

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 20 Elihu's Discourse (Job 32-37) Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Walton, Job, Session 20, Elihu's Discourse (Job 32-37), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. John Walton analyzes Elihu's discourse in the Book of Job (chapters 32-37). **Walton argues that Elihu, though seemingly an interloper, plays a crucial role, offering a unique perspective on Job's suffering. Elihu accuses Job of self-righteousness, a point Walton considers partially valid. However, Walton highlights Elihu's flawed theodicy, emphasizing that Elihu, like Job's friends, attempts to explain God's justice through a simplistic equation. Ultimately, Walton positions Elihu's contribution as a stepping stone toward the book's ultimate resolution.**

**2. 22 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Walton's, Job, Session 20 – Double click icon to play in
Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL]
Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament →
Psalms & Wisdom → Job → Walton).**



**Walton_Job_Session
n20.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of John Walton's lecture on the Elihu discourse in the Book of Job:

Briefing Document: John Walton on the Elihu Discourse (Job 32-37)

Introduction

This document summarizes John Walton's interpretation of the Elihu discourse (Job 32-37) within the Book of Job, based on excerpts from his Session 20 lecture. Walton challenges the traditional view of Elihu as an interloper, arguing that his role is significant and contributes to the book's overall logic and message.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Elihu's Significance and Purpose:

- **Not an Interloper:** Walton argues against the view of Elihu as a disruptive addition, asserting his important role in the narrative. He states, "Certainly, he can be viewed as an interloper, but I believe that his role is very significant to the book and plays an important part as a contribution to the book's logic."
- **"He is My God":** Elihu's name is distinctly Hebrew and carries meaning. Walton highlights, "Even his name is interesting... Elihu clearly is, and it's meaningful--'He is my God.'"
- **Defending God (Theodicy):** Elihu positions himself as a defender of God's justice, placing himself "in God's corner." Walton explains, "Elihu builds his fort in God's corner, and he's defending God. And so, in that sense, Elihu is really doing the theodicy job, defending God's justice."
- **Transitional Figure:** Elihu's speeches serve as a bridge between Job's passionate defense and God's eventual response. Walton explains, "It's really an intriguing kind of strategy in the book that while we're holding our breath practically, seeing how Yahweh will respond, we get the rambling speeches of Elihu. And we say, what is going on?"

1. Elihu's Critique of Job:

- **Specific Accusation:** Unlike Job's friends who make general insinuations, Elihu levels a specific charge against Job: self-righteousness. "Elihu is the only one in the book which offers a specific accusation pertaining to a specific breach in Job's righteous facade."
- **Job's Self-Defense:** Elihu critiques Job's willingness to defend himself "at the expense of God," identifying this as a legitimate point of concern.
- **Suffering as Bait:** Elihu views Job's suffering as a way to reveal the underlying problem of self-righteousness. Walton states, "The suffering of Job would be baiting him in order to reveal what really is going on behind the scenes."

1. Elihu's Perspective on Justice and Retribution:

- **Retribution Principle Reimagined:** While Elihu upholds the principle of retribution, he redefines it as preventative rather than simply remedial. Walton notes, "He redefines the retribution principle, not just being remedial for things done in the past that being preventive to anticipate things that are coming up."
- **God's Justice Unassailable:** Elihu emphasizes God's inherent justice and argues that God is not accountable to humans. "God is not contingent, and we should not think that his actions are subject to our evaluation or correction."
- **Flawed Theodicy:** Despite his defense of God, Elihu's theodicy is flawed. Walton states, "He continues to have an inadequate theodicy... he is overestimating his ability to bring coherence on the basis of justice."

1. Elihu's Relationship to Other Characters:

- **Parallel to the Challenger:** Walton draws a parallel between Elihu and the Challenger, noting that both offer alternative views of Job's righteousness. The Challenger questioned Job's motives (seeking benefits), while Elihu questions Job's righteousness (self-righteousness). "Elihu's role in the second part of the book parallels, in some ways, the role of the Challenger in the first part of the book."
- **Agreement with the Challenger:** Elihu, like the Challenger, also implies that Job is motivated by a desire for benefits but is ultimately wrong about that. Walton clarifies, "He agrees with the Challenger about Job's motives, that's in 35:3, and his major point is he accuses Job of the sin of self-righteousness."

1. Elihu's Limitations

- **Wrong About Job's Motivation:** Despite accurately identifying Job's self-righteous attitude, Elihu misinterprets Job's motivations. Walton notes, "Elihu is wrong about Job's motivations... Job has amply demonstrated that prosperity at any cost is not the driving motivation of his life."
- **Still Working the "Triangle":** Walton describes that Elihu is still stuck on the "triangle," which is implied to mean focusing on a simple equation of justice. "He still thinks justice is the foundation of the system... he still thinks that he can work out a simple equation." He is therefore, "still engaged in theodicy" despite falling into the same trap as Job, of trying to provide coherence based on justice.

