

SUMMARY OF JOB 30 – 36:23

Revd Dr Elaine Colechin

... that's me in the corner,
that's me in the spotlight
losin' my religion,
tryin' to keep up with you
and I don't know if I can do it.
Oh no, I've said too much,
I haven't said enough.

After much backwards and forwards between Job and his “friends”, Job concludes his defence. Contrasting his past honour and prosperity with his suffering, Job expounds his deep anguish one more time, speaking of not only the physical pain he suffered due to his ailments, but the mental and soul felt hurt he had experienced as his so-called friends had spoken. From the depths of his misery, Job declares that God has abandoned him. This is demonstrated in how everything is the opposite to what it should be in chapter 30. In the previous discourses, Job's friends have defined this abandonment as God's judgement. In Job's eyes, how can this be true as he is innocent and defends his integrity to the last. In chapter 31, Job lists the many sins he had avoided and declared his commitment to being righteous. In all that Job had done in his life, to the best of his ability and knowledge, he had honoured God and lived blamelessly. If there was guilt he had not repented for, (remember back in chapter 1 where we were told Job would rise early every morning to make offerings to God for any wrongs of the previous day), Job calls for God to speak and tell him of those iniquities.

Job finally falls silent, having said possibly too much, or maybe not enough!

We might expect that this would be the point that God would finally make an appearance. Everyone had stopