

# The Anger of Elihu



## SABBATH—NOVEMBER 26

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Job 13:28; Job 28:28; Job 32:1–5; Job 34:10–15; Ezekiel 28:12–17; Job 1–2:10.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘The heavens are higher than the earth. And my ways are higher than your ways. My thoughts are higher than your thoughts’ ” (Isaiah 55:9, NlrV).

**IN THE BATTLE BETWEEN JOB AND** these three men, there are words that sometimes are wise, beautiful, deep, and true. How often people will quote from the book of Job. They even quote from Eliphaz, Bildad, or Zophar. And that is because, as we have seen again and again, they do have a lot of good things to say. They just do not say them in the right place, at the right time, in the right situation. Their use of words should teach us the powerful truth of these verses in Proverbs 25:11–13:

The right word at the right time  
 is like golden apples in silver jewelry.  
 A wise person's warning to a listening ear  
 is like a gold earring or jewelry made of fine gold.  
 A messenger trusted by those who send him  
 is like cool snow at harvest time.  
 He renews the spirit of his masters (NlrV).

Sadly, those were not the words that Job was hearing from his friends. In fact, the problem was going to get worse because, instead of just three people telling him he was wrong, a fourth person came on the scene.

## STUBBORN “COMFORTERS” (Job 13:28)



**We as humans need to be humble when we talk about God and the workings of God.**

Even after Job’s powerful testimony (witness; statement) of faith (Job 13:15, 16), the quarrel continues. Over the course of many chapters, the men go back and forth, arguing over many deep and important questions about God, sin, death, justice, the wicked, wisdom, and how short human life is.

**Read Job 13:28; Job 15:14–16; Job 19:25–27; and Job 28:28. What truths are being shown in these verses?**

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Through all these chapters the arguments continue. Neither side wants to give up its position. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar argue from their own set of beliefs about what is right. They do not give up their argument about how people get what they deserve in life. They are stubborn in arguing that what has come upon Job must be just punishment for his sins. But Job continues to cry out against the cruel tragedy (very bad event) that has happened to him. He persists in (remains true to) the argument that he does not deserve the suffering. Back and forth Job and his friends quarrel. Each “comforter” finds fault with Job for using empty and proud words. And Job accuses them of doing the same.

In the end, none of them, including Job, understands all that is going on. How could they? They speak from a very limited point of view, which all humans have. Suppose we could get one lesson from the book of Job (one that should be clear by now, especially after all the speeches of these men). It would be this: that we as humans need to be humble when we talk about God and the workings of God. We might know some truth, maybe even a lot of truth. But sometimes—as we can learn from these three men—we might not know the best way to make use of the truths that we know.

**Look around at the natural world. Why does this alone show us how limited we are in what we know about even the simplest of things?**

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## THE ENTRANCE OF ELIHU (Job 32:1–5)

From Job 26 to 31, the suffering hero of this story, Job, gives his final speech to the three men. His speech is beautiful and emotional (full of strong feelings). But he continues the same argument he has been making all along: *I do not deserve what has been happening to me. Period.*

Again Job serves here as a good example of humans. Like Job, many people suffer things that they do not deserve. And the question—in many ways the hardest question of all—is, Why? In some cases, the answer to suffering is rather easy. People clearly bring the trouble on themselves. But so often, and especially in the case of Job, that is not what happens. And so the question of suffering remains.

As chapter 31 comes to a close, Job has been talking about the kind of life he has led. This life is one in which he does nothing wrong to deserve what is happening to him now. Then the final verse of the chapter reads: “The words of Job are ended” (Job 31:40).

**Read Job 32:1–5. What is happening here? And what is Elihu’s charge against Job and the other men?**

Here is the first time that this man, Elihu, is mentioned in the book of Job. He clearly hears some of the long discussions. But we are not told just when he appears on the scene. He must have come later, because he is not mentioned as being with the other three when they first come. But what we do know is that he is not satisfied with the answers he hears during the discussions. In fact, we are told four times in these five verses that Elihu becomes angry over what he hears. For the next six chapters, this man Elihu tries to explain the issues that all these men talked about in their discussions of the terrible suffering that struck Job.

