

**INSERT**  
**ELIHU'S SPEECH**  
**JOB 32-37**

### Introduction to the Elihu insert

Job has just declared his innocence under oath. We await God's response. However, and surprisingly, a new character, Elihu, takes the stage and for six chapters gives his opinion on the issue. It is as though someone passing by has been listening and decides to have his say. Elihu was not mentioned in the Introduction, and does not feature in the Epilogue. His lengthy discourse disturbs the structure of the Book and adds nothing substantial to the argument. The style, too, is different and of a poorer quality. It is a later addition, and by a different hand. It is as though a member of the audience leaps to the stage to interrupt proceedings in order to make his point. Its importance lies in the fact that it is our earliest commentary on the Book of Job, the first in a long line. The author of Job would have been pleased, even though the commentator judges that Job as well as his three companions have spoken badly, for his purpose in writing was to get people thinking and questioning.

Unlike Job's three 'friends', who are representatives of eastern 'wisdom', Elihu has a Hebrew name, meaning 'He is my God'. He represents the best of Israelite traditional wisdom – and will prove no wiser than the others!

'Barachel' means 'God has blessed'.

'Buz' is the name of a nephew of Abraham (see Genesis 22:21).

The Psalmist prays for enlightenment, knowing that insight comes only from God:

Open my eyes, so that I  
may behold wondrous  
things out of your law.

– Psalm 119:18

Compare the proverb:

YHWH gives wisdom; from  
his mouth come knowledge  
and understanding.

– Proverbs 2:6

<sup>1</sup>The three men ceased to try to reply Job, persuaded as they were that he was convinced of his own righteousness. <sup>2</sup>Then Elihu son of Barachel from Buz, of the family of Ram, was moved to indignation against Job, because he was claiming to justify himself in God's sight.

<sup>3</sup>His anger burst forth also against Job's three companions because having found no satisfactory answer, they had left God on the losing side of the argument. <sup>4</sup>Elihu had kept his patience while they were arguing with Job, out of respect for their age. When he saw that there was no answer in the mouths of these three men, he became angry.

<sup>6</sup>Elihu son of Barachel from Buz spoke out:

"I am young in years, and you are aged;  
therefore I was timid and afraid to declare  
my view to you.

<sup>7</sup>I thought, 'Let years speak, maturity teaches wisdom.'

<sup>8</sup>But truly it is the spirit in man,  
the breath of the Almighty, that makes for  
understanding.

<sup>9</sup>It is not being a senior that gives wisdom,  
nor is it by being old that one learns  
to judge.

<sup>10</sup>Therefore I ask that you listen to me,  
for I, too, will have my say.

<sup>11</sup>I held my peace while you spoke,  
I paid attention to your reasoning,  
while you searched out what to say.

<sup>12</sup>I gave you my attention,  
but none of you showed Job to be wrong,  
nor did you reply to his arguments.

<sup>13</sup>Yet do not say, 'We lack wisdom;  
God alone, not a man, can vanquish him  
in argument.'

<sup>14</sup>Job has not directed his words against me,  
and I will not answer him with your  
arguments.

Elihu

- <sup>15</sup>How dismayed they look. They have  
nothing more to say;  
they are lost for words.**
- <sup>16</sup>And am I to wait, because they do not  
speak,  
because they stand there, and stop  
replying?**
- <sup>17</sup>I also will take my part in the debate,  
I also will expound my thoughts.**
- <sup>18</sup>For I feel myself bursting with words,  
the urge to speak constrains me.**
- <sup>19</sup>My heart is like a new wineskin  
ready to burst.**

Elihu now addresses the audience. He has something to offer, and seems to be challenging the audience to have their say as well. We should not think that the only arguments against Job have already been presented by the three companions.

At this stage we are left wondering. Is Elihu being powerfully moved by God's Spirit such that at last we are going to hear just how wrong Job is? Or is Elihu just full of hot air? He can't restrain his youthful impetuosity, but should we expect him to shed much real light on the argument? We will have to wait and see.

