

JOB

Chapter 34

Elihu Asserts God's Justice

Then Elihu answered and said: 2 “Hear my words, you wise men, and give ear to me, you who know; 3 for the ear tests words as the palate tastes food. 4 Let us choose what is right; let us know among ourselves what is good. 5 For Job has said, ‘I am in the right, and God has taken away my right; 6 in spite of my right I am counted a liar; my wound is incurable, though I am without transgression.’ 7 What man is like Job, who drinks up scoffing like water, 8 who travels in company with evildoers and walks with wicked men? 9 For he has said, ‘It profits a man nothing that he should take delight in God.’ 10 “Therefore, hear me, you men of understanding: far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should do wrong. 11 For according to the work of a man he will repay him, and according to his ways he will make it befall him. 12 Of a truth, God will not do wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert justice. 13 Who gave him charge over the earth, and who laid on him the whole world? 14 If he should set his heart to it and gather to himself his spirit and his breath, 15 all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust. 16 “If you have understanding, hear this; listen to what I say. 17 Shall one who hates justice govern? Will you condemn him who is righteous and mighty, 18 who says to a king, ‘Worthless one,’ and to nobles, ‘Wicked man,’ 19 who shows no partiality to princes, nor regards the rich more than the poor, for they are all the work of his hands? 20 In a moment they die; at midnight the people are shaken and pass away, and the mighty are taken away by no human hand. 21 “For his eyes are on the ways of a man, and he sees all his steps. 22 There is no gloom or deep darkness where evildoers may hide themselves. 23 For God has no need to consider a man further, that he should go before God in judgment. 24 He shatters the mighty without investigation and sets others in their place. 25 Thus, knowing their works, he overturns them in the night, and they are crushed. 26 He strikes them for their wickedness in a place for all to see, 27 because they turned aside from following him and had no regard for any of his ways, 28 so that they caused the cry of the poor to come to him, and he heard the cry of the afflicted—29 When he is quiet, who can condemn? When he hides his face, who can behold him, whether it be a nation or a man?—30 that a godless man should not reign, that he should not ensnare the people. 31 “For has anyone said to God, ‘I have borne punishment; I will not offend any more; 32 teach me what I do not see; if I have done iniquity, I will do it no more’? 33 Will he then make repayment to suit you, because you reject it? For you must choose, and not I; therefore declare what you know. 34 Men of understanding will say to me, and the wise man who hears me will say: 35 ‘Job speaks without knowledge; his words are without insight.’ 36 Would that Job were tried to the end, because he answers like wicked men. 37 For he adds rebellion to his sin; he claps his hands among us and multiplies his words against God.”

4:1–37 The second of Elihu’s four speeches (see note on 32:1–37:24), divided into three sections: (1) addressed to a group of wise men (vv. 2–15), doubtless including the three friends; (2) addressed to Job (vv. 16–33); (3) addressed to himself (vv. 34–37), as in 32:15–22. (CSB)

34:1–9 As young Elihu begins his second speech, he directs his first words toward Job’s friends, doing so in a manner that sounds boastful and haughty, possibly detracting from the reception his

message receives. In our youth, we may at times speak in a manner that is offensive to others, but as with Elihu, God can use our imperfect efforts to teach important truths. (TLSB)

34:1 *Then Elihu answered.* Indication that an argument is being continued. Elihu's second speech follows, continuing until v 37. (TLSB)

34:2, 10 *hear me.* Although it is possible that Elihu is overly impressed with his own wisdom, it is more likely that he considered himself a messenger of God. (CSB)

34:2 *wise men.* Also referred to as "men of understanding" (vv. 10, 34). (CSB)

Elihu addresses the three friends, speaking ironically, for he considers himself to be wiser than they. (TLSB)

you who know. More irony. Elihu considers himself the teacher. Because of his boastful manner, Elihu's reputation has suffered. He is, however, a young man of some wisdom, and he offers helpful counsel to Job, showing new ways to look at his suffering and stressing God's persistent love and mercy toward His people. (TLSB)

34:3 *ear tests words ... palate tastes food.* Ear judges between true and false, even as the mouth judges between good and bad. Elihu claims a superior ability to test words. (TLSB)

Whether or not Elihu was "rubbing it in" when he spoke those words we cannot tell, but from his words thus far we can safely say that tact was not Elihu's strongest suit. (PBC)

34:4 *choose ... know.* For his listeners' benefit, Elihu announces his intention to analyze Job's claims. (TLSB)

