

ELIHU'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE THOUGHT OF THE BOOK OF JOB

by
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A focal point in Joban studies has been the contribution of the Elihu speeches to the argument of the book of Job. Elihu's contribution ranges anywhere from interpreting him as a theological bigot to a theological hero. Curtis, who advocates that Elihu was a theological "bigot,"¹ argues that the Joban author fabricated Elihu as part of his original work to demonstrate the folly of the friends' mechanical view of divine justice.

The ultimate coup de grace for a foolish theology is to have it presented by an unsympathetic spokesman, who is so muddle-headed and ridiculous that no character nor even the narrator will deign to acknowledge his presence, either before or after his appearance. Elihu is the *reductio ad absurdum* of traditional theology. Once he has spoken, traditional dogma can no longer be defended.²

While not necessarily portraying Elihu as a bigot, others have argued that the Elihu speeches are essentially a rehashing of the friends' theology.³ Gray is in agreement with this position, but he has additionally

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¹J. B. Curtis, "Why Were the Elihu Speeches Added to the Book of Job?" *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 8 (1988): 93.

²*Ibid.*, p. 98.

³For a brief historical overview of various suggestions dealing with Elihu's contribution up through the first decade of the twentieth century, see Helen Hawley Nichols, "The Composition of the Elihu Speeches," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature* 27 (January 1911): 97–103, and Donald Arvid John, who provides an updated summarization, *The Literary and Theological Function of the Elihu Speeches in the Book of Job* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 8325382, 1983), pp. 1–7.

asserted that the Elihu speeches are a latter interpolation.⁴ Some who view the Elihu speeches as a latter interpolation maintain that they improve the friends' theology⁵ or refute their teachings.⁶ McKay views Elihu as a forerunner of a modern charismatic Christian who desires "to lift the sufferer into a healing confrontation with the Almighty."⁷ Rather than presenting Elihu as a protagonist, Andersen suggests that Elihu is an adjudicator. In a manner similar to God's approach in 38:2–41:34, Elihu, as an adjudicator, gives his estimation of the dialogue. According to Andersen, Elihu gives the human assessment, and God the divine evaluation.⁸ Robertson views Elihu as providing a comic relief from the dialogue.⁹ Gordis has indicated that the contribution of Elihu is to be found in his assertion that God uses suffering for disciplinary purposes. This was intended by the Joban author to supplement the God speeches.¹⁰ Beeby views Elihu as a "covenant mediator in Wisdom dress,"¹¹ and Sauer portrays Elihu as essentially a theological hero, "a spokesman of grace."¹²

⁴Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, ICC, 2 vols. in 1 (reprint ed., Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1977), 1:xl–xli.

⁵R. A. F. MacKenzie, "Job," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, 2 vols. in 1 (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 1:528–29.

⁶So, for example, Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1949), p. 673; A. van Selms, *Job*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 8; and Roger N. Carstensen, "The Persistence of the 'Elihu' Tradition in Later Jewish Writings," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 2 (1967): 43.

⁷John W. McKay, "Elihu—A Proto-Charismatic?" *Expository Times* 90 (March 1979): 170. While not describing Elihu with the same metaphor, Walter L. Michel argues for a similar position by asserting that Elihu was a "real friend" who prepared Job so that he could accept God's confrontation as "a revealing and healing experience" ("Job's Real Friend: Elihu," *Criterion* 21 [1982]: 32).

⁸Francis I. Andersen, *Job*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1976), pp. 51–52.

⁹David Robertson, *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), pp. 47–48.

¹⁰Robert Gordis, "Elihu the Intruder," in *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 114; cf. also Shimon Bakon, "The Enigma of Elihu," *Dor-je-Dor* 12 (1984): 222–24.

¹¹H. D. Beeby, "Elihu—Job's Mediator," *Southeast Asia Journal of Theology* 7 (October 1965): 42.

¹²Alfred von Rohr Sauer, "Salvation by Grace: The Heart of Job's Theology," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 37 (May 1966): 267. Others who take Elihu as an essen-

The various interpretations reflected by this brief sketch provide an invitation to reexamine Elihu's contribution to Job. The majority of Elihu studies have focused on Elihu's unique doctrinal contributions to the thought of Job at the exclusion of how his speeches fit in with the design of the book. As McKay concisely states the case: "What Elihu is actually *doing* while he speaks is about as important as what he is *saying*."¹³ Habel also recognizes this point when he maintains that Elihu's role in Job was more for literary considerations than theological. Accordingly, Habel argues that the contribution of the Elihu speeches in the design of the book is for dramatic and forensic purposes.¹⁴

My thesis in this present study is that the Elihu speeches contribute to the design of Job by serving primarily as a transition from the dialogue with the three friends (3:1–31:40) to the Yahweh speeches (38:1–40:2; 40:6–41:34).¹⁵ To establish this thesis, we will initially look at Elihu's argumentation, followed by a presentation of the Joban author's theological emphases, and conclude with an examination of Elihu's transitional function in the book.

ELIHU'S ARGUMENTATION

The Joban author provides a prose introduction for Elihu in 32:1–5. By observing the use of the introductory formula *וַיֹּאמֶר . . . וַיֹּאמֶר* ("Elihu answered . . . and said"), we can divide the Elihu speeches into four separate speeches: 32:6–33:33; 34:1–37; 35:1–16; and 36:1–37:24.¹⁶ We will briefly examine the argument in each of these speeches.

tially positive figure include Johns, who argues that Elihu has a different attitude toward Job than the friends and serves as a theological corrective for Job (*Elihu Speeches*, pp. 156–62; 196–98), and Zuck ("Job," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck [Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985], p. 755).

¹³McKay, "Elihu," p. 168.

¹⁴Norman C. Habel, "The Role of Elihu in the Design of the Book of Job," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G. W. Ahlström*, ed. W. Boyd Barrick and John S. Spencer, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 31 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1984), pp. 81–98.

¹⁵For a brief listing of those taking a similar viewpoint, see my dissertation, "The Significance of the Elihu Speeches in the Context of the Book of Job" (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1985), pp. 3–4; this viewpoint has been more recently supported by Lindsay Wilson ("The Role of the Elihu Speeches in the Book of Job," *Reformed Theological Review* 55 [May–August 1996]: 81–94), and Donald K. Berry (*An Introduction to Wisdom and Poetry of the Old Testament* [Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995], p. 152).

¹⁶This introductory formula is slightly modified in the fourth speech at 36:1, *וַיֹּאמֶר . . . וַיֹּאמֶר*, "Elihu again said."

Elihu's First Speech (32:6–33:33)

Elihu's first speech can be broken down into two segments. The first segment (32:6–22), initially an address to Job's three friends,¹⁷ is Elihu's apology. The second segment in 33:1–33 is addressed directly to Job (cf. 33:1) and begins the substance of Elihu's remarks.

Elihu's Apology (32:6–22)

The Joban author observes in 32:2 that the three friends' failure to demonstrate to Job his error was for them to concede that Job was more righteous than God. In his apology, Elihu informs the friends that he had been patiently waiting on them to refute Job. However, they had miserably failed and had even been silenced by Job (32:11–12). Therefore, Elihu presents himself as the one to refute Job. With this self-appointed role, Elihu assumes the position of an "arbiter" (בֹּזֵקֵיךָ, v. 12).¹⁸ As an arbiter, Elihu is to be viewed not as a fourth friend, but as the response to Job's request for a בֹּזֵקֵיךָ, "arbiter" or "umpire."¹⁹

This self-appointed role of Elihu is seen in 32:12–14,

(12) I have given you my full attention; but see there is no arbiter (בֹּזֵקֵיךָ) for Job, none among you to answer his charges. (13) Do not say, "We have found wisdom; let God refute²⁰ him, not man." (14) But he has not arranged his words against me, and I will not answer him with your arguments.²¹

¹⁷In 32:6b the nonverbal clause אַתָּם יִשְׁיֵשִׁים, "you are aged," indicates that Elihu is directing this part of his address to Job's three friends. This direct address pattern extends through v. 14. In v. 15, however, Elihu changes his pattern by referring to the friends in the third masculine plural form. Perhaps, we may infer from this change that Elihu directs his attention to Job in 32:15–22, though still speaking about the friends.

¹⁸Habel, "The Role of Elihu," pp. 82–85; Wilson, "The Role of the Elihu Speeches," p. 90.

¹⁹*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. "בֹּזֵק," by G. Mayer, 6:66 [hereafter cited as *TDOT*]; Elihu's role as a mediator or arbiter has been recognized by other scholars such as Hugh Anderson ("The Book of Job," in *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M. Laymon [Nashville: Abingdon, 1971], p. 249); H. D. Beeby ("Elihu," p. 45); S. Hemraj ("Elihu's 'Missionary' Role in Job 32–37," *Biblehashyam* 6 [1980]: 77); William A. Irwin ("The Elihu Speeches in the Book of Job," *Journal of Religion* 17 [January 1937], p. 43); and Nichols ("The Composition of the Elihu Speeches," pp. 119–20).

²⁰The jussive יִדְּפֵנֵי, "let [God] refute," has been related to a number of different verbal roots. My rendering follows Gordis's suggestion of relating this to the verbal דָּרַג, "drive," with an abstract rendering "refute" (*Job*, pp. 368–69).

²¹Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this essay are my own.

According to Elihu in v. 12, no “arbiter” among the friends has been able to respond to Job’s charges. In v. 13 he chides the friends for their failure in refuting Job. In v. 14 Elihu announces that he would not respond with the argumentation of the friends. These verses suggest that Elihu would assume the role of an arbiter.²²

Elihu justifies his self-appointed role as arbiter by boasting of an internal, divinely-produced compulsion to speak (32:8, 18–20) and by correcting the friends’ for their failure to refute Job (32:12, 15–16). Elihu further justifies his role by asserting his own impartiality.²³ Consequently, we should understand that a purpose of Elihu’s initial apology is to present himself as the answer to Job’s request for an arbiter.