- <sup>20</sup>I must speak, so that I may find relief;  
I must open my lips and answer.**
- <sup>21</sup>I will not show partiality to any  
person  
or use flattery toward anyone.**
- <sup>22</sup>For I do not know how to flatter.  
My Maker would soon put an end  
to me!**

Having addressed the three friends, and the audience, Elihu now turns to Job.

From the beginning it is clear that Elihu is not one to make his point concisely.

Elihu is claiming a special charismatic gift of the Spirit, something the other three clearly lacked (in his view). Job is about to meet his match!

Elihu places himself at the same level as Job without any hint of embarrassment. We are right to see in this his immaturity and presumption. Furthermore, he invites Job to reply, but gives him no opportunity to do so!

He now gets down to the argument. Job has been claiming that he is innocent and that, therefore, God is acting unjustly.

Elihu has followed Job well. For his claim not to have behaved in a way that merited the punishment, see 9:21; 10:7; 16:17; 23:10-11; 27:5; all chapter 31. For Job's complaint that God is acting unjustly, see 10:13-17; 13:24; 19:11; 30:21. For his claim that God has hemmed him in, see 13:27; 31:4.

**<sup>1</sup>But now, hear my speech, O Job,  
and listen to all my words.**

**<sup>2</sup>See, I open my mouth;  
the tongue in my mouth is already  
forming words.**

**<sup>3</sup>I speak out of the sincerity of my heart,  
my lips express a refined wisdom.**

**<sup>4</sup>The spirit of God has made me,  
and the breath of the Almighty  
gives me life.**

**<sup>5</sup>Answer me, if you can;  
be prepared; take up your position  
before me.**

**<sup>6</sup>See, before God I am as you are;  
I too was formed from a piece of clay.**

**<sup>7</sup>No fear of me need terrify you;  
I will not attack you.**

**<sup>8</sup>Surely, you have spoken in my hearing,  
and I have heard the sound of  
your words.**

**<sup>9</sup>You say, 'I am clean, without  
transgression;  
I am pure, and there is no iniquity in me.**

**<sup>10</sup>Look, he finds occasions against me,  
he counts me as his enemy;**

**<sup>11</sup>he puts my feet in the stocks,  
and watches all my paths.'**

God speaks through dreams and through suffering

**<sup>12</sup>But in this you are not right. I will  
answer you:  
God is greater than any man.**

**<sup>13</sup>Why do you contend against him,  
accusing him of not responding?**

**<sup>14</sup>For God speaks now in one way,  
and now in another  
but people do not pay attention.**

**<sup>15</sup>In a dream, in a vision of the night,  
when deep sleep falls on mortals,  
while they slumber on their beds,  
<sup>16</sup>then he opens their ears,  
and terrifies them with warnings,  
<sup>17</sup>that he may turn them aside from  
their deeds,  
and keep them from pride,  
<sup>18</sup>to stop them falling into the pit,  
and crossing the boundary of Death.**

**<sup>19</sup>They are also chastened with pain  
upon their beds,  
and with continual strife in their bones,  
<sup>20</sup>till they loath food with all their heart,  
and cannot stand the sight of the most  
exquisite dainties.**

**<sup>21</sup>Their flesh is so wasted away that it  
cannot be seen;  
and their bones, once invisible,  
now stick out.**

**<sup>22</sup>Their souls draw near the grave,  
and their lives near to the harbingers  
of death.**

However, Elihu's response misses the point. Elihu waxes eloquent on the power and greatness of God. Job has never questioned this. What Job has questioned is God's justice in punishing the innocent.

It is true that Job has complained about God's silence (verse 13; see 9:15-16; 19:7).

The problem, according to Elihu, is not God's silence. It is people's (including Job's) inability or refusal to listen.