34:5, 9 *For.* Links v 4 to Job's claims, explaining why they must be looked into. Elihu summarizes the heart of Job's complaints. (TLSB)

Job has said. Elihu again quotes Job and then goes on to defend God's justice against what he considers to be Job's false theology (e.g., 9:14–24; 16:11–17; 19:7; 21:17–18; 24:1–12; 27:2). The substance of the quotation in v. 5 is accurate (cf. 12:4; 13:18; 27:6), and much of v. 6 represents Job fairly (see 21:34; 27:5; see also 6:4 and note)—though Job had never claimed to be completely guiltless. Verse 9 is not a direct quotation from Job, who had only imagined the wicked saying something similar (see 21:15). But perhaps Elihu derives it from Job's repeated statement that God treats the righteous and the wicked in the same way (cf. 9:22; 21:17; 24:1–12), leading to the conclusion that it does not pay to please God. – Elihu may have imagined he was assuming the role of a mediator. In this speech, however, he acted less like a judge than a prosecuting attorney. (PBC)

in the right. Cf 9:15, 20. Job has claimed to be innocent of any overt wrongdoing. (TLSB)

my right. Job has claimed that his right to justice has been denied. (TLSB)

34:6 *I am counted a liar.* Job also has claimed that he is considered a liar, that onlookers conclude from his dire circumstances that he cannot be innocent. (TLSB)

my wound. Lit, “my arrow.” Poetically, the instrument for wounding stands for the wound it caused. Cf 6:4; 16:12. Job’s wound is deeper than his external injuries. (TLSB)

34:7 *drinks up scoffing like water*. See Eliphaz’s description of man in 15:16. (CSB)

Elihu berates Job for his capacity to scoff commonly held beliefs, doing so as easily as one might drink water. (TLSB)

scoffing. Job’s scorn of moral truth. (TLSB)

The words in verses 7-9 are especially sharp and unkind. They appear to contradict his previous statement that he would be an impartial judge in the long controversy between Job and his friends. (PBC)

34:8 *evildoers ... wicked men?* Because of Job’s insistence of innocence (v 5), Elihu places him in the company of overt evildoers. A man of God does not walk in such company. (TLSB)

34:9 *he has said*. Not a known quote of Job but Elihu’s representation of Job’s opinion. (TLSB)

profits a man nothing. Job has lamented that nothing is to be gained by being on good terms with God. Elihu sees this as scoffing God. Cf 9:22–24, where Job states that disaster and calamity befall both the blameless and the wicked. (TLSB)

34:10 *Therefore*. Introduces Elihu’s opinion in contrast to Job’s in v 9. (TLSB)

men of understanding. Lit, “men of heart,” the heart being the seat of intelligence in Hbr thought. Continuation of the irony in v 2. (TLSB)

Far be it from God...to do wickedness. Abraham based his plea on the justice and authority of God, confident that God would do what was right (see Dt 32:4). Elihu’s concern that Job was making God the author of evil is commendable. Job, in his frustration, has come perilously close to charging God with wrongdoing (12:4–6; 24:1–12). He has suggested that this is the only conclusion he can reach on the basis of his knowledge and experience (9:24). (CSB)

Same term as in Gn 18:25, introducing an emphatic negative statement (e.g., “God would never do such a thing!”). (TLSB)

wrong. To Elihu’s way of thinking, Job’s conviction in v 9 comes close to charging God with wrongdoing (12:4–6; 24:1–12) and is nothing short of wickedness. (TLSB)

34:11 *according to the work of a man he will repay him*. Elihu states his understanding of divine justice: God will pay back people according to what they have done, good for good and evil for evil. This general principle, found frequently in OT Wisdom Literature and in NT descriptions of the final judgment, is correctly understood only in light of the scriptural truths that doing evil is the cause of a person’s damnation (Rm 6:23) and that doing good is the result and evidence—never the cause—of a person’s salvation by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith (Eph 2:8–10; Heb 11:6). (TLSB)

34:12 Elihu assumes the role of God’s defender against the position taken by Job and summarized in v 9. (TLSB)

34:13–15 Elihu is zealous for God’s glory as the sovereign Sustainer who demonstrates his grace every moment by granting life and breath to man. (CSB)

34:13 *Who gave Him charge.* Rhetorical question anticipating the response “no one.” God’s power and authority are derived from Himself, and He reports to no one. Elihu supports his statement in v 12 by zealously defending God’s glory. (TLSB)