Elihu’s Speech Proper (33:1–33)

The second segment of Elihu’s first speech is his speech proper. This segment provides the substance of his argumentation in his first speech. Elihu’s introduction to this unit is found in vv. 1–7. In these verses Elihu demonstrates that he is continuing his role as an arbiter. As an arbiter Elihu exhorts Job, “Now hear my arguments, Job; give ear to all my words” (v. 1). He further challenges Job to respond to his arguments, “Refute me, if you can; prepare yourself before me, and take your stand” (v. 5).²⁴

The substance of Elihu’s remarks begins in v. 8. Elihu’s argumentation involves his initial summarization of the key issues in Job’s position in vv. 8–11, followed by his refutation of Job in the remainder of this chapter. Elihu will follow the same pattern in his second and third speeches. In this speech, we want to develop Elihu’s argumentation. In developing his argument, we will observe that Elihu’s summary of Job provides a review of the key issues developed in 3:1–31:40, and his refutation reflects that his arguments are similar to the friends’, even his argument involving the disciplinary use of suffering.

After announcing that he has listened to the substance of Job’s words (v. 8), Elihu summarizes two essential arguments of Job: Job’s defense of his innocence (v. 9) and his denial of God’s justice (vv. 10–11). Job’s first argument is summarized in v. 9, “I am innocent (טָהוֹר),²⁵

²²Habel, “The Role of Elihu,” p. 83.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Elihu’s role as an arbiter in these verses is more fully developed by Habel (*Job*, pp. 460–61).

²⁵The adjective טָהוֹר, “pure, clean” (BDB, p. 269), is related to טָהַר, “be pure” (*The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 3:103 [hereafter cited *DCH*]) and its by-form טָהַר, “be pure” (ibid., 3:105). In Hebrew the basic meaning of טָהַר and its related forms is literally “pure, clear.” In Job טָהוֹר is used metaphorically in the sense of “pure” or “innocent” (*TDOT*, s.v. “טָהַר,” by A. Negoita (and H. Ringgren, 4:62).

without transgression (עֲשָׂה); I am clean (קָרָא)²⁶ and free from iniquity (יָעִו).” Elihu’s citation of Job is simply a restatement of Job’s argument that he was innocent. Job has claimed to be innocent in a number of passages. For example, Job has asserted that he was “blameless,” רָם (9:20–21). He has also refused to deny his “[my] integrity,” רָמָה (27:5), and has affirmed his “[my] righteousness,” צַדִּיקָה (27:6). Though Job does not specifically use the terms קָרָא, “innocent,” and עֲשָׂה, “clean,” these adjectives are valid assessments of Job’s argument of innocence. Elihu has further described Job in v. 9 as being “without transgression” and “free from iniquity.”²⁷ Both descriptive phrases are drawn from passages like 13:23, “How many are my iniquities (עֲוֹנוֹתַי) and sins? Show me my transgressions (עֲשָׂה) and my sins.” Job, in effect, is suggesting that he is “without transgression (עֲשָׂה)” and “free from iniquity (יָעִו).” Elihu’s correct description of Job’s position is further supported by 31:1–40. This chapter, containing Job’s oath of innocence, is also a clear affirmation that he has been living a life free of overt sin.²⁸ Therefore, Elihu’s summation of Job’s declaration of innocence along with his freedom from overt sin is a fair representation of Job’s position.

In vv. 10–11 Elihu succinctly reproduces Job’s second argument. Job has contended that God treated him as an enemy. In these verses Elihu cites Job as questioning God’s justice. Elihu initially cites Job’s contention that God “finds occasions²⁹ against me” (v. 10a). Elihu’s

²⁶The adjective קָרָא is a *hapax legomenon* (DCH, 3:285). In rabbinic Hebrew the verbal form קָרָא is used in the sense of “scrape, rub,” and “to cleanse one’s head, rub, comb.” It is used of Hillel washing his head. It is also attested in Aramaic with the meaning of “to rub” (Morris Jastrow, compiler, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* 2 vols. [reprint ed., Brooklyn: P. Shalom Publishing, 1967], 1:492). Its cognate in Akkadian, *hapapu*, is used in the sense of “to wash” (*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, 6:84 [hereafter cited as CAD]). The context of our immediate passage requires קָרָא to have a meaning such as “clean.” As such, קָרָא and עֲשָׂה are basically synonymous; see Harold R. Cohen, *Biblical Hapax Legomena in the Light of Akkadian and Ugaritic*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, 37, ed. Howard C. Kee and Douglas A. Knight (Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1978), p. 142, and Cyril F. Carr, “A Study of Hapax Legomena with a View to the Date of the Book” (M.A. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1976), pp. 41–42.

²⁷Some have taken the phrases “without transgression” and “free from iniquity” as Elihu maintaining that Job was sinless; so Driver and Gray, *Job*, 1:28; J. H. Eaton, *Job*, Old Testament Guides, ed. R. N. Whybray (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), p. 23; Gordis, *Job*, p. 373; Habel, *Job*, p. 46; Hartley, *Job*, p. 44.

²⁸Robert L. Alden, *Job*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), p. 324; Johns, *Elihu Speeches*, p. 86.

²⁹The word translated as “occasions,” רָגַע, is the plural form of רָגַע, “opposition, amazement,” and is used in the OT only here and in Num 14:34 (Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* [Leiden:

summation in v. 10a appears to be a conflation of Job's assertions in 10:6–7 and 13:23, with 13:23 being the primary passage. In this latter passage Job reacts to his friends' simplistic view of retribution theology by challenging God with this question: "For how many iniquities and sins am I responsible? Show me my rebellion and my sin?" Knowing that he had not been living in overt sin, Job demands that God reveal his sin to him. This verse reflects Job's contention that God did not have any good reason for punishing him. In order to find a reason, Job suggests in 13:26 that God may have held him responsible for the sins of his youth. From these passages, Elihu has summarized Job as saying that God has found some reasons for punishing him.³⁰

Elihu continues his summation of Job's argument in v. 10b, "He considers me His enemy." Outside of a change from second to third person,³¹ 33:10b is a virtual quotation from 13:24b, "You consider me your enemy." In 33:11 Elihu continues to cite Job as saying, "He places my feet in the stocks; He observes all my paths." As 33:10b draws directly from 13:24b, 33:11 is a virtual quotation of 13:27, "You place my feet in the stocks, and observe all my paths."³² Elihu cites Job as saying God regards him as His enemy and he is unable to escape God's afflictions.

From our examination of 33:8–11, we conclude that Elihu represents Job as affirming in v. 9 that he is innocent, free of any overt sin, and, as asserting in vv. 10–11, that God has denied Job justice. Therefore, Elihu has preserved Job's key tension, his innocence versus God's justice.³³

Brill, 1958], p. 1034 [hereafter cited as KB]). The suggested rendering of the plural is "occasions for hostility" (BDB, p. 626), "causes for opposition, amazement" (KB, p. 1034). It is derived from the verb *סָבַח*, to "hinder, restrain, frustrate" (BDB, p. 626). Some commentators suggest that metathesis has occurred in *סָבַח* with *ב* and *ס* being transposed so that the word is emended to *סָבַח*, "pretexts" (E. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. Harold Knight [Camden, NJ: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1967], p. 491). However, in defense of the Masoretic Text, there is no manuscript support for this metathesis. In addition, the ancient versions, excluding the Syriac Peshitta, do not reflect a deviation from the MT.

³⁰Andersen, *Job*, pp. 248–49.

³¹Job's remarks in 19:11 are very similar, except 19:11 has *כְּצַרְרֵי* ("as one of his foes"), in place of *לְאֵיֵבִי* ("enemy").

³²Besides the change from second to third person in 33:11, Elihu omits two *waw*-conjunctives that stand at the head of each clause.

³³Matitiah Tsevat has demonstrated that Job and his friends were not able to harmonize the coexistence of three concepts: a God who turns his face to man, Job as an innocent man, and a retribution theology. The friends had to give up Job's integrity to reconcile God and their theology, and Job sometimes sounds as if he is almost willing to give up God's integrity to harmonize his own innocence and retribution theology ("The

Elihu's capsulized citation of Job's position provides a basis to cite the key problem in v. 13 that will be addressed in the remainder of this speech. In vv. 12–14 Elihu rebukes Job and offers a counterargument. This is followed in vv. 15–30 by the development of this counterargument. Elihu initially rebukes Job by rejecting his position. God's greatness over man negates the possibility of man having a legitimate claim against God (v. 12). Job has often contended that God's hostility towards him has been specifically demonstrated by God's refusal to address him in a legal context. In v. 13 Elihu summarizes Job's specific contention by citing Job as maintaining that God does not respond to his complaint.³⁴ Elihu seeks to refute Job's assertion that God does not respond to his complaints. In contrast to this argument of Job, Elihu's counterargument is tersely set forth in v. 14, "God does speak in one way, and in two, though no one perceives it."

Elihu's counterargument that God has his own ways of communicating is developed in 33:15–30. Elihu highlights two ways God speaks. First, while man sleeps, God may speak to him in dreams (vv. 15–18). Second, God may speak through a heavenly mediator³⁵ when man is suffering (vv. 19–30). God's purpose with both ways is to turn a man from his misconduct and consequential death. The second way that God communicates in vv. 19–30 is often understood as Elihu's unique contribution to the book of Job. In these verses Elihu argues that God uses suffering as a discipline to bring the sinner back to God. However, this disciplinary view of suffering is not unique, for Eliphaz has introduced it in kernel form in 5:17–18. Though Elihu gives it a higher profile than Eliphaz,³⁶ it is not a primary emphasis in the Elihu speeches.³⁷ Another factor that mitigates its value as a unique contribution is that Elihu's disciplinary view of suffering appears to assume that sin had some cause for suffering. This assumption is reflected in vv. 26–27. In v. 26 the repentant sinner finds favor with God, and in v. 27 he makes a public confession of his sin, "I sinned and perverted what is right but I did not

Meaning of the Book of Job," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 37 [1966]: 106–7).

³⁴Job has made this type of complaint in 9:2, 14–19, 32–35; 13:22; 19:7; 23:2–7; 30:20.

³⁵Though most commentators understand that the מְלִיצִי ("mediator") of v. 23 is a heavenly mediator, Beeby ("Elihu," p. 45) takes this as a reference to Elihu. This is also followed by David Wolfers, "Elihu: The Provenance and Content of His Speeches," *Dor-le-Dor* 16 (1987/88): 92.

³⁶So Gordis, "Elihu the Intruder," pp. 112–16, and Bakon, "The Enigma of Elihu," pp. 222–24.

³⁷Marvin E. Tate, "The Speeches of Elihu," *Review and Expositor* 68 (Fall 1971): 492.

receive what I deserved." This first speech is brought to a conclusion in vv. 31–33 with a challenge to Job to respond to Elihu's wisdom.