Elihu counters by stating that God replies through dreams (verse 15; compare Numbers 12:6). Elihu sees Job to be in danger. He should attend carefully to God's warning.

God replies also through sickness and suffering. Job should realise that these are sent by God in order that Job might repent of his sin and seek forgiveness. Compare:

My days pass away like smoke,  
and my bones burn like a  
furnace. My heart is stricken  
and withered like grass; I am  
too wasted to eat my bread. Be-  
cause of my loud groaning my  
bones cling to my skin.

– Psalm 102:3-5

God communicates his words via a messenger [מַלְאָךְ, mal'āk]. The Septuagint translates as 'angel' [ἄγγελος] (verses 23-24). Job appears to have been hoping for a heavenly intercessor (see 9:33; 16:19-21; and perhaps 19:25-27).

In his commentary Pope Gregory the Great thought here (verse 24) of Christ who intercedes for us (see Romans 8:34), who is moved with compassion for us (see Hebrews 4:15), and who is our ransom to redeem us (see 1 Timothy 2:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30).

This part of verse 23 appears to fit better here.

<sup>23</sup>**But if he should encounter an angel who is favourable to him  
a mediator, one of a thousand,  
<sup>24</sup>who is moved with compassion for him,  
and says,  
'Save him from going down into the grave;  
for I have brought a ransom for him',**

<sup>25</sup>**then his flesh will become fresh with youth;  
and he will return to the days of his youthful vigour.**

<sup>26</sup>**He will invoke God, and God will look upon him with favour,  
joyfully will he show him his face,  
he will restore him to health,  
<sup>23c</sup>showing mortal man his righteousness.**

<sup>27</sup>**The one restored will sing to others and will say,  
'I have sinned, and perverted what was right,  
but God has not treated me as I deserved.**

<sup>28</sup>**He has redeemed me from going down to the grave,  
and my life is flooded with light.'**

<sup>29</sup>**God indeed does all these things, twice, three times, with mortals,  
<sup>30</sup>to bring back their souls from the grave,  
to flood them with the light of life.**

<sup>31</sup>**Pay heed, Job, listen to me;  
be silent, and I will speak.**

<sup>32</sup>**If you have anything to say, answer me;  
speak, for I desire to be reasonable with you.**

<sup>33</sup>**If not, listen to me;  
be silent, and I will teach you wisdom."**

Elihu's Second Discourse (34:1-37)

Introduction

Here in this second discourse Elihu has a lot to say about God as ruler and judge. However he fails to produce arguments to defend God's justice – which is the very thing that Job is questioning. He assumes that supreme authority and power must necessarily be just, and he takes it for granted that suffering comes from God and is a punishment for sin to bring about repentance. Elihu's point of view is echoed in the Book of Wisdom 12:12-16.

For who will say, "What have you done?" or will resist your judgment?  
Who will accuse you for the destruction of nations that you made?  
Or who will come before you to plead as an advocate for the unrighteous?  
For neither is there any god besides you, whose care is for all people,  
to whom you should prove that you have not judged unjustly;  
nor can any king or monarch confront you about those whom you have punished.  
You are righteous and you rule all things righteously deeming it alien to your power  
to condemn anyone who does not deserve to be punished.  
For your strength is the source of righteousness,  
and your sovereignty over all causes you to spare all.

Elihu has failed to see that Job is precisely questioning an understanding that makes a necessary link between suffering and sin. In failing to grasp this point Elihu adds many words, but sheds no light on the central issue. He seeks to win the debate by heaping up words, defending positions that are not under debate. No one is questioning God's justice in punishing sin. It is the connection between suffering and innocence that is being debated.

Job's cry is echoed in Psalm 44,17-24:

All this has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten you,  
or been false to your covenant.  
Our heart has not turned back,  
nor have our steps departed from your way, yet you oppress us ...  
If we had forgotten the name of our God,  
or spread out our hands to a strange god,  
would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart  
Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord?  
Awake, do not cast us off forever!  
Why do you hide your face?  
Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?