Job 32:2 says that Elihu is angry with Job because he tries to make himself look right with God. But this view really is not a correct view of Job’s true position. What should Elihu’s words tell us about how careful we need to be in the ways that we interpret the words of others? How can we learn to think the best of what someone says rather than the worst?



**How careful we need to be in interpreting the words of others!**

## ELIHU'S DEFENSE OF GOD (Job 34:10–15)

A lot has been written about Elihu and his speech. Some have thought of his speech as an important turning point in the direction of the conversation. But it is really not that easy to find where Elihu adds anything so new that it changes the conversation. Instead, Elihu seems to be giving the same arguments that the other three have given when they try to defend God against the charge of unfairness over the sufferings of Job.

**Read Job 34:10–15. What truths is Elihu saying here? How are they nearly the same as what the other men have said before? Elihu's words are true. But why are they not proper for the current situation?**

Perhaps what we find with Elihu, as with these other men, is fear. It is the fear that God is not what they think Him to be. They want to believe in the goodness and the justice and the power of God. So what does Elihu do but tell truths about the goodness, the justice, and the power of God?

“ ‘His [God's] eyes see how people live. He watches every step they take. There isn't [is not] a dark place or deep shadow [of death] where those who do what is evil can hide' ” (Job 34:21, 22, NIrV).

“ ‘God is mighty, but he doesn't [does not] hate people. He's [he is] mighty [strong] and he knows exactly what he's [he is] going to do. He doesn't [does not] keep alive those who are evil. Instead, he gives suffering people their rights. He watches over those who do what is right. He puts them on thrones as if they were kings. He honors them forever' ” (Job 36:5–7, NIrV).

“ ‘We can't [cannot] reach up to the Mighty One. He is lifted high because of his power. Everything he does is fair and right. So he doesn't [does not] crush people. That's [that is] why they have respect for him. He cares about all those who are wise' ” (Job 37:23, 24, NIrV).

Suppose all these words were true. Then we easily could believe that Job is getting what he deserves. What else could his suffering mean? But what really is happening is that Elihu is trying to protect his own understanding of God in the face of the terrible evil that has happened to such a good man as Job.

**Have you ever faced a time when something happened that made you fearful for your faith? How did you answer? Looking back, what might you have done differently?**



God does not crush people.

## EVIL IS UNREASONABLE (Ezekiel 28:12–17)

All four of these men are believers in God. They are believers in a God of justice. But they find themselves with a problem: What would be a good reason for Job's situation that would agree with their beliefs about the character of God? Unfortunately, they end up taking a position that turns out to be wrong in their need to understand the evil that happens to Job.

Ellen G. White offers a powerful comment: "It is impossible to explain the beginning of sin or to give a reason for it. . . . Sin is an invader. No reason can be given for it. It is mysterious and unexplainable. To excuse it is to defend it. If an excuse for sin could be found, or a cause be shown for it, it would stop being sin."—Adapted from *The Great Controversy [War Between Christ and Satan]*, pages 492, 493.

Ellen G. White uses the word *sin*. But suppose we replaced that word with another word, one that has almost the same meaning: *evil*. Then the quote could read: *It is impossible to explain the beginning of evil or to give a reason for it. . . . Evil is an invader. No reason can be given for it. It is mysterious and unexplainable. To excuse it is to defend it. If an excuse for evil could be found or a cause be shown for it, then it would stop being evil.*

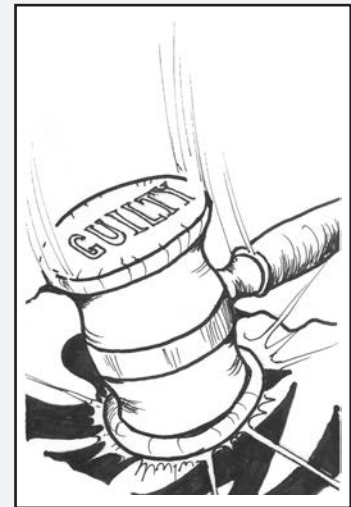
So often when a terrible event happens, people will say or think: "I do not understand this tragedy [very bad event]." Or "This tragedy does not make sense." Job has been making this complaint all along.

If we could understand evil or if it made sense, then it would not be evil. Nor would it be that tragic, because it would serve a reasonable purpose.