Elihu's Second Speech (34:1–37)

Like his first speech, Elihu's argumentation in his second speech involves a summary of Job's position followed by his own refutation of this position. After inviting the wise men to listen (vv. 1–4), Elihu provides a summary of Job's position about God's inconsistent system of justice (vv. 5–9). Then, in vv. 10–31 Elihu refutes Job's position. This speech is rounded off with a concluding appeal to the wise men (vv. 34–37).³⁸ Elihu's refutation is a forceful and harsh defense of God's justice in governing the world. Like the friends, Elihu reflects the assumption that Job was suffering because of sin. Our goal is to show how Elihu summarizes the basic tenets of Job's contention against God, and how he refutes those contentions.

Elihu begins his representation of Job's position in 34:5–6 with the same basic arguments as 33:8–11, Job's innocence and his denial of God's justice. In 34:5 Elihu summarizes Job as saying, "I am innocent (אֲנִי צַדִּיק),³⁹ but God denies me justice (בְּשֹׁפֵט)."⁴⁰ The second clause of v. 5 is a verbatim quotation of 27:2a.⁴¹ The first clause of v. 5 is best understood as a summary of Job's many statements of innocence, similar to the synopsis found in 33:9, with 27:2–6 being a primary informative text. Following his summation of Job's position in v. 5, Elihu in v. 6 expands Job's two arguments, "In spite of my right,⁴² I am considered a

³⁸ Alden, *Job*, p. 341. For an analysis of the strophic patterns in Job 34, see Edwin C. Webster, "Strophic Patterns in Job 29–42," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30 (October 1984): 102–3, and MacKenzie, "Job," 1:529.

³⁹"I am innocent" may also be rendered "I am righteous." The translation of אֲנִי צַדִּיק as "I am innocent," or "I am in the right," is consistent with the legal nature of Job's complaint (see Habel, *Job*, pp. 192, 481).

⁴⁰The noun בְּשֹׁפֵט is used 23 times in the book of Job; see Abraham Even-Shoshan, ed., *A New Concordance of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1985), pp. 722–24. The verb שָׁפַט along with its participial forms is used six times in Job (*ibid.*, pp. 1126–27, 1199–1200; Even-Shoshan lists שֹׁפֵט separately as a masculine noun [pp. 1126–27], but BDB takes it as a participle [BDB, p. 1047]). With this summary, Elihu intends to show Job that he has no legal rights (צִדְקָה); see Sylvia Huberman Scholnick, "The Meaning of *Mispat* in the Book of Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (December 1982): 527–28.

⁴¹The only exception is that Job's use of אִי, "as [God] lives," in 27:2a has been eliminated in 34:5b; Job has also made the same assertion about God denying him justice in 14:3 and 19:7.

⁴²"In spite of my right," בְּעַל צִדְקָתִי, could also be translated as "concerning my right." I have rendered the preposition בְּעַל in a concessive sense, as it is used in 10:7 and

liar;⁴³ my wound is incurable,⁴⁴ though I am without transgression.” Job’s argument about his innocence is described as “my right” and “without transgression.” Job’s second argument, that God denies him justice, is presented in two ways in v. 6. First, because Job contends that he is suffering unjustly, he is “considered a liar.” Though Job has never explicitly accused God of calling him a liar, he has maintained in 16:8 and 10:17 that his illness was a witness against his contention of innocence. Thus v. 6 would be a reasonable synthesis of Job’s position. Second, his unjust suffering is pictured as a “wound,” produced by an arrow,⁴⁵ that is “incurable.” Consequently, we would understand that 34:5–6 is a restatement of 33:8–11. The fact that Elihu repeats Job’s basic position suggests that he views this as a key tension that needs to be resolved. Perhaps, Elihu’s repetition of Job’s foundational position points to one of his contributions to the thought of the book of Job.

After a parenthetical *ad hominem* attack on Job in vv. 7–8, Elihu returns to summarizing Job’s position in v. 9, “A man has no profit (יִצְדֹּק) when he delights in God.” With this summation, Elihu has synthesized Job’s assertions in 9:22–24 and 21:5–13. Elihu’s synthesis of these passages in 34:9 is an extension of Job’s arguments in vv. 5–6. The remainder of this speech is a refutation of Job’s position, as set forth in v. 9.

In 34:10–33 Elihu refutes Job’s position that there is no profit in serving God (cf. v. 9). Elihu, in vv. 10–12, offers a counterargument, followed by a development of it in vv. 13–33. Elihu’s counterargument is that God cannot pervert justice. In v. 10 Elihu strongly states his case by maintaining that God cannot do wickedness. This characteristic of God is demonstrated by his administration of retribution in v. 11, God “requites man according to his work, and He treats him according to his

16:7 (see Gordis, *Job*, p. 386). This phrase may be transformed into a concessive clause, “though I am right.”

⁴³“I am considered a liar” is a translation of יִצְדֹּק. Though יִצְדֹּק could be translated as “I lie,” it can also have a delocutive sense such as “pronounce a liar” or “consider a liar.” It is used in this manner in Ps 116:11 and Prov 30:6 (Gordis, *Job*, p. 382).

⁴⁴“My wound” is a translation of יִצְדֹּק, “my arrow.” I have taken this as a metonym of cause for effect. The cause, “my arrow,” represents the effect, “my wound.” There is a possibility that the personal pronoun “my” could also be taken as “his.” In this case, the clause in which יִצְדֹּק is found could be translated, “His arrow produces an incurable wound.” This understanding finds some support from 6:4, “The arrows of the Almighty are within me.” For support, see Anton C. M. Blommerde, *Northwest Semitic Grammar and Job*, *Biblica et Orientalia*, 22 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical institute, 1969), pp. 120–21 and Mitchell Dahood, “Northwest Semitic Philology and Job,” in *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought*, ed. John L. McKenzie (New York: Herder and Herder, 1962), pp. 61–62.

⁴⁵Hartley, *Job*, pp. 451–52.

deeds." Elihu is clearly affirming a mechanical view of retribution.⁴⁶ The thought of v. 10 is restated in a modified form in v. 12, "Certainly, God does not act wickedly, and the Almighty does not pervert justice." This verse is essentially the same as Bildad's question in 8:3. In answering his own question, Bildad asserts that Job's children died because of their sin. In a similar manner, Elihu supports his own point about God's administration of justice by appealing to his mechanical view of retribution in v. 11. Elihu, at this point, has reflected that his counterargument is a recapitulation of the friends' theology.⁴⁷

Elihu substantiates his view of divine justice by arguing that God has the right to rule (vv. 13–15) and that He does so impartially (vv. 16–30). Elihu, then, appeals to Job in v. 33, arguing that if he, in light of the punishment given to him by a God who knows the details of Job's life precisely, refuses to repent, then he must continue to suffer. In v. 37 Elihu concludes that Job has added rebellion to his sin. God does not requite a man according to potential sin but according to his actual sins (vv. 11, 21–27, 31–33). Job's blasphemous words, according to Elihu, are an extension and a reflection of his sinfulness.

Elihu's Third Speech (35:1–16)

In a similar manner to Elihu's first two speeches, Elihu's third speech involves a citation of Job's position in vv. 2–3 followed by a refutation in vv. 4–13. This is concluded with an application to Job in vv. 14–16. Our goal in examining this speech is to show how it, like the two preceding speeches, focuses on Job's basic complaint. Though Elihu has claimed earlier that he would not respond with the same arguments as the friends (32:14), we will notice in his refutation how he borrows from previous speeches, and thus provides a recapitulation of the friends' arguments.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Job* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1939), p. 232. For a treatment mechanical retribution, see Parsons, "The Structure and Purpose of the Book of Job," pp. 143–45. The concept of mechanical retribution was common in the ancient Near East; this is also developed by Parsons in his dissertation, "A Biblical Theology of Job 38:1–42:6" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1980), pp. 14–35; see also John Gray, "The Book of Job in the Context of Near Eastern Literature," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 82 (1970): 251–69.

⁴⁷W. A. Irwin, "Job," in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, rev. ed., ed. Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), p. 404.

⁴⁸The Joban author's intention by preserving this inconsistency is to suggest that Elihu should not be taken on his own terms. See J. Gerald Janzen, who has perceptively noticed this inconsistency with the following observation: "When Elihu, therefore, advances the assertion to the friends that 'I will not answer [Job] with your speeches' (32:14b), this assertion is undercut by the way in which his speeches do repeat theirs. If this is the case, then the reader is warned that Elihu is being presented as someone who

After the Joban author's prose introduction in v. 1, Elihu again begins his speech by summarizing Job's position in v. 2, "Do you think this is according to justice (חֲשׂוֹן צְדָקָה)? You have said, 'My righteousness⁴⁹ is greater than God's.'"⁵⁰ As in 33:8–11 and 34:5–6, Elihu maintains that Job's argument is still an issue of Job's innocence and his denial of God's justice. Though Job has not explicitly claimed a righteousness greater than God's, Job's consistent claim of innocence and his repeated insistence that God has denied him justice may lead to a conclusion that Job was claiming a righteousness that was superior to God's.

In contrast to Job's position as represented in 35:2, Elihu highlights the inconsistency of Job's position in 35:3 with two questions, "But you say, 'What does it profit (יִצְרֹף) you? What do I gain by avoiding sin?'" The significance of the first question is that Job's righteous life has had no effect in gaining God's blessing on his life. The second question is an outgrowth of the first. If living righteously resulted in the extreme suffering that Job was experiencing, then Job has gained nothing by avoiding a sinful lifestyle.⁵¹ Elihu has inferred the questions of 35:3 from Job's remarks in 7:19–20; 9:22–31; and 21:7–13. The significance of 35:2–3 is that there is an inconsistency with Job's argumentation. On the one hand, Job feels his innocency and God's denying him justice should qualify Job for a legal hearing (see also 35:15). From this, Elihu concludes that Job insists that in his case he is more righteous than God (v. 2). On the other hand, Job claims that his righteous lifestyle has had no effect on God. Job's integrity has resulted in extreme suffering, and, therefore, Job has gained nothing by avoiding sin (v. 3).

Elihu next rejects Job's claim, as stated in v. 3, that his righteous life has had no affect on how God treats him. Elihu will seek to refute this claim as well as providing a reply to the friends (v. 4). Elihu gives two responses as to why God does not respond to man's requests for divine help. First, God's transcendence prevents him from responding

does not understand himself or his role in the dramatic context. This means that Elihu is presented in the mode of dramatic irony" (*Job*, Interpretation [Atlanta: John Knox, 1985], p. 220).