Unaware that he is missing the point of the argument, Elihu trots out traditional formulas.

Elihu presents Job's cry adequately enough, as can be seen by reading 6:4, 13:8, 27:6-7, and 27:2.

There is some truth in verse 7. See 9:5-13 and 12:13-25. However, Elihu has no grounds for accusation in verse 8.

Verse 9 is fair comment. Compare Job's words:

It is all one; therefore I say,  
he destroys both the blameless  
and the wicked.

– Job 9:22

Does it seem good to you to  
oppress, to despise the work  
of your hands and favour the  
schemes of the wicked?

– Job 10:3

**<sup>1</sup>Elihu continued:**

**<sup>2</sup>"Hear my words, you wise men,  
and give ear to me, you who know;**

**<sup>3</sup>for as the ear distinguishes words  
as the palate tastes food,**

**<sup>4</sup>so we investigate to see what is right,  
and to determine what is good.**

**<sup>5</sup>For Job has asserted, 'In spite of my being  
innocent,**

**God has denied me my rights;**

**<sup>6</sup>with right on my side, I am counted a liar;  
my wound is incurable, though I am  
without transgression.'**

**<sup>7</sup>Who is there like Job,  
who soaks up sarcasm like one who  
drinks water,**

**<sup>8</sup>who mixes with evildoers and  
walks in the company of the wicked?**

**<sup>9</sup>For he has said, 'It profits one nothing  
to take delight in God's favour.'**

**<sup>10</sup>Therefore, hear me, you who have sense,  
far be it from God that he should do  
what is wrong,  
and from the Almighty that he should  
act unjustly.**

**<sup>11</sup>God repays a man according to their  
deeds,  
he gives him what his conduct deserves.**

**<sup>12</sup>It is certain that God does not act  
wickedly,  
the Almighty does not pervert justice.**

**<sup>13</sup>Who ever confided the earth to him?  
Who gave him control over the  
universe?**

**<sup>14</sup>If he should take back his spirit,  
and gather to himself his breath,  
<sup>15</sup>all flesh would perish,  
and all mortals would return to dust.  
<sup>16</sup>If you have understanding, hear me;  
listen now to what I say.**

**<sup>17</sup>Can one who hates justice govern?  
Will you condemn the Just and  
Mighty One,  
<sup>18</sup>the One who declares a king to be a  
criminal  
and nobles to be evildoers?**

**<sup>19</sup>God shows no partiality to princes,  
nor favours the rich over the poor,  
for they are all the work of his hands.  
<sup>20</sup>In a moment they die, at dead of night,  
the nobles are agitated and pass away,  
and the mighty are struck down,  
and not by a human hand.**

**<sup>21</sup>For the eyes of God survey the ways  
of mortals,  
and he sees all their steps.  
<sup>22</sup>There is no gloom or deep darkness  
where evildoers may hide themselves.  
<sup>23</sup>For it is not for a man to fix the time  
of his death,  
to go before God in judgment.**

Now comes Elihu's central point. God's power is absolute, and therefore God is necessarily just. This is hardly an argument that might convince Job (or us the audience!).

Job has already stated this:

He snatches away; who can  
stop him? Who will say to him,  
'What are you doing?'

– Job 9:12

Job's point has been that if God controls everything who else can be responsible for evil:

The earth is given into the hand  
of the wicked; he covers the  
eyes of its judges — if it is not  
he [God], who then is it?

– Job 9:24

The most powerful of humans hold no power over God, and cannot persuade God to act unjustly in their favour. Job has already spoken of God's humiliation of the powerful (see 12:17-21).

Job has no argument with verses 21-23 either.

On verse 22 see Job 17:13.

Job wants his day in court. This is foolish, says Elihu. After all God sees everything. There is no need for an inquiry.