34:14–15 *His spirit and His breath.* Divine breath and the human spirit are related (Gn 2:7). (TLSB)

flesh. All living things, as in 12:10 and 28:21. God demonstrates His grace every moment by granting life and breath to humankind. When He withdraws His breath, human beings return to dust (Ec 12:7). A warning to Job of the danger of challenging God—to do so is to risk one’s life. (TLSB)

34:14 *set his heart to it.* To Job it appeared as if God acted in an impulsive and arbitrary manner when he permitted him to suffer so greatly. To us, too, it may sometimes seem as if God is unjust when he allows us to suffer great misfortunes such as sickness, accidents, or loss of a dear one. God’s wisdom, however, is infinitely greater than ours. His thoughts and ways are far beyond our limited human understanding. He has also given his believers the assurance that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). Not only is God wise and just, he is also loving and merciful. (PBC)

34:16 *hear ... listen.* The Hebrew for these verbs is singular, addressed to Job. Elihu is concerned that Job’s attitude about God’s justice be corrected (see v. 17), so he stresses God’s impartial rule as Lord of all, especially in meting out justice to the wicked in high places (see vv. 18–20). (CSB)

Hbr is singular. Elihu speaks directly to Job, intent on correcting Job’s attitude regarding God’s justice He believes his point should be obvious to anyone, belittling Job. (TLSB)

34:17 *justice govern?* In ancient thought, there was no separation of power in government. Justice and governing power were ideally united in the ruler. The word for “govern” can also be translated as “bind up,” as in Hos 6:1, where it speaks of bandaging wounds (cf Ps 147:2–3). God cannot be thought of as hating justice. (TLSB)

34:18 *worthless.* The same Hebrew word is also used, e.g., in 1Sa 10:27; 30:22 (“troublemakers”); 1Ki 21:10, 13 (“scoundrels”); Pr 6:12 (“scoundrel”). Later, this word (*Belial* in Hebrew) was used as a name for Satan (2Co 6:15), who is the personification of wickedness and lawlessness.) (CSB)

Most depraved and despicable of society, the opposite of a king (except when the king governs unjustly). God holds accountable such kings and nobles. Cf Dt 13:13–14. (TLSB)

34:19 *princes ... rich ... poor.* All people, from the wealthy upper class to the powerless, depend on God for their existence and are accountable to Him for their conduct. (TLSB)

all the work of His hands? The reason why all are treated alike. (TLSB)

34:20 *in a moment they die* – How important it is therefore for us to be prepared for the time of our death, whenever it may come! With Moses we ought to pray, “Teach us to number our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). (PBC)

God's impartiality is shown in the way the great and small alike die, esp when they do not expect it. (TLSB)

shaken and pass away. OT elsewhere speaks of the shaking back and forth of mountains (Ps 18:7) or the sea (Jer 5:22). Although the rich and powerful are seen to be the most stable, they are as vulnerable as the poor to sudden catastrophe. (TLSB)

by no human hand. Idiom suggesting that death happens effortlessly, as with the flick of a finger. Death's suddenness is seen as evidence of God's involvement. The manner in which God rules the world proves He is righteous and mighty. His justice is not thwarted by the mightiest of the mighty, nor is it bent in favor of the richest of the rich. While we often view what happens to us and around us from the much smaller perspective of our own lives and times, the proper picture of God's rule is much larger. He has greater things in mind for us that diminish present circumstances. (TLSB)

34:21–28 God's omniscience guarantees that he will not make any mistakes when he punishes evildoers. It is not necessary for him to set times to examine people for judgment (see v. 23; contrast 24:1). (CSB)

34:21 Elihu echoes the words of Job in 31:4. (TLSB)

His eyes. God is able to hold people accountable because He sees every person's behavior (24:23). He sees every misstep and keeps a record of human faults. Cf Ps 1:6. (TLSB)

God's omniscience qualifies him to be impartial. He sees and knows all. Not a single step of a human being can escape his notice. That fact can serve as both a warning and a comfort to us human beings. (PBC)

34:22 *gloom or deep darkness.* Cf 3:7; Ps 139:11–12; Jer 23:24. God's eyes penetrate the cover of darkness sought by evildoers. (TLSB)

34:23 *go before God.* Job had asked for an opportunity to face God, as in 9:32 and 24:1. God has no need for additional opportunity to examine a human. He is too exalted to be asked to give an accounting of His rule. (TLSB)