⁴⁹"Righteousness," צְדָקָה, along with its cognate forms, is used throughout Job to refer to his claim of being "right, innocent, not guilty of wrongdoing" (William D. Reyburn, *A Handbook on the Book of Job* [New York: United Bible Societies, 1992], p. 646); Job's claim of being "right," or "innocent," was made in 9:15 and 10:15; Job's claim of being "right" was so understood by Elihu in 32:2 and 34:5.

⁵⁰The final clause in v. 2 could also be translated, "My innocency is before God." In agreement with my comparative translation of this clause is the Septuagint, Syriac Peshitta, Aramaic Targum, and the Vulgate.

⁵¹The questions of v. 3 reflect a more negative perspective to the assertion that Elihu claims Job raised in 34:9, "A man has no profit (יִצְרֹף) when he delights in God."

(35:4–8). Borrowing from Eliphaz in 22:12, where God is higher than the heavens (see also 9:8–13 and 11:7–9), Elihu's counterargument is to look at the heavens (35:5). In the immediate context, Elihu's point is that God is so far removed from man that He cannot be affected by man's actions. Drawing from Job's words in 7:20, Elihu asserts in 35:6 that man's sins have no affect on God. In 35:7–8 Elihu again draws upon Eliphaz's speech in 22:2–11.⁵² Since Elihu's argument in vv. 5–8 is drawn heavily from Eliphaz's and Job's arguments dealing with God's transcendence, this aspect of Elihu's speech is a recapitulation of their argument. However, the difference between the friends and Elihu is that the friends have compiled a list of hypothetical sins, whereas Elihu focuses on Job's verbal rebellion against God as a response to his suffering. Elihu is convinced that Job's verbal rebellion is an extension of the sinful state that resulted in his extreme suffering (see 34:10–12, 31–33, 37). Because of Job's verbal rebellion, Elihu maintains that Job will get no response from God.

Second, God does not respond to the prayers of the innocent oppressed because they pray insincerely, 35:9–13. Job has mentioned in 24:1–12 that the needy were taken advantage of by the wicked and that God did not correct the wrong. If God rules the world with justice, why does he not answer the prayers of the oppressed? Elihu gives two reasons for God's silence to their prayers in 35:9–13. First, God does not answer the prayers of the oppressed because they pray with wrong motives (vv. 9–11). They cry for deliverance from the oppressor (v. 9), but they do not turn to God as their Maker who can give them joy in their times of trouble (v. 10), even though he has made them wiser than animals (v. 11). Second, God remains silent to the oppressed because of their pride (vv. 12–13).

Elihu concludes this speech with an application to Job. Elihu begins v. 14 with an *a fortiori* argument introduced by "how much less," *כִּי אַיֵּן*.⁵³ The significance of this as it relates to the preceding paragraph could be summarized in this way: If God does not listen to the oppressed because of their vain prayers, how much less likely is it that God would listen to Job with his empty remarks: he does not see God, his case is before God, and he must wait for God. In v. 15 Elihu condemns Job's charge that the wicked are not punished. Elihu concludes in v. 16 that Job had made one empty accusation after another, and these reflect Job's lack of

⁵²For a helpful treatment of Elihu's citations in chapter 35, see Johns, *Elihu Speeches*, pp. 120–23.

⁵³BDB, p. 65.

wisdom.⁵⁴

Elihu's Fourth Speech (36:1–37:24)

In his fourth speech Elihu changes his plan of attack. Rather than citing Job's arguments and refuting them, Elihu presents a forceful defense of God's justice (36:2–21) and a description of God's work in nature (36:22–37:24). The first section of this speech (36:2–21) is a continued development of the theological emphases from Elihu's three preceding speeches. The second section (36:22–37:24) provides a new emphasis on God's power in nature and serves as a preparation for the Lord's speeches.

Elihu's Defense of God's Justice (36:1–21)

Elihu's last speech is initiated in v. 1 with a prose introduction and in vv. 2–4 by Elihu's summons for Job to listen. Elihu presents his argument in vv. 5–7, a substantiation of his argument in vv. 8–15, and an application to Job in vv. 16–21. We will notice in this speech how Elihu develops his argument. Furthermore, we will notice Elihu's presumptuous nature and his recycling of the friends' theology.

Beginning with Elihu's summons to Job, Elihu informs us that he is God's spokesman (v. 2), that he has vast knowledge to impart, and that he needs to defend his Maker's justice (v. 3). If we have any doubts about Elihu's superior wisdom, he further asserts in v. 4, "my words are not false; one perfect in knowledge is with you." Not only does Elihu characterize himself as being "perfect in knowledge" (תָּמִים הָעוֹת), he also describes God in essentially the same way in 37:16 (תָּמִים הָעֵינִים). Elihu's presumption seems to have reached a new plateau.

In contrast to his approach in his previous three speeches with an argument-counterargument technique, Elihu starts out by presenting his argument in vv. 5–7: God, who is mighty and firm in his purpose, judges the wicked and blesses the righteous. The substantiation of his argument is found in vv. 8–15. When suffering comes to an individual, God tells them their "transgressions" and "pride" (v. 9), and commands them to repent of their "evil" (v. 10). Elihu sets forth two responses to affliction. First, God will deliver the one who responds positively to his message and will prosper his life (vv. 11, 15). Second, God will judge by death the one who responds negatively to his message (vv. 12–14).

In 36:16–21 Elihu applies his argument to Job. This is Elihu's last appeal for Job to repent. Elihu claims in v. 16 that God seeks to "allure" Job from "the mouth of distress." God desires to pull Job from a

⁵⁴D. David Garland, *Job*, Bible Study Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), p. 86.

position of greater disaster to one of blessing. According to Elihu, God has brought on Job the "judgment due the wicked" (v. 17). He harshly warns Job about longing for prosperity and turning to evil (vv. 18–21). Elihu warns Job in v. 21, "Take heed, do not turn to evil, for you seem to prefer this to affliction." Elihu's point is that Job prefers the evil of complaining against God to the lessons to be learned from affliction.

As in his second speech, Elihu develops here the principle of God's justice. Though the applications of divine justice have varied with each friend, this theological theme has been developed throughout the book of Job. In addition, Elihu's discussion of God's delivering or judging a person according to his response to God's testing is similar to Eliphaz's discussion in 22:15–30. Elihu's point with his generalized discussion is that Job needs to repent. "In Elihu's opinion he [Job] is that unrepentant, arrogant sinner whom God is judging and warning."⁵⁵ Furthermore, as noted in our discussion of 33:19–30, Elihu's disciplinary view of suffering is essentially the same as Eliphaz's in 5:17–18. Though Elihu has his own distinctive brash voice, his theology is fundamentally a reincarnation of the friends', and it is still, in the final analysis, human wisdom along with its inherent inadequacies.

Elihu's Praise of God's Greatness (36:22–37:24)

The context now shifts from a defense of God's justice to praise of his incomprehensible greatness as demonstrated in his control of the elements of nature. The immediate context appears to reflect a developing storm, and this storm provides the occasion for Elihu to focus on God's control of nature. As far as the content of this section goes, it can be divided into two subsections: Elihu's hymn of praise and his concluding address. In hymnic fashion Elihu describes God's magnificent sovereign control of weather (36:22–37:13). Viewing God's magnificent sovereign power, Elihu is moved to ascribe praise to God. Elihu's tone changes in his concluding address (37:14–24), as he addresses Job directly. We will notice how some of Elihu's rhetorical features anticipate God's use of the same literary techniques. In addition, we will attempt to highlight how Elihu's theocentric perspective of a developing storm anticipates God's appearance out of the storm.

Elihu's Hymn of Praise. This unit can be divided into two parts, 36:22–33 and 37:1–13. Elihu's interjection in 37:1 ("Indeed, at this my heart trembles and leaps from its place") reflects an intensification of the approaching storm. This interjection provides a good dividing point in the hymn.

Elihu introduces 36:22–33 in vv. 22–26. In these introductory

⁵⁵Alden, *Job*, p. 349.

verses, Elihu maintains that God's incomparable power and incomprehensible wisdom are evident to mankind. Though God's greatness and eternity are seen by man, this ultimately is beyond man's comprehension, vv. 25–26. Elihu's use of rhetorical questions in vv. 22–23 anticipates God's use of the same literary technique in 38:4–41:34.

With the introductory verses of 36:22–26, Elihu shifts his emphasis from God's system of justice to a description of God's incomprehensible nature and work. As such, Elihu adds a strong theocentric dimension to his speech. This theocentric perspective is specifically demonstrated by Elihu's description of God's control of the weather in 36:27–37:13. In 36:27–33 God uses the rain (vv. 27–28), lightning (vv. 30, 32), and thunder (v. 33) to govern the nations (v. 31).

In 37:1–13 Elihu provides a more intense discussion of God's control of the weather. In vv. 1–5 Elihu challenges Job to listen to the approaching thunderstorm, for it is under God's sovereign control. He concludes his description of the thunderstorm in v. 5 and observes that God "does great things beyond our understanding." Elihu expands beyond God's control of the thunderstorm to his control of winter weather in vv. 6–13. Elihu describes God's control of winter weather (v. 6) followed by its effects on creation (vv. 7–8). Elihu creates a parallel unit in vv. 9–13, God's control of winter weather (vv. 9–11) and its effects on creation (vv. 12–13). God uses the weather to govern man and animals (vv. 7–8, 12–13). Elihu's theocentric presentation of the weather in 36:22–37:13 anticipates God's appearance out of the storm and His discussion of his control of the same meteorological phenomena in 38:22–30, 34–38.

Elihu's Concluding Address. Elihu brings his speeches to a conclusion in 37:14–24. This address can be broken down into two units. In the first unit, vv. 14–20, Elihu uses a series of rhetorical questions in addressing Job. In the second unit, vv. 21–24, Elihu describes natural phenomena and God's transcendence. Elihu's use of rhetorical questions appears to be a "clear structural bridge to the divine discourse that directly follows."⁵⁶

In the first unit Elihu provides in v. 14 an introductory challenge addressed directly to Job. From vv. 15–20, excluding a challenge in v. 19, Elihu asks a series of rhetorical questions that are similar to the pattern that God will use when he speaks.⁵⁷ Elihu asks Job if he compre-

⁵⁶Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Book, 1985), p. 91.