It is by oppressing the poor that the wicked 'distance themselves from God' and abandon God's way. The implication is that Job must be among them. His suffering is proof. God has struck him in his wickedness in the public square' (verse 26).

That God hears the cry of the poor (verse 28) is a central tenet of the religion of Israel. We recall God's words to Moses from the burning bush as he commissions Moses to go back to Egypt to liberate God's people:

I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings ... The cry of the Israelites has now come to me.

– Exodus 3:7,9

Compare the following from the Psalms:

He does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

– Psalm 9:12).

When the righteous cry for help, YHWH hears, and rescues them from all their troubles. YHWH is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit

– Psalm 34:17-18

If God does not appear to answer the cry of the poor, we should assume that there are serious reasons for this. To condemn God is utterly foolish!

There are textual difficulties in verse 30. If the translation is accurate, Elihu is making a statement that expresses the traditional, abstract, and theoretical 'wisdom', but that experience shows not to be the case.

**<sup>24</sup>He grinds down the mighty without instigating an investigation, and sets others in their place.**

**<sup>25</sup>Thus, knowing their actions, he overturns them in the night, and they are crushed.**

**<sup>26</sup>He strikes them for their wickedness in the public square,**

**<sup>27</sup>because they have distanced themselves from him, and have not followed his ways,**

**<sup>28</sup>so that they caused the cry of the poor to reach God, and he heard the cry of the afflicted.**

**<sup>29</sup>If he remains quiet, who can condemn him?**

**If he hides his face, who can behold him?**

**He watches over nations and people**

**<sup>30</sup>so that the godless should not reign,**

**or those who ensnare the people.**

Elihu's second discourse

<sup>31</sup>Say to God, 'I am mistaken,  
I will not sin again;

<sup>32</sup>teach me what I do not see;  
if I have done iniquity, I will do it  
no more.'

<sup>33</sup>Do you expect him to exact retribution  
according to your whim?

You choose one thing and discard  
another, and not I;  
what do you know!

<sup>34</sup>Those who have sense will say to me,  
and the wise who hear me will say,

<sup>35</sup>'Job speaks without knowledge,  
his words are without insight.'

<sup>36</sup>Would that Job were tried to the limit,  
because his answers are those of a  
wicked man.

<sup>37</sup>For he adds rebellion to his sin;  
he mocks in our presence,  
and does not hold back from speaking  
against God."

Elihu appeals to Job to repent.

Job has asserted his own justice often enough. Does he expect God to fit in with his criteria? Elihu challenges Job. Just because Job thinks he has the wisdom to make good choices, what makes him think that God should go along with Job's judgments?

## Elihu's Third Discourse (35:1-16)

Job has made equivalent assertions, see 33:9, 34:5 and 34:9. Elihu asserts that Job is too focused on himself. He should see things from God's point of view.

God does not declare us guilty because we have hurt God, nor does God declare us innocent because we have done God a favour. God is an impartial judge and judges according to the facts of the case. So far, so good.

In verses 10-13 Elihu seems to go on to say that when God does not respond to our cry, it is because we are not really crying out to God (verses 10-11), or because we are not genuine (verse 13).

We might compare Habakkuk.

Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing; why do you look on the treacherous, and are silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they?