**Read Ezekiel 28:12–17 about the fall of Satan and the beginning of evil. How much sense does his fall make?**

Here is a perfect being (person). He is created by a perfect God, in a perfect environment. He is honored, full of wisdom, perfect in beauty, covered in precious stones. He is an "anointed cherub (angel)" who is in the "holy mountain of God." But even with all that and having been given so much, this perfect one ruins himself and lets evil take over. What could have been more unreasonable than the evil that ruined the devil?

**What is your experience with how unreasonable and unexplainable evil is?**



**"To excuse [sin] is to defend it. If an excuse for sin could be found, . . . it would stop being sin."**

**THE CHALLENGE OF FAITH (Review Job 1–2:10)**

Certainly the main characters in the book of Job are just weak humans who see life “through a glass [mirror], darkly [dimly]” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Interesting, too, that in all these debates about the evil that happens to Job, none of the men, Job included, discusses the role of the devil. The devil is the real cause of all of Job’s problems. Job’s friends are very sure about how right they are, especially Elihu (read Job 36:1–4). But they fail to explain Job’s suffering. And, of course, Job knows that they have failed.

**Even with our understanding of the story’s great-controversy background, how well are we able to reason and explain the evil that happens to Job? Read Job 1–2:10 again. Even with all the causes of Job’s suffering shown to us, what other questions remain?**

We know well the opening chapters of Job. And we have a view of things that none of these men in the book of Job have. But even now, the issues remain hard to understand. As we learned, far from anything evil Job had done to bring this suffering upon himself, it is Job’s *goodness* that causes God to point him out to the devil. So did Job’s goodness and desire to be faithful to God lead to these terrible events happening to him? How do we understand this?

In the end, God wins His challenge with the devil, but we know the devil has not surrendered to defeat (Revelation 12:12). So what is the purpose of Job’s suffering? And also, whatever good comes out of what happens to Job, is it worth the death of all these people and all the suffering that Job goes through? If these questions remain for us (but more answers are coming), imagine all the questions that Job had!

And here is one of the most important lessons we can learn from the book of Job. We are to live by faith and not by sight. We are to trust in God and stay faithful to Him even when, like Job, we cannot reason or explain why things happen as they do. We do not live by faith when everything can be explained fully. We live by faith when, like Job, we trust and obey God, even when we cannot make sense of what is happening around us.

**What are the things you must trust God for, even though you do not understand them? How can you continue to build that trust, even when you do not have answers?**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** In a discussion about the question of faith and reason, author John Hedley Brooke wrote about the German philosopher<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Kant wanted to understand the limits of human knowledge, especially when it came to the working of God. For Kant, “the question of making right the ways of God to man was one of faith, not of knowledge. As his example of a true stand in the face of terrible suffering, Kant chose Job. Job had lost everything except a clear conscience. In his surrender to God’s will, Job had been right to refuse to accept the advice of friends who had tried to explain all the terrible things that happened to him. The strength of Job’s position was in knowing what he did not know: he wondered what God meant by allowing him to suffer these terrible things.”—Adapted from *Science and Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pages 207, 208.

Job’s friends thought they could give an answer for what had happened to Job. They thought the real cause was Job’s sin, and the result was his suffering. What could be clearer and more reasonable than that? But their reasoning was wrong. It is a powerful example of the fact that what God does and what really happens in this life do not necessarily follow our understanding of how God works in the world that He created.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① In all the long speeches about Job’s situation and why it happens, nobody mentions how the devil is involved. Why is that so? What does it tell us about how limited these men are in their understanding, even though they had some truths? What could their lack of knowledge teach us about our own, even though we know more truths than they do?

② “Suppose we depend upon our own wisdom for success in the things that we have been given to manage. How, then, are we taking a burden that God has not given us and trying to carry on without His help? . . . But when we really believe that God loves us and means to do us good, we shall stop worrying about the future. We shall trust God as a child trusts a loving parent. Then our troubles and suffering will disappear. They disappear because our will is enveloped [surrounded by; wrapped up] in the will of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pages 100, 101. How can we learn this kind of trust and faith? What choices are we making now that will make our faith either stronger or weaker?

### DEFINITIONS

1. philosopher—a person who studies ideas about knowledge, truth, and the nature and meaning of life.