⁵⁷For a discussion of some similarities shared between Elihu's fourth speech and Yahweh's speeches, see David Noel Freedman, "The Elihu Speeches in the Book of Job: A Hypothetical Episode in the Literary History of the Work," in *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980), pp. 334–37; Norman H. Snaith, *The Book of Job: Its Origin and Purpose*, Studies in Biblical Theology, 2 (Naperville, IL: Alec

hends how God governs the clouds and lightning (vv. 15–16) and if he could assist God in spreading out the skies of summer, while his strength is being robbed from the heat (vv. 17–18).⁵⁸ If Job does not understand observable issues of nature such as God governing the weather, Job has no hope with his “darkened” understanding to prepare a case to convince God of his innocency (v. 19). Elihu concludes this unit with two rhetorical questions asserting that man’s desire to speak with God is like desiring to be swallowed up; this is to say, Job’s desire to present his case before God is an impossibility. Through his use of rhetorical questions, Elihu’s goal is to provide an effective challenge for Job to submit to the God who is sovereign over nature and man. Elihu’s use of the rhetorical question is a precursor for God’s extended use of the same rhetorical technique in 38:4–39:27.⁵⁹

Elihu brings his speeches to a conclusion in the second unit. In vv. 21–22 Elihu returns to the wonders of nature. After the wind has driven away the storm clouds, man cannot behold the brilliance of the sun. If man cannot behold the brilliance of the sun, how much more so would this be true of man being unable to look on God.⁶⁰ This is a tacit rebuke of Job’s desire to confront God in court. Elihu further affirms in v. 23 that God, who is exalted in power,⁶¹ is beyond man’s reach; God, who acts in justice, does not oppress. In light of this, Elihu’s application in v. 24 is that men, especially Job, are to fear God because he looks with favor on all who are wise in heart.⁶²

From this overview of Elihu’s praise of God’s greatness in 36:22–37:24, we would understand that the Joban author has used it as a rhetorical and theocentric anticipation for the Yahweh speeches. As

R. Allenson, 1968), pp. 75–85; Gary W. Martin, *Elihu and the Third Cycle in the Book of Job* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1973).

⁵⁸Hartley, *Job*, pp. 482–83.

⁵⁹Roland E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther*, *Forms of Old Testament Literature*, vol. 13, ed. Rolf Knierim and Gene M. Tucker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 42.

⁶⁰H. H. Rowley, *Job*, *New Century Bible Commentary*, ed. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black, rev. ed. (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1976; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 239.

⁶¹In v. 23, עָלָא בְּכֹחַ, “exalted in power,” is the same motif that initiated 36:22–26.

⁶²The Hebrew text in the final clause of v. 24 is literally translated as “he [God] does not regard any who are wise in heart.” This clause has generally been taken in one of two ways: as a declaration that God does not favorably look on the wise in heart or as a negative rhetorical question expecting a positive answer (so NIV). Because the phrase “wise in heart” is never used pejoratively in Scripture, my interpretation follows the understanding reflected in the NIV (so Alden, *Job*, p. 366; for a discussion supporting this positive understanding, see Gordis, *Job*, p. 434, and Hartley, *Job*, pp. 483–84).

such, the Elihu speeches provide a preparation for the Yahweh speeches.

In concluding our development of Elihu's argumentation, we have seen that Elihu, by self-appointment, has assumed the role of an arbiter (32:6–22). His role is to objectively resolve the dispute between the conflicting parties. As such, we expect his emphasis to be directed to the germane arguments of Job 3–31. In this regard, Elihu has not disappointed. The Joban author preserves Elihu as one who sifts through Job's arguments and summarizes the major issue of the book: Job's innocence versus God's justice (33:9–11; 34:5–6; 35:2). As Job sorts through this issue, he concludes that God does not respond to his complaints (33:12–13), a man who fears God has no advantage (34:9), and a man who avoids sin may suffer rather than prosper (35:3). In each respective chapter, Elihu refutes Job's conclusions. In refuting Job, Elihu adapts earlier arguments used in the book. Though his focus is on Job's verbal complaints, Elihu's counterarguments are tied to an assumption that Job's sins have brought this suffering upon him (34:11–12, 21–27, 31–33, 36–37). After initially defending God's system of justice (36:2–21), Elihu's last speech focuses on God's incomprehensible greatness in sovereignly controlling the weather (36:22–37:24) and using it to govern his animate creation (36:31; 37:7–8, 12–13). His theocentric emphasis prepares us for God to speak. Elihu's use of rhetorical questions also anticipates the literary technique that God will use. Having seen the development of Elihu's thought, we are in a position to compare his speeches with the theological emphasis of the Joban author.

THE JOBAN AUTHOR'S THEOLOGICAL EMPHASES

Since Elihu claims to be moved by the breath of the Almighty (32:8, 18) and he is not rebuked by God in the conclusion (42:7–9), it might be concluded that Elihu's four speeches are intended to be completely normative.⁶³ It is my contention that this type of understanding is an oversimplification of the Elihu speeches.⁶⁴ Rather than focusing

⁶³So, for example, J. Barton Payne, "Inspiration in the Words of Job," in *The Law and the Prophets*, ed. John H. Skilton, Milton C. Fisher, and Leslie W. Sloat (n.p.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1974), p. 320. The omission of any reference to Elihu in the book's conclusion has been used by some critics to argue for the Elihu material being a secondary interpolation by a later redactor and by some conservative interpreters to suggest that Elihu's solution to Job's suffering was correct. This type of reasoning can be reversed, for it could also be argued that God's omission of any reference to Elihu is intended to put him in his place. See James Barr, "The Book of Job and Its Modern Interpreters," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 54 (Autumn 1971): 33. However, in either case, this is an argument from silence.

⁶⁴There are a number of reasons why Elihu's claim of being moved by the breath of the Almighty (32:8, 18), supposedly a statement by Elihu claiming to have received special revelation, is not to be taken as part of the normative message of the book of Job;

exclusively on Elihu's doctrine, my focus is on how he functions in the book. To support my thesis concerning his transitional function in Job, we must compare his speeches with the theological emphases, *Tendenz*, of the Joban author. We should understand that the author's emphases are primarily preserved in three segments of material: the prose pericopes, the God speeches, and Job's submissive responses to God.⁶⁵ From these segments, we will examine four emphases that have a bearing on our discussion.

Job's Integrity

Job is presented in the book as a man with great religious integrity. This is the evaluation of Job by the Joban author in 1:1 ("blameless and upright, fearing God and turning away from evil"). When the Lord initiates each of Job's trials, he extols Job's integrity with the same words as the Joban author (1:8; 2:3). Satan is then granted permission to put Job's integrity to the test. Consequently, God's positive assessment of Job's integrity demonstrates that Job's suffering is not prompted because of any sinful activity on Job's part; and any section of the book that reflects this type of assumption would be inconsistent with the Joban author's *Tendenz*.

Though Elihu does not place an emphasis on Job's former sinful condition, he does assume that Job was suffering as a consequence of sin. This assumption is reflected in a number of verses. God's purpose for sending dreams in 33:17 is to lead a man from his "deeds," a contextual reference to "wrongdoing," and to keep him from "pride." The result of the work of the heavenly witness in v. 27 is that the restored sinner would announce that he had sinned. Though Elihu does not

for a presentation of some of these reasons, see Janzen, *Job*, pp. 218–21. In contrast with Janzen, other interpreters maintain that this claim of Elihu supports his message as having complete normative value. See Larry J. Waters, "Reflections on Suffering from the Book of Job," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (October–December 1997): 446; Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 147; and Thurman Wisdom, "The Message of Elihu," *Biblical Viewpoint* 21 (November 1987): 28–31. This type of argument generally takes Elihu as being "completely normative" and, therefore, has Elihu as preparing for the God speeches. From Elihu's normative preparation, God supposedly builds his message. While I agree that Elihu has a preparatory function, I do not take it that the issue of his role in the book focuses on Elihu being completely normative. Rather, Elihu unwittingly prepares for the God speeches. From my understanding, a major issue with Elihu's role focuses on how the Joban author uses Elihu to develop his message, and not how Elihu perceives himself.

⁶⁵To determine the normative message in Job, the material in Job 3–37 must be compared with the Joban author's perspective; for some hermeneutical guidelines, see William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), pp. 321–22.

explicitly name Job in these verses as needing to be lead out of sin, the application can only be intended for Job. In defending God's system of justice in 34:11, Elihu maintains that God requites a man according to his deeds. The intent is to say that Job's suffering is the repayment for his conduct. Elihu explains in 34:24–27 how God quickly shatters the mighty because of their wickedness. He certainly appears to be describing Job in 34:37, "to his sin he adds rebellion." In addition, if a man was suffering, God would tell him that he had sinned arrogantly (36:9–10). Elihu is assuming that Job's sin, whether in action and/or attitude, has produced his suffering.⁶⁶ Thus, this assumption of Elihu does not harmonize with the Joban author's emphasis.

Elihu's Anger

The Joban author provides a prose introduction for Elihu in 32:1–5. Elihu is presented as being angry at Job for his self-righteous attitude as demonstrated by Job's justifying himself rather than God (vv. 1–2). Elihu is also angry with Job's three friends because they have found no way to refute Job, yet they still condemn him. The Joban author places a strong emphasis on Elihu's anger. He mentions his anger four times in these five verses (vv. 2 [twice], 3, 5). The apparent motivation for the author's emphasis on Elihu's anger is drawn from his second and third speeches. Elihu's anger moves to a climax in the conclusion of his second speech. Having asserted in 34:35 that Job's words lack knowledge, Elihu caustically adds in v. 36, "O that Job might be tested to the extreme limit because he has answered like a wicked man." Elihu's anger is again delineated in Job 35, though not as caustically as in Job 34. If God does not answer the prayers of the oppressed because of their impure motives (vv. 9–13), how much more certain it is that God will not answer Job's empty words (vv. 14–15). The Joban author pictures Elihu as an impatient individual, he is more emotional than rational.⁶⁷ The emphasis of the prose introduction on Elihu's anger is consistent with the emotional outburst of Elihu, as pictured by his *ad hominem* attack on Job in both of these speeches. Since Job's three friends have also had emotional outbursts, perhaps the Joban author is intentionally highlighting this to portray Elihu as a younger version of the friends.