Conclusion:

John Walton's analysis positions Elihu as a complex and vital figure in the Book of Job. While Elihu's critique of Job's self-righteousness is accurate, his own theodicy and understanding of Job's motivations are flawed. Elihu serves as a transitional character, highlighting the limitations of human attempts to understand God's justice, and setting the stage for God's own address to Job. Ultimately, Elihu's discourse is a strategic part of the book's narrative, pushing the audience to reflect on deeper issues of justice and God's character, and preparing them for God's response.

4. Job Study Guide: Session 20, Elihu's Discourse (Job 32-37)

Study Guide: Elihu's Discourse in the Book of Job (Job 32-37)

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. How is Elihu's name significant within the context of the Book of Job?
2. What specific accusation does Elihu make against Job, and how does it differ from the accusations of Job's other friends?
3. How does the introduction of Elihu's speeches impact the narrative suspense built up after Job's Oath of Innocence?
4. In what way does Elihu's role in the second part of the book parallel the Challenger's role in the first part of the book?
5. How does Elihu modify the concept of the retribution principle, and what purpose does he suggest it serves?
6. According to Elihu, what is the root cause of Job's suffering, and why is it considered serious enough for punitive action?
7. How does Elihu both criticize and confirm Job's perspective and attitude towards God?
8. What is Elihu's view of God's justice and accountability?
9. What flaw in Elihu's theodicy is pointed out, and how does it relate to the same fault he accuses Job of?
10. How does Elihu's attempt to reshape the "triangle" within the framework of the Book of Job relate to his understanding of justice?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Elihu's name, meaning "He is my God," is a distinctly Hebrew name, unlike the other friends' names, and it signals his role as a defender of God's justice within the narrative. He establishes his position squarely in "God's corner."
2. Unlike Job's friends who only suggested possible wrongdoings, Elihu specifically accuses Job of self-righteousness, asserting that Job's defense of himself is a sin worthy of punishment.

3. Elihu's speeches interrupt the suspense following Job's oath, creating a pause that allows the reader to contemplate Job's situation and God's response. The narrative purposely postpones God's response to create tension and to further refine understanding through Elihu's contribution.
4. Both the Challenger and Elihu offer alternative perspectives on Job's righteousness; the Challenger suggests Job's righteousness might be self-serving while Elihu proposes it is self-righteous.
5. Elihu redefines the retribution principle as not just a response to past actions but as a preventive measure, suggesting that suffering can be a tool to draw out hidden sin.
6. Elihu argues that Job's self-righteousness is the cause of his suffering, and it is serious enough to warrant divine intervention and to allow for Job to show his true colors.
7. Elihu rightly criticizes Job's self-righteousness and willingness to defend himself at God's expense but wrongly believes Job still desires prosperity, missing Job's true commitment.
8. Elihu believes God is not accountable to humans, affirming that God's justice and character are unassailable, thus rejecting human evaluation or correction of God's actions.
9. Elihu's flawed theodicy lies in his attempt to provide a coherent explanation of God's justice, similar to Job's fault; in trying to explain God, Elihu assumes too much, thereby repeating Job's mistake of seeking to be in control.
10. Elihu attempts to reshape the triangle by redefining the retribution principle, but he remains focused on justice as the foundation of the system, still believing in a simple equation for coherence, thereby remaining part of the problem.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the strategic purpose of introducing Elihu's discourse in Job 32-37, considering its placement within the broader narrative of the Book of Job.
2. Compare and contrast the perspectives and arguments of Job's three friends with those of Elihu, highlighting their specific critiques of Job's righteousness and their understanding of divine justice.
3. Evaluate the ways in which Elihu both aligns with and departs from the traditional retribution principle, discussing the implications of his redefinition for understanding suffering and divine justice.
4. Discuss the significance of Elihu's critique of Job's self-righteousness, considering how this charge relates to Job's earlier speeches and actions in the book.
5. Explore the limitations and flaws in Elihu's theodicy, analyzing how his attempt to defend God's justice ultimately reveals his own fallibility and an incomplete understanding of divine nature.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Theodicy:** The attempt to reconcile the existence of a good and omnipotent God with the reality of evil and suffering in the world.
- **Retribution Principle:** The belief that individuals receive rewards or punishments based on their actions, especially morally good or evil behavior, often believed to be dispensed by God or a divine power.
- **Self-Righteousness:** An attitude of moral superiority or an excessive belief in one's own righteousness, often involving judging others and defending oneself at the expense of God.
- **Interloper:** Someone who intrudes or interferes in a place or situation where they are not wanted or do not belong.
- **Symbiosis:** A close and long-term interaction between different biological species, which, in this context, refers to the perceived beneficial relationship between God and humanity.
- **Challenger:** A character in the beginning of the book of Job who questions Job's motivations for being righteous.
- **Oath of Innocence:** Job's declaration of his lack of wrongdoing, wherein he asserts his innocence before God, demanding a response.
- **Punitive Action:** Measures taken to punish or inflict pain, loss, or suffering as a consequence of a wrong or offense.
- **Divine Justice:** The concept of fairness and righteousness as embodied by a divine being or god.
- **Coherence:** The quality of being logical and consistent, forming a unified whole, and making sense within a specific system of thought or belief.