– Habakkuk 1:13

**<sup>1</sup>Elihu continued:**

**<sup>2</sup>“Do you think it is reasonable to say:**

**‘I am right, not God?’**

**<sup>3</sup>Or to say: ‘What’s the point, what good does it do me to try not to sin?’**

**<sup>4</sup>I will answer you and your friends with you.**

**<sup>5</sup>Look attentively at the heavens, observe the clouds, so high.**

**<sup>6</sup>If you have sinned, what harm have you caused God?**

**And if your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to him?**

**<sup>7</sup>If you are righteous, what do you give to him;**

**or what does he receive from your hand?**

**<sup>8</sup>Your wickedness affects others like you, and your righteousness, other human beings.**

**<sup>9</sup>Because of the multitude of oppressions people cry out;**

**they call for help against the powerful.**

**<sup>10</sup>But no one says, ‘Where is God my Maker,**

**who restores strength in the night,**

**<sup>11</sup>who teaches us along with the animals of the earth,**

**and instructs us along with the birds of the air?’**

**<sup>12</sup>Well then, they cry out because of the arrogance of evildoers,**

**but he does not answer.**

**<sup>13</sup>Surely God does not hear such empty cries,**

**the Almighty does not get caught up in such affairs.**

Elihu's third discourse

**<sup>14</sup>How much less when you say that you do not see him, or that the case is before him, and you are waiting for him!**

**<sup>15</sup>And now, because his anger does not punish, and he does not greatly heed transgression,**

**<sup>16</sup>Job opens his mouth in empty talk, he multiplies words without making sense."**

The Psalmist writes:

Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is no one who does good.

– Psalm 14:1

Elihu seems unaware that his criticism in verse 16 applies more to him than to Job!

## Elihu's Fourth Discourse (36:1 – 37:24)

Here in his fourth and final discourse, Elihu does not directly quote Job's words in order to refute them. Rather, based on his understanding of Job, he sets out in verses two to twenty-one to underline the value of suffering as a corrective to bring about a change of heart and behaviour. This depends, of course, on the cooperation of the one who is suffering. Eliphaz had already made this point (see 5:17-18). Elihu highlights the place of human cooperation: heeding and submitting. Elihu is warning Job that his resistance is obstructing God's design for him. He should accept the suffering and repent. To do this he must stop defending his claimed innocence. Like Eliphaz (see 5:11-16), Elihu has no doubts that God takes the side of the oppressed against their oppressors. Underlying everything that Elihu says is his unquestioned assumption that Job has done wrong (is not innocent) and that God's just punishment is in view of getting Job to admit his sin and change. The worse thing Job can do is to obstinately claim to be innocent, a claim that accuses God of injustice!

Elihu is very sure of himself. He continues to reveal that he lacks the wisdom to grasp Job's point. All he manages to do is to repeat in an abstract way the faulty understanding that he has himself received. We have already heard this from Job's companions who have failed to convince Job or the reader who struggles with the same problem of the suffering of the innocent.

Elihu begins by underlining God's power. The God who acts in human affairs is the God who controls the universe.

We might compare the following:

With righteousness he shall judge  
the poor, and decide with equity  
for the meek of the earth; he shall  
strike the earth with the rod of his  
mouth, and with the breath of his  
lips he shall kill the wicked.

– Isaiah 11:4

**<sup>1</sup>Elihu went on:**

**<sup>2</sup>"Bear with me a little, and I will  
instruct you,  
for I have yet something to say in  
God's defence.**

**<sup>3</sup>I will penetrate further to discover  
a wisdom to offer,  
in order to establish that my Maker  
is right.**

**<sup>4</sup>For truly my words are not false;  
I have an exemplary wisdom to  
offer you.**

**<sup>5</sup>Surely God is mighty and does not  
despise a sincere heart.**

**<sup>6</sup>He does not keep the wicked alive.  
He gives the afflicted their right.**

**<sup>7</sup>He does not withdraw his eyes from  
the righteous,  
but has them seated on a kingly  
throne  
and raises them up for ever.**