When 32:1–5 is further compared with 32:6–22, where Elihu presents himself as patient, rational, and driven by the breath of the Almighty, a tension is created between the Joban author's portrayal of Elihu and Elihu's self-promoting portrayal. The author's point may be

⁶⁶Edgar Jones, *The Triumph of Job* (London: SCM Press, 1966), pp. 70–72.

⁶⁷C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books: The Wisdom and Songs of Israel*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1988), p. 80.

that Elihu is an angry, arrogant, young man.⁶⁸ This conflicting picture creates a tension between the author's presentation of Elihu as an angry young man and Elihu's own assertions that he has the solution for Job's problem. Furthermore, the Joban author has Elihu moved by anger, but Elihu maintains that he is moved by "the spirit" (32:18). The discrepancy between the author's presentation of Elihu's motives and Elihu's words is an example of dramatic irony. The Joban author has informed us about Elihu's real motives, but Job and his friends are initially unaware of Elihu's real motives. The Joban author's use of irony causes us to question Elihu's claims of speaking on behalf of God.⁶⁹ Though Elihu's anger has some reasons for it, it is still flawed by his false assumptions about Job's suffering being a result of sin and by his own emotional outbursts against Job.

As we have examined Elihu's anger, we have seen that he has attacked Job and pictured him as a "wicked man" (34:36). Elihu's presentation of Job is diametrically opposed to God's own assessment of Job as a man with impeccable spiritual integrity (1:8, 2:3). Elihu's assessments of Job at key junctures are not only inaccurate, but they are also couched in his anger. As such, Elihu apparently reflects the wrath of man and not God. Perhaps, the Joban author may be demonstrating the limited and emotionally flawed nature of man's solutions to Job's problem.

God's Evaluation of the Arguments of the Book's Participants

In order to evaluate Elihu's verdict on Job and the three friends, we must compare his verdicts against God's. In keeping with his self-appointed role as arbiter, Elihu makes judgments about Job (33:1–13, 31–33; 34:16, 33; 35:2–3; 36:2–4; 37:14–18) and his friends (32:6–22; 34:2–15, 34–37).⁷⁰ To begin with, Elihu's verdict on the friends is that they were wrong by being ineffective in responding to Job's arguments. They have been unable to prove Job wrong (32:12), yet still condemn him (32:3). Job's friends are dogmatic defenders of an immediate and mechanical interpretation of retribution theology. In their view, suffering is an indication of sin. Therefore, they were forced to assert Job's sinfulness and, even, to invent sinful activities (22:2–11). Elihu's verdict

⁶⁸For a similar understanding, see Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 351; and Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, "The Book of Job," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, James S. Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), pp. 259–60.

⁶⁹Janzen, *Job*, pp. 219–221.

⁷⁰Dhorme, *Job*, p. ci.

is that they are in the wrong.⁷¹ In 42:7, 8 God angrily announces to the friends that they have not asserted of Him “what is right,” as his servant Job has. Since Elihu’s verdict is in agreement with God’s, we conclude that this is a correct verdict.

In addition, Elihu’s verdict on Job’s words ranges from speaking in ignorance to wickedness. On the one hand, Elihu asserts that Job has spoken in ignorance, “without knowledge” (34:35; 35:16). From his perspective of ignorance, Job has justified himself rather than God (32:2).⁷² On the other hand, Elihu has maintained that Job’s basic position is wrong (32:12). He has accused Job of drinking up “derision” (עָרַב, 34:7). In effect, this is to say that Job fills himself up with blasphemy.⁷³ Elihu has characterized Job’s speech as the words of a “wicked man” (34:36), as words of “rebellion” (34:37) and “vanity” (35:16). Has Elihu given an accurate verdict on Job’s speech? In comparing Elihu’s assessments of Job’s words with God’s, God’s evaluation indicates that Job has sometimes made assertions in ignorance but he has generally been correct in his understanding of God’s administration of justice.

God accuses Job of speaking ignorantly in three passages. First, this evaluation is seen in 38:2 with this question: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” Yahweh’s charge against Job is that he has spoken words “without knowledge,” as Elihu has also maintained (34:35 and 35:16). Second, God concludes his first speech by rephrasing the question of 38:2 followed by an accusation in 40:2, “Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who accuses God answer him!” These two questions form an *inclusio* for Yahweh’s first speech. This *inclusio* also reflects that God’s understanding of Job’s accusations against him in 40:2 are also words spoken in ignorance. Third, at the beginning of his second speech, God asks Job two questions (40:8): “Would you impugn my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?” Yahweh’s evaluation of Job is that Job has spoken some words that have condemned God in order to justify himself. Though Job’s words are sinful, these are not words of a blasphemous rebel. We must remember that many of his words have been spoken in a context where he has been “wrestling to reconcile his beliefs about God with the reality he was experiencing and witnessing, and not in a context of rebellion.”⁷⁴ When Job repents in 42:2–6, he specifically repents of words spoken “without knowledge” (42:3). Therefore, the content of these three

⁷¹Wilson, “The Role of the Elihu Speeches,” p. 90.

⁷²B. Lynne Newell, “Job: Repentant or Rebellious?” (Th.M. thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1983), p. 101.

⁷³The noun עָרַב in this context is tantamount to “blasphemy”; see BDB, p. 541.

⁷⁴Newell, “Job,” pp. 120–21.

questions reflects that some of Job's words are pronounced as ignorant by God. Since Elihu makes the same assessment of Job's words as God has done for some of his words, we would understand that Elihu's verdict that Job has spoken in ignorance has some substance to it.

On a more positive note for Job, God commends him to Eliphaz because Job "spoke" of God "what is right" (42:7, 8). The word translated "what is right" (יָשָׁרָה) is used twice in 42:7, 8. It denotes that which is "reliable" or "true."⁷⁵ It characterizes an aspect of Job's speech as being "correct and consistent with the facts."⁷⁶ In contrast with this positive verdict, Yahweh characterizes the friends' words in v. 8 as "folly" (בְּהִלָּה). Though Job's words have often been spoken in ignorance, his essential position is correct. Elihu's essential verdict is that Job did not speak "what is right" about God, he spoke as a "wicked man" (34:36). Since Elihu's verdict is the opposite of Yahweh's, Elihu's verdict is to be rejected. Eaton maintains that "if Job is pronounced right, Elihu, no less than the friends, must be wrong."⁷⁷ The Joban author appears to be using Elihu's evaluation as a "theological foil" for God, as Wilson has correctly contended,

His [Elihu's] evaluation of Job is thus intentionally set up as a rival to the later words of Yahweh, causing the reader to question Elihu's seemingly orthodox answer in light of God's wider viewpoint. Elihu is thus a theological foil for Yahweh.⁷⁸

In using Elihu as a theological foil, though some of Elihu's verdicts are consistent with God's, we expect some disparities between the two. God's agreement with Elihu's verdict on the friends shows that the arguments of the three friends are to be discarded. God's positive verdict on Job causes us to question Elihu's verdict on Job and to see Elihu's verdict as a rival to God's. As far as Elihu's function in the book of Job, we should understand that the Joban author has Elihu functioning in a different manner from what Elihu presents himself. Thus, Elihu's function may play a greater role in developing the message of the book than do his actual words.

The Mysterious Nature of Suffering

It is often contended that Elihu's contribution to Job is found in his

⁷⁵William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 153.

⁷⁶Habel, *Job*, p. 583

⁷⁷Eaton, *Job*, p. 39.

⁷⁸Wilson, "The Role of the Elihu Speeches," p. 90.

argument that suffering has a disciplinary effect (33:19–24 and 36:8–11), as opposed to the punitive view of suffering tenaciously defended by Job's three friends. While recognizing that Elihu's view of suffering is not the complete solution, Gordis has argued that it was used by the Joban author in a subsequent revision of his book to serve as a supplement to the God speeches.⁷⁹ As such, Elihu's view of suffering, according to Gordis, is "primarily preventive, not punitive."⁸⁰ This same motif was briefly mentioned earlier by Eliphaz in 5:17–18. Elihu uses this motif to expand the discussion on suffering. When God speaks, his intent appears to leave Job in the dark about the details of his suffering. From Job's perspective, the story behind his suffering is kept secret in the mysterious purpose of God.⁸¹ If this is true, Elihu's disciplinary view of suffering is in conflict with this, since he provides an explanation for what God has kept shrouded in his secret will. We should understand that Elihu's solution to suffering is part of the failed attempts of human wisdom.

The friends' unsuccessful efforts of convincing Job to confess his sin that produced his suffering has demonstrated the failure of elderly human wisdom.⁸² While assuming that Job is suffering as a result of sin, Elihu, consequently, shifts his focus to a disciplinary use of suffering. But though God undoubtedly uses suffering for disciplinary purposes (Prov 3:11–12), this is not part of the book's normative message. There are three reasons for my assertion. First, Elihu says relatively little about the disciplinary use of suffering in comparison with his defense of God's nature and actions.⁸³

Second, if the Joban author uses Elihu as a final display of the inadequacies of human wisdom, this suggests that Elihu's teaching, including his teaching on the disciplinary use of suffering, is not intended to be a part of the book's normative message. To demonstrate that the Joban author uses Elihu in this manner, an examination of the development of the book's argument provides assistance. In presenting the preliminary incidents (1:6–2:13),⁸⁴ the Joban author informs us that God gave

⁷⁹Gordis, "Elihu the Intruder," pp. 112–16.

⁸⁰Gordis, *Job*, p. 387. The preventive understanding of suffering is also followed by Waters ("Reflections on Suffering," pp. 444–46).

⁸¹D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), p. 171.

⁸²Since Elihu's contrasts the failure of elderly wisdom and the need for his youthful wisdom (32:6–9), the Joban author is possibly showing how both elderly and youthful wisdom cannot handle Job's problem.

⁸³Tate, "The Speeches of Elihu," p. 492.

⁸⁴My understanding of the development of Job's message through its rhetorical structure has been influenced by Newell ("Job," pp. 90–103).

