elihu because, while he may say some good things, his hostility towards both parties is always present. Indeed the friends had found no answer to Job and therefore should have conceded the argument in his favour. But they condemned him as guilty of some nameless gross sin, because in their belief only such a gross sin could have warranted the treatment he had received from God. Clearly they thought that it was hidden and that Job was covering it up. They had never seriously considered, even after chapter 31, that such sin might just not have been there. Their theology did not allow them to make that concession. They were wrong.

32.5-6. We do not know how young is young. We do know that Eliphaz represented a much older generation. Respect for elders had caused Elihu to be a silent observer and listener. But why should he, rather than any other bystander, have the right to impose his view in this august company? Young men are not always wise, either.

32.7-8. He claims the inspiration of the Almighty, which, if it be that the words of 38.2 are directed to him, is a false claim. It is a serious matter to believe that your view is God's view. His ways are higher than ours. Elihu claims inspiration, which is a different matter. It would be good to read Jeremiah 23.21-22; 25-31. To be able to differentiate between the precious and the vile, or a true word of God and a false claim, is vital for a believer. Now that the scriptures are complete it is easier for us provided we align ourselves with them. Elihu does not seem to be referring here to the writers of scripture who alone are inspired to proclaim God's word. He was, in fact, talking to one. Job was one such. Elihu's view is not aligned with Job's and therefore cannot be said to be the inspired speech of the Lord, though it is contained in scripture. Days should certainly speak and the multitude of years should teach wisdom.

Certainly. But the level of the friends' arguments in some places is quite lofty and should not be so cursorily dismissed.

32.9-15. "Great men are not always wise." This is damning with faint praise. He says that they are great men, but not wise. Great men without wisdom are not great. Elihu now feels it imperative to put forward his opinion. The wise conclusion to which they should have come, so he avers, is that "God thrusteth him down not man." It is true and the friends never denied this, nor did Job. The whole passage seems to border on arrogance of spirit. He is claiming to be neutral. Job's words have not been replies to him, he says. He is claiming to have a fresh approach, "neither will I answer him with your speeches." At this point, the friends who might have replied to him as they did to Job, were so dumbfounded that they simply saw no point in doing so.

32.16-22. The arrogance continues unabated. "I am full of matter;" like a bottle ready to burst. He is constrained by the force of his spirit within. But his spirit, as with Eliphaz (4.15), is not the Holy Spirit. It is merely his opinion, as he concedes. It seems he speaks to refresh his own spirit rather than to impart to Job and his friends mutual benefit. How different from the truly inspired apostle Paul, who wrote (Romans 1.11-12), "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me." "Let me not accept any man's person..." This is correct theology and correct law court procedure in judgment. But in this instance he seems to be saying that he rejected and set at nought Job's office as king and the others as counsellors. No mention has been made of flattering titles, nor does Elihu suggest any, so it may be that he is saying that their respective offices of king and counsellors flatters them. "My maker would soon take me away." The meaning would seem to be not that he would be removed from the scene merely, but that he would be visited with death. Was it such a sin as to be punished by death? Is this not pride, saying in effect "I wouldn't do a thing like that." It was not his remit to bestow titles or office and to estimate a person's worthiness for such preferment. And whether the titles of Job and his friends, or their public offices, flattered them or not it was for Elihu to submit to every ordinance of man. Had he spoken graciously and gently, as Paul in Romans 1.11-12, then his contribution would have been acceptable and its source, the Holy Spirit, would have been manifest.