- <sup>8</sup>And when he chains them in fetters  
or constrains them in the cords of  
affliction,  
<sup>9</sup>it is to alert them to their transgressions  
the sins they have committed in their  
pride.  
<sup>10</sup>He opens their ears that they may learn,  
and he exhorts them to repent of their  
iniquity.  
<sup>11</sup>If they listen, and submit themselves  
to him,  
they will complete their days in  
prosperity,  
and their years in wellbeing.  
<sup>12</sup>But if they do not listen, they will  
cross over the frontier of Death,  
and die without awareness.  
<sup>13</sup>When he binds in chains those who  
persist in evil,  
instead of crying for help, they give  
way to anger.  
<sup>14</sup>They lose their life while still young,  
and die in their youth.  
<sup>15</sup>He saves the afflicted by means of  
their affliction,  
and opens their ear through adversity.  
<sup>16</sup>He is enticing you, too, to leave the  
constraints of your distress  
and enter a place that is broad and  
open.  
He wants to serve you a succulent  
meal.  
<sup>17</sup>But you must not defend the cause of  
the wicked.  
Take hold of the truth I am offering  
you.  
<sup>18</sup>Do not let yourself be seduced away  
from prosperity.  
Do not turn aside from the path that  
leads to an abundant life.  
<sup>19</sup>Do you think that your wealth and  
possessions  
are at risk because of God?**

Elihu states that suffering can be disciplinary, to keep human beings from pride and from sin. Eliphaz made this point earlier (see 5:17).

God's first step is to punish so that we might realise that we have sinned. This realisation is meant to bring us to heed God's response and to repent. Here, again, we might compare Isaiah:

The people did not turn to him  
who struck them, they did not  
seek YHWH of hosts.

– Isaiah 9:13

Compare Isaiah:

If you are willing and obedient,  
you shall eat the good of  
the land; but if you refuse and  
rebel, you shall be devoured  
by the sword; for the mouth of  
YHWH has spoken.

– Isaiah 1:19-20

Scholars admit that verses 16-20 are extremely difficult to interpret with any confidence.

Since we cannot purchase freedom from God, we need have no concern that freedom from evil will leave us impoverished.



- <sup>20</sup>At night do not want  
to get rid of people from their  
place.**
- <sup>21</sup>Do not turn any longer to iniquity;  
for because of that you have been  
tried by affliction.**
- <sup>22</sup>See, God is exalted in his power;  
what teacher can be compared to  
him?**
- <sup>23</sup>Who has prescribed for him his  
way,  
or who can say, 'You have acted  
unjustly'?**
- <sup>24</sup>Remember to extol his work,  
of which mortals have sung.**
- <sup>25</sup>All people have contemplated it;  
everyone watches it from far away.**

In verse 22 Elihu focuses again on God's power, wisdom and transcendence. His intention is to highlight these in support of the argument that God is just: God does not act unjustly!

The transcendence of God – God being beyond our reach, including the reach of our minds (we cannot comprehend God) – is basic to Israel's faith:

As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

– Isaiah 55:9

Am I a God near by, says YHWH, and not a God far off?

– Jeremiah 23:23

YHWH appeared to him from far away.

– Jeremiah 31:3

Hymn to God's power

Hymn (36:26 - 37:24)

This hymn to the grandeur of God concludes the long and wordy discourses of Elihu. Elihu picks up and develops some of the ideas already presented by Job's three companions and anticipates YHWH's response in chapters 38 to 42. Elihu sets out to establish God's power, wisdom and justice. His aim is to get Job to cease from obstinately resisting and questioning God, and in humility to bow down and worship him.

**<sup>26</sup>Surely God is great, and transcends our ability to know;  
we cannot measure the number of his years.**

Age is a measure of wisdom.

**<sup>27</sup>For he separates the drops of water;  
he draws them from their fount as rain;**

**<sup>28</sup>the clouds distill them  
and they pelt down on the land.**

**<sup>31</sup>From the land he feeds the peoples  
offering them food in abundance.**

At times the heavens pour down grace and favour; at other times, punishment.

**<sup>29</sup>Who can calculate the spreading out of the clouds,  
or the height of his pavilion?**

**<sup>30</sup>All around Him he spreads out  
and fixes his throne on the depths of the sea.**

By 'throne' is he referring to the earth, where God reigns? Compare:

Wrapped in light as with a garment, you stretch out the heavens like a tent.  
You set the beams of your chambers on the waters,  
you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind,  
You set the earth on its foundations.