Satan permission to afflict Job for no other reason than God's sovereign purposes (1:8; 2:3). Job's cursing the day of his birth provides the occasioning incident (3:1–26) to begin the debate between Job and his friends. As the complications in the debate unfold, the Joban author develops his argument until the issues about Job's suffering can only be resolved by God (38:1–41:34). To set up God's resolution, the Joban author uses the hymn on wisdom in 28:1–28 to emphasize that true wisdom cannot be found with man but only with God. In this hymn, the author sets forth that man does not know where to find wisdom nor its value. God alone has wisdom. With the hymn's emphasis on God's wisdom set against man's lack of wisdom, this hymn moves our focus from human wisdom to divine wisdom.⁸⁵ As such, Job 28 serves as the initial segment of a transition,⁸⁶ in 28:1–37:24, to the God speeches where God overwhelms Job with his ignorance and finite limitations in contrast to God's incomprehensible wisdom and incomparable power.⁸⁷ In placing the Elihu speeches between the wisdom hymn and the God speeches, Elihu, the last representative of human wisdom, is set up as a foil for God, the source of true wisdom. Like Job and his three friends, Elihu gives a final demonstration of the failure of human wisdom in fathoming the true wisdom in dealing with Job's suffering.⁸⁸

Third, if Elihu's concept of the disciplinary use of suffering is a part of the solution to Job's suffering, this is never suggested in the sections of Job having a bearing on its normative message.⁸⁹ In both of his speeches (38:2–40:2; 40:7–41:34), God overwhelms Job with rhetorical questions about his creation and management of the world. The intent of these questions is "to remind Job of the kinds of things he cannot do, and that only God can."⁹⁰ This is to say, they challenge Job's anthro-

⁸⁵Though there is some debate as to whether this wisdom hymn is produced by Job or the Joban author, we would understand that whether this hymn is the author's or Job's is not as significant as understanding that the Joban author has purposefully placed it in the climactic section of the book in order to direct our focus from human wisdom to God's wisdom. For a helpful treatment of Job 28, see Michael J. Petersen, "Job 28: The Theological Center of the Book of Job" (Ph.D. dissertation, Bob Jones University, 1994).

⁸⁶Newell, "Job," p. 99.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁸⁸William Sanford LaSor, David Alan Hubbard, and Frederic Wm. Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form and Background of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 481.

⁸⁹The sections that have a bearing on the normative message of Job include the prose pericopes, the God speeches, and Job's submissive responses to God (cf. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 321–22).

⁹⁰Carson, *How Long*, p. 171.

pocentric view of the moral order of life and substantiate a theocentric perspective. In both speeches God never mentions the subject of Job's suffering.⁹¹ We are surprised by these questions because they do not directly address the issue of Job's suffering. The Joban author appears to stress that God has no obligation to explain the "whys" of Job's suffering.⁹² Instead, the Joban author places an emphasis on God's sovereign freedom. God's activities spring freely from his perfections and plan. God is not bound by man or man's wisdom. He chose to create and sustain the universe. He chose to have Job suffer and not to reveal the specific reasons for it.⁹³ God leaves the "whys" of Job's suffering hidden in his mysterious, secret plans.⁹⁴ Since God and the Joban author have not chosen to reveal the "whys" of Job's suffering to Job, we conclude that the disciplinary view of suffering undermines the normative message of the book of Job.

In concluding our discussion of the Joban author's theological emphases, we have seen that in some cases Elihu is in agreement with the author's *Tendenz*, and in other cases Elihu is in disagreement. These disparities between Elihu and the Joban author demonstrate that the Elihu speeches cannot be taken as completely normative in developing the book's message. In addition, I am persuaded from our examination of the Joban author's theological emphases that excessive focus on Elihu's theological contribution to the book has clouded the significance of his function in the book. Wilson is correct when he asserts that "a common fallacy is to ignore the crucial distinction between what Elihu contributes to the debate, and what his speeches contribute to the book as a whole."⁹⁵ Elihu's contribution to the book as a whole is to be found in his transitional function between the dialogue (3:1–31:40) and the God speeches.

ELIHU'S TRANSITIONAL FUNCTION

My thesis in this study is that the Elihu speeches contribute to the design of Job by serving primarily as a transition from the dialogue among Job's three friends to the Yahweh speeches. As such, the Elihu

⁹¹Ryken, *Words of Delight*, p. 351.

⁹²David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco: Word, 1989), pp. xlv–xlvi.

⁹³LaSor, Hubbard, Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, pp. 493–94.

⁹⁴Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 322.

⁹⁵Wilson, "The Role of Elihu," p. 87. McKay has stated the issue in this way: "Over-concentration on Elihu's doctrinal beliefs is bound to obscure his role in the unfolding of the drama" ("Elihu," p. 167).

speeches have a dual function. That is, they provide a summary of the content of the dialogue, with most of Elihu's ideas serving as a recapitulation of earlier views, and they serve as a preparation for the God speeches.⁹⁶

Elihu's Summary Role

Having assumed the role of an arbiter, Elihu attempts to bring a resolution to Job's argument. He attempts to do this by citing Job's key arguments and by interacting with them. Though Elihu undoubtedly sees himself as fulfilling this role, the Joban author invites us to view Elihu not solely from the vantage point of what he says but how he functions to support the Joban author's theological emphases. Our author uses Elihu's role as an arbiter to provide a needed summary for the cycles of speeches. Elihu's summary function can be developed in two ways.

Elihu's Citation of Job's Key Arguments

In performing his self-appointed role as arbiter, Elihu cites Job's key arguments. The foundation for Elihu's argumentation in his first three speeches is his repeated citation of the basic tenets of Job's position, his innocency versus God's justice (33:8–11; 34:5–6; 35:2).⁹⁷ This approach by Elihu is a major shift from the approach of the three friends. Given the extended nature of the three cycles of speeches and Job's persuasive, verbose presentation of his innocency in 28:1–31:40, the key issues of the debate may be lost in the emotion and verbosity of the debate. Elihu's repeated citation of the basic tenets of Job's position has a beneficial literary effect in preserving Job's key tension. While listening to the debate in 3:1–31:40, Elihu has preserved Job's major tension through a synthesis from his many arguments. Elihu's synthesis is useful for the development of the Joban author's message, who uses Elihu's summary to develop the book's plot.⁹⁸

We should understand that the Joban author's selection and arrangement of the Elihu material, while accurately preserving its historicity, reflects his use of this as a summation of Job's position.⁹⁹ If

⁹⁶While developing his argument with different details, Wilson has recently argued for the Elihu speeches having the same dual function ("The Role of the Elihu Speeches," pp. 89–94).

⁹⁷Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament As Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p. 540.

⁹⁸LaSor, Hubbard, Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, p. 485.

⁹⁹See Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible As Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), pp. 63–65. In a biblical author's literary shaping, we should under-

we remove the Elihu speeches from the book of Job, we would have God immediately speaking after Job's oath of innocence. We would perhaps lose sight of Job's key argument. Job's presentation in 28:1–31:40, especially his concluding oath of innocence in 31:1–40, is so compelling we are forcefully ensnared by his perspective.¹⁰⁰ Elihu forces us out of Job's perspective and reminds us that the key issues are Job's innocency and God's justice. With the threefold repetition of this summarized citation (33:8–11, 34:5–6, 35:2), the Joban author uses Elihu to demonstrate that Job's tension is essential in understanding the book's development of its plot.¹⁰¹ Elihu's repetitious citations keep us informed about the real tension in Job's position.

Elihu's Reflection of the Friends' Wisdom

In presenting himself as an arbiter, Elihu's point is that he has the solution for Job's conflict. Since the Joban author has given us additional details in the prologue, details that Job, his three friends, and Elihu are unaware of, about the heavenly exchange between God and Satan, we realize that any solution assuming a mechanical view of retribution theology is myopic. Unlike the friends, Elihu does not suggest a list of hypothetical sins. Nevertheless, he assumes a strict dogma of retribution theology (33:17, 27; 34:11–12, 25–27, 37; 36:5–15).¹⁰² While Elihu more thoroughly defends God's justice, his defense is predicated upon the same mechanical retribution theology as the friends. Thus, in effect, Elihu reflects the same theology as the friends.

Elihu's similarities with the friends are also reflected by his use of their arguments. Although he insists he will not use the friends' arguments (32:14), Elihu, nevertheless, draws significantly from their arguments.¹⁰³ In 34:11–12 Elihu uses Bildad's argument from 8:3–4 that God could not pervert justice. In dealing with God's transcendence in

stand that there are two essential elements, the historical material and the author's divinely-given theological interpretation of the material. The historicity of an event places certain limitations on a biblical author, and the author's message controls how he selects and arranges the historical material. Both of these elements are necessary in maintaining a high view of bibliology.

¹⁰⁰W. Lee Humphreys, *The Tragic Vision and the Hebrew Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), p. 110.

¹⁰¹Ryken, *How to Read*, pp. 59–60.

¹⁰²So also Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 204; and *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, s.v. "Job, Theology of," by Greg W. Parsons, p. 417.

¹⁰³Moshe Greenberg, "Job," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 296.

35:5–8, Elihu draws heavily from Eliphaz in 22:2–11, with 35:6 being cited from Job in 7:20. Even Elihu's disciplinary view of suffering is drawn from Eliphaz in 5:17–18. Though Elihu freely expands, in 33:19–24 and 36:8–11, Eliphaz's teaching on suffering, he again appears to reflect Eliphaz's argumentation.¹⁰⁴

The Joban author's emphasis on Elihu's similarities with the friends suggests that Elihu is the youthful epitome of conventional wisdom. In presenting himself as an arbiter, Elihu is in effect portraying himself as a sage (32:6–9). He asserts in 33:33 that he has "wisdom" to teach Job. However, Elihu does not view himself simply as any ordinary sage but as a sage *par excellence*, "one who is perfect in knowledge" (36:4), a description that he uses only one other time to describe God (37:16). Though Elihu undoubtedly views his wisdom as divine, we must recognize that this is not the Joban author's view of Elihu's wisdom, since Elihu's message is inconsistent with the normative message of the Joban author. The difference between Elihu's words and the author's use of his words creates a tension. With his presentation of the Elihu material, the Joban author arranges the Elihu speeches to highlight Elihu's adaptation of the friends' arguments. This suggests that not only is Elihu presumptuous but that his wisdom is also finite and limited.

By assuming a mechanical view of retribution theology and by using some of the friends' arguments, Elihu demonstrates that youthful wisdom is an adaptation of older wisdom. When we read the speeches of Job's three "comforters" (2:11–13), we see their wisdom is an "irony of orthodoxy."¹⁰⁵ Though their teaching is orthodox doctrine (God is just, he does reward good and punish evil), their application is an unorthodox pronouncement of judgment on an innocent man. They preach orthodoxy, "but all this orthodoxy is wide of the mark because it does not apply to the specific case of Job."¹⁰⁶ Since Elihu is a youthful embodiment of the friends, Elihu's wisdom also reflects this same "irony of orthodoxy." However, Elihu's use of the friends' arguments creates an additional tension reflecting his presumptuous nature, for he has claimed that he would not answer with the friends' arguments (32:14). The Joban author uses these tensions to suggest that youthful wisdom is incapable of handling Job's problem just as was true for the conventional wisdom of the friends. In the final analysis, finite wisdom is unable to comprehend the mysterious wisdom of the infinite God.