34:24 *without investigation.* No further investigation is necessary, even for the mighty. God knows how they act and He responds as necessary, deposing powerful rulers and giving their positions to others. (TLSB)

34:25 *overturns.* God takes away power and authority. *in the night.* God acts when least expected. (TLSB)

34:26 *strikes.* Lit, "to clap hands" in anger (Nu 24:10; Ezk 21:17) or "to beat one's thighs" in mourning (Jer 31:19), expressions describing actions that cause shame. (TLSB)

in a place for all to see. While the wickedness of the powerful is often clandestine, punishment of the powerful brings shame on them in the public square. (TLSB)

34:27 *turned aside.* Their behavior is serious and their punishment public because their rejection was deliberate, not following or rightly regarding God's laws and teachings. (TLSB)

34:28 *cry of the poor.* God sides with the poor. The oppressive manner of the evildoers arouses God's anger. In this way, evildoers effectively bring about their own punishment. (TLSB)

34:29 *when he is quiet, who can condemn?* Elihu attempts to answer Job's complaint about God's silence (ch. 23). God watches over men and nations to see that right is done (vv. 29–30). (CSB)

Elihu intends to answer Job's complaint about God's silence. God may allow affairs on earth to take their ordinary course for a time, but He also sets things right in His time. (TLSB)

Apparently men like Stalin and Mao carried on in their cruel and ruthless manner without real opposition. Often we find that wicked men are in control and that evil prevails. God seems to be silent, hide his face, and let things run their course. Yet in spite of appearances God is in control. His apparent slowness to act does not deny his sovereignty or power. He may punish or chastise a nation by allowing a wicked man to conquer it or rule over it, as he did on a number of occasions in Israel in the OT times. (PBC)

When He hides His face. At times, God seems to withdraw from a nation or an individual entirely. (TLSB)

34:30 *should not reign.* Continues the thought begun in v 28. In due time, God no longer permits godless rulers to remain in power and to do harm to the people in their care. God's slowness to act does not mean that He will be unjust. (TLSB)

34:31–33 First indirectly (vv. 31–32) and then more directly (v. 33), Elihu condemns Job and calls for his repentance. (CSB)

Elihu is disturbed because Job had challenged God's justice and rule by suggesting that he had acted arbitrarily toward Job. (PBC)

34:31 *will not offend any more.* Elihu intends in an indirect manner to put repentant words into Job's mouth, beginning with a confession borne out of affliction. (TLSB)

34:32 *teach me.* Second element of repentance, willingness to learn from God. (TLSB)

do it no more? A third element of repentance, a resolve not to continue in sin. (TLSB)

34:33 *make repayment to suit you.* Job has demanded that God prove his innocence. Elihu suggests to Job that it is foolish for him to expect God to respond on such terms. (CSB)

you must choose, and not I. Elihu cannot do the right thing for Job. *declare.* Perhaps Elihu pauses here to await response from Job. Since Job does not answer, Elihu goes on. (CSB)

34:34 *Men of understanding.* Cf v 10. Elihu boldly states that anyone with any understanding will recognize the truth of what he has said versus what Job has spoken. (TLSB)

34:35 *Job speaks without knowledge.* A motif in the first discourse of the Lord (see 38:2) and the final response of Job (see 42:3). (CSB)

Eliphaz accused Job of "windy knowledge" (15:2). (TLSB)

without insight. Job's complaints against God and his avowal of innocence are senseless. (TLSB)

Although Elihu came closer than the three friends to finding the solution to Job's suffering, those words hardly reveal a sympathetic heart. (PBC)

34:36 *tried to the end*. Elihu gets caught up in emotion and calls down judgment on Job for his stubbornness. (TLSB)

answers. By his silence, Job holds fast to earlier speeches, the kind of answers only an evil person would give. (TLSB)

34:37 *rebellion*. Job's attitude and words have fostered unbelief among the people, adding to his offense. (TLSB)

claps. May refer to a gesture that incites rebellion, such as the modern gesture of thumbing one's nose. (TLSB)

Ch 34 Elihu maintains that when Job, a mere human, dictates to God how or when He must act, Job must be charged with rebellion. Questioning God's actions in our lives or world may lead to serious sin. But God is patient with us, even as He was with Job. • Gracious Lord, forgive our rebelliousness and impatience, and strengthen our faith that we may truly accept Your will for our lives. Amen. (TLSB)