– Psalm 104:2, 3, 5

**<sup>32</sup>He hides the lightning in the palm of his hand,  
and hurls it with precision to its target.**

**<sup>33</sup>The Most High causes the thunder to be heard  
and his anger sends forth the tempest.**

Compare the psalm:

YHWH thundered in the heavens, and the Most High caused his voice to be heard.  
He sent out his arrows, and scattered them ...  
the foundations of the world were laid bare.

– Psalm 18:14-16

The hymn continues (37:1-24)

- <sup>1</sup>Seeing this my heart trembles,  
leaping out of my breast.**
- <sup>2</sup>Listen, hear the thunder of his voice  
and the rumbling that comes from his mouth.**
- <sup>3</sup>He lets it loose over the expanse of the heavens,  
and his lightning to the corners of the earth.**
- <sup>4</sup>After the lightning, thunders his voice  
crashing with majestic roar.  
People stay not when his voice is heard.**
- <sup>5</sup>God thunders wondrously with his voice;  
he does great things that we cannot comprehend.**

Compare:

YHWH also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice.

– Psalm 18:13

The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered; your arrows flashed on every side.  
The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind;  
your lightnings lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook.

– Psalm 77:17-18

- <sup>6</sup>To the snow he says, ‘Fall on the earth’;  
and to the torrential rain, ‘Pour down’.**
- <sup>7</sup>He keeps everything in check,  
so that all may know that they are the work of his hands.**
- <sup>8</sup>The wild animals go into their lairs  
and remain in their dens.**
- <sup>9</sup>From the Chambers of the south comes the whirlwind,  
and hail from the frozen winds.**
- <sup>10</sup>From the breath of God comes ice,  
and the surface of the waters freezes over.**
- <sup>11</sup>He loads the thick cloud with moisture;  
and scatters the clouds.**
- <sup>12</sup>They swirl round and round by his guidance,  
to accomplish all that he commands them  
on the face of the habitable world,**
- <sup>13</sup>whether for correction, if we do not obey,  
or to favour us.**

We might consult Psalm 105. Also the following from Sirach:

All the works of the Lord are very good,  
and whatever he commands will be done at the appointed time ...  
Everything has been created for its own purpose ...  
There are winds created for vengeance ...  
Everything proves good in its appointed time.

– Sirach 39:16, 21, 28, 34

God's wondrous power

- <sup>14</sup>**Hear this, O Job;  
stop and consider the wondrous works of God.**
- <sup>15</sup>**Do you know how God directs the clouds,  
and causes the cloud to light up with his flashes of lightning?**
- <sup>16</sup>**Do you know how he arranges the clouds,  
the wondrous works of the one whose knowledge is perfect?**
- <sup>17</sup>**You who feel hot in your clothing  
when the earth is still at the breath of the south wind?**
- <sup>18</sup>**Can you, like him, spread out the skies,  
hard as a bronze mirror?**
- <sup>19</sup>**Teach us what we should say to him,  
we who cannot reason so covered as we are in darkness.**

This is heavy with irony. If Job cannot control or understand the physical world, who does he think he is to question God? Elihu is preparing for God's response, to which Job has no answer.

- <sup>20</sup>**Should he be told that I want to speak?  
If anyone says something, is there a need to alert Him?**
- <sup>21</sup>**Now, no one can see the light  
when it is obscured by cloud,  
but then the wind comes and disperses the clouds.**
- <sup>22</sup>**From Zaphon comes golden splendour;  
God surrounds himself with awesome majesty.**

On Zaphon, the holy mountain of Baal, see 26:7.

- <sup>23</sup>**We cannot attain to the Almighty.  
He is sublime in power, rich in justice,  
He does not violate justice.**
- <sup>24</sup>**Therefore everyone is in awe of him,  
but He is not in awe of the wise."**