¹⁰⁴For a thorough treatment of the many passages in Job from which Elihu draws his material, see Freedman, "The Elihu Speeches," pp. 55–57; and Snaith, *Job*, pp. 75–85.

¹⁰⁵Ryken, *How to Read*, p. 56.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

Elihu's Preparatory Role

While Elihu is delivering his fourth speech, a storm develops in the background. As the storm becomes more prominent, Elihu sees this meteorological phenomenon as a reflection of God's power and wisdom. Being overwhelmed by this display of God's majesty, Elihu shifts direction in 36:22–37:24 from God's justice to a description of his power and wisdom. Though Elihu's preparatory role is drawn from the overall effect of all four of his speeches, the material in 36:22–37:24 provides a strong theocentric perspective in anticipation of God. In examining Elihu's preparatory role, I will demonstrate that Elihu is a rhetorical and theological preparation for God.

Elihu's Summation of Job's Position

By repeatedly summarizing Job's position, Elihu forces us to focus on the primary issues from the debate between Job and his friends and not to be drawn into sympathy with Job's oath of innocence. As such, we recognize that the key issues are the tension between Job's innocence and God's justice, and we recognize that Job's request for a legal confrontation with God is to be discarded. Elihu's review jolts us out of Job's world. For God's speeches to have a forceful effect, both Job and his audience must be forced out of Job's limited world to God's vast world that takes into account heaven and earth. As Humphrey's has summarized Elihu's role,

The cosmos the hero defines, large as it is, cannot be all-sufficient, that it is not large enough to take in heaven and earth. Job's frame of meaning cannot be all in all.... Elihu's presence, ill-timed as his appearance is, prepares us for this lesson.¹⁰⁷

As such, Elihu's repetition of Job's position prepares the reader for what God has to say.

A Theological Foil

In bringing his oath of innocence to a conclusion, Job has demanded that God appear in a legal setting and give him a written document of innocence. With this type of oath, a person would be demanded to appear in court. By using this legal metaphor, Job has in effect demanded an appearance of God. Consequently, we expect God but get Elihu. Thus Elihu's appearance postpones God's. If Job's demand in 31:35–37 creates a sense that God must immediately appear and if the book's message affirms that God has the resolution to Job's quest, then

¹⁰⁷Humphreys, *The Tragic Vision*, p. 111.

Elihu's appearance is anticlimactic. We should understand that Elihu's anticlimactic appearance serves the Joban author's purpose of using him as a "theological foil" for God.¹⁰⁸ As a theological foil, the Elihu material is "a deliberate anticlimax, which retards the plot and leads the audience to expect a plot development which is the opposite of what actually happens."¹⁰⁹

With Elihu's postponement of God's appearance, Job's audience despairs of hearing from God. When Elihu speaks, the substance of his words heightens this sense of despair. Elihu insists that God does not respond to requests from people like Job (35:4–13). Consequently, Job's only hope for satisfaction, according to Elihu, is to have an arbiter to respond to his case, and to submit to the arbiter's resolution. In 32:6–22 and 33:3–7, Elihu has presented himself as a divinely sent arbiter. Since Elihu is convinced that God is beyond Job's reach (37:23), Elihu is confident that the resolution he brings to the table will be the answer for Job. If there are any questions about the substance of Elihu's resolution, he reminds Job and his friends that he is one who is "perfect in knowledge" (36:4). Thus Elihu does not see himself as a preparation for God but rather as providing the true resolution.

Instead of taking Elihu at face value, I am suggesting that our focus should be on his function in the book. This is to say, the issue focuses on how does the author use Elihu, and not how he views himself. By emphasizing the tensions between the Joban author's theological emphases and Elihu's deviations from these, the Joban author's use of Elihu as a rival resolution sets off the true resolution of God.¹¹⁰

Postponement of the Resolution

The position of the Elihu speeches postpones God's resolution.¹¹¹ This postponement adds an element of suspense. In addition, the postponement also supports a major theological tenet of the book, that is, God's freedom.¹¹² In 31:1–40 Job has taken an oath of innocence and has challenged God to meet him face to face in a legal setting. Job has forcefully challenged God to put his indictment in writing. If God would give him a written statement, Job would wear it like a crown. If God grants this hearing, Job maintains that he would present his case

¹⁰⁸Wilson, "The Role of the Elihu Speeches," p. 90.

¹⁰⁹Habel, *Job*, p. 33.

¹¹⁰Wilson, "The Role of the Elihu Speeches," p. 93.

¹¹¹Greenberg, "Job," p. 296.

¹¹²*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., s.v. "Job," by J. E. Hartley, 2:1073.

before God as a prince (31:35–37). With this final oath, Job has given himself an equal standing with God. For Yahweh to have responded immediately to Job’s emotionally charged oath of innocence would have strongly suggested that Job was in control. If God responds to Job’s immediate demands and, then, gives a message on his sovereign rule and his freedom in ruling, God’s freedom and sovereignty would be seriously undermined.¹¹³ However, God in his sovereign rule freely takes the initiative in responding to Job, not immediately or in a legal setting as Job demanded, but in God’s time and in God’s forum—a storm. By countering the sense that God is compelled to respond to Job’s demands, the postponement provided by the Elihu material prepares for a meeting with God according to God’s conditions and not man’s.¹¹⁴

A Connection Between God’s Justice and Sovereignty over His Creation

As a storm apparently develops, Elihu shifts directions from a defense of God’s justice, 36:2–21, to a description of God’s power and wisdom in controlling the elements of nature, 36:22–37:24. Elihu appears to broaden his perspective of God’s justice to include God’s sovereign power over the elements of nature. The connection between God’s justice and sovereign power are made clear in 37:23, “The Almighty—we cannot find him; he is exalted in power (כֹּחַ) and justice (מִשְׁפָּט); he will not violate abundant righteousness.”¹¹⁵ By connecting “justice” with “power,” Elihu provides a transition for the God speeches where God affirms that there is a connection between his control of both the natural realm and the moral realm. As in God’s ordering of “the natural world, God’s governing of the moral world is broadened far beyond a narrow understanding of retributive justice.”¹¹⁶

A Theocentric Perspective on Meteorology

Elihu’s final speech has a strong theocentric perspective that anticipates God’s speeches. There are three similarities between 36:22–37:24 and the God speeches. First, there is a nucleus of terms that are common expressions used in both Elihu’s and God’s meteorological contexts; for example, snow is referred to as שֶׁלֶג (37:6; 38:22), clouds as עָב (36:29; 37:11, 16; 38:34) and עָנָן (37:11, 15; 38:9), ice as קָרָח (37:10; 38:29),

¹¹³Johns, *Elihu Speeches*, pp. 182–83.

¹¹⁴Newell, “Job,” p. 102.

¹¹⁵On the use of the term מִשְׁפָּט to describe God’s sovereign rule, see Scholnick, “The Meaning of *Mispat* in the Book of Job,” pp. 526–28.

¹¹⁶Wilson, “The Role of the Elihu Speeches,” p. 94.

and rain as קָטַר (36:27; 37:6; 38:26, 28).

Second, the content between each speech is parallel. Elihu asserts that God's age is unsearchable (36:26). God makes the same point as Elihu through his use of rhetorical questions in 38:4–24. Since God is eternal and created the earth, he knows all the details about creation (38:4, 12); conversely Job was not alive at the time of creation and, therefore, does not know the details about creation. God with a touch of sarcasm reminds Job that he should know the details about creation since the number of his days is "so many" (38:21). Another parallel is seen by comparing 36:27–28 with 38:25. In the former, Elihu draws attention to the coming rain, and, in the latter, God chides Job about who cuts a channel for the rain. Another parallel relates to the benefits from rain. Elihu maintains that God uses rain to provide nourishment for the nations (36:31). God asserts that he uses rain to bring nourishment for desolate areas (38:27).¹¹⁷

Third, in this meteorological context in 37:15–20, Elihu challenges Job with a number of rhetorical questions. In this context, Elihu's use of this form stresses man's finiteness.¹¹⁸ At the same time, these rhetorical questions "point Job toward the world of order and beauty which manifest God's creative and providential power."¹¹⁹ God uses the same technique as Elihu in 38:1–39:30, 40:2, 8, 24; 41:1–7, 10–14. God's point in using this rhetorical device is to overwhelm Job into recognizing his creative and providential sovereign power and wisdom. Elihu's literary use of rhetorical questions also anticipates God's use of the same technique.

With the coming of a storm, Elihu's shifts his focus to the storm and God's control of it. This shift creates a mood of praise to God. Elihu's theocentric emphasis is so moving that when he finishes, we are ready to hear from God. For Elihu, "God's creative power is not simply represented by storm, but is vitally present in it."¹²⁰ Elihu's theocentric emphasis is useful for God's message to Job, for it restores God to the center of Job's thinking and prepares him to hear from God.

CONCLUSION

From this study, we can conclude that Elihu is neither a theological bigot nor a theological hero. The Joban author has used him for his own literary and theological purposes. We have interpreted Elihu's contribu-

¹¹⁷For an elaboration on the three parallels I have mentioned as well as seven other parallels, see Johns, *Elihu Speeches*, pp. 169–74.

¹¹⁸Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, p. 42.

¹¹⁹Tate, "The Speeches of Elihu," p. 495.

¹²⁰McKay, "Elihu," p. 170.

tion in terms of his function in the book, rather than interpreting him strictly in terms of his own words and self-appointed role. Consequently, the Joban author uses Elihu to serve as a transition from the dialogue to the Yahweh speeches. As a transition, the Elihu speeches serve a twofold purpose of summarizing the content of the dialogue, with many of Elihu's ideas serving as a recapitulation of earlier views, and of preparing for the God speeches. With Elihu's summary role, the Joban author basically uses him to review the key issues of the debate, Job's innocence and God's justice. With Elihu's preparatory role, the Joban author significantly uses him to provide a theocentric perspective of God's control of the natural realms and to serve as a theological foil for God.