5. FAQs on Walton, Job, Session 20, Elihu's Discourse (Job 32-37), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Elihu's Discourse in the Book of Job (Job 32-37)

- Who is Elihu and what is unique about his role in the Book of Job?** Elihu is a newcomer to the narrative, introduced after Job's oath of innocence. Unlike the other friends whose names do not feel distinctly Hebrew, Elihu's name, meaning "He is my God," is significant. Elihu takes a different approach from the other friends. He sees himself as defending God's justice (theodicy). He is also the only character to make a specific accusation against Job, and he does so by accusing Job of self-righteousness, not simply suggesting Job might have done wrong, as the other friends did. While Elihu's arguments are more correct than those of Job's other friends, they are still ultimately flawed and not in line with the central themes of the book.
- Why does Elihu speak after Job's oath of innocence, and what is the strategic purpose of his speeches?** After Job's declaration of innocence, the narrative is hanging on the edge of suspense, waiting to see how God will respond. The introduction of Elihu at this point serves as a literary device to increase tension. His lengthy speeches delay the expected direct confrontation between Job and God, forcing the reader to consider the issues of justice and suffering. This delay builds the dramatic effect and highlights the complexity of the problem before God directly intervenes.
- How does Elihu's approach differ from the Challenger (Satan) at the beginning of the Book of Job?** The Challenger questions Job's motives, suggesting that Job's piety is only motivated by the benefits he receives from God. Elihu, on the other hand, does not question Job's motives in the same way. He does however suggest that Job's righteousness is actually self-righteousness. The Challenger suggests that Job serves God for personal gain, while Elihu accuses Job of being self-righteous by focusing on his own innocence at the expense of God. Elihu does agree with the Challenger on the issue of motivations, he believes Job is still seeking benefits, but argues that Job's current suffering is the result of self-righteousness and his desire to be right at the expense of God.

- **What specific accusation does Elihu make against Job?** Elihu accuses Job of self-righteousness, which he considers a serious sin. Elihu believes that Job's insistence on his own innocence, especially when Job's defense borders on accusing God, shows that Job is more concerned with his own righteousness than with God's. According to Elihu, Job's suffering is a punishment for his self-righteous attitude, a way to expose this deeper issue.
- **How does Elihu reinterpret the retribution principle, and what is his perspective on the purpose of suffering?** While upholding the basic retribution principle that good actions lead to reward and bad actions lead to punishment, Elihu redefines it. He sees the retribution principle not just as remedial (punishment for past actions) but also as preventative, anticipating future actions. He believes suffering is sometimes used to draw out problematic attitudes or behaviors, like Job's self-righteousness. He sees Job's suffering as a way to reveal the issues that are below the surface, as if baiting Job.
- **In what ways is Elihu's perspective correct, and where does he fall short?** Elihu is correct in condemning Job's self-righteousness, which is evident in Job's defensiveness and willingness to accuse God. Elihu is also correct in asserting God's unassailable justice and sovereignty. He elevates God's status to the point that he is not accountable to humans. He falters in his theodicy by believing that he can create a coherent view of suffering through a lens of justice, that suffering is simply a just punishment for wrongdoing. He fails to recognize that there is more to God's nature and policies than just justice. Also, Elihu wrongly believes that Job is still only pursuing a self-serving agenda of benefiting at all costs.
- **What is the "great symbiosis" and how does Elihu view it?** The "great symbiosis" refers to the idea that humans' righteousness is something that God needs, and in some interpretations God's and humanity's well being are interdependent. It is suggested that Job's earlier statements may imply this idea of symbiosis. Elihu despises the concept of symbiosis and does not think God needs human righteousness. He does not believe that God's actions are contingent on human actions. This is where Elihu is correct, God's actions are not to be subject to human evaluation or correction, and he is not contingent upon anything humans do.

- **How does Elihu's perspective contribute to the broader themes of the Book of Job?** Elihu's discourse is a crucial part of the book's design as it delays God's response to Job. He offers a more nuanced and compelling defense of God than Job's friends. He is even correct about some aspects of Job's attitude, but ultimately, he is flawed. The reader is shown that even seemingly correct interpretations of justice can miss the larger picture. He allows the audience to stew over the questions of justice, God, and suffering, allowing his points to be another avenue to examine the nature of these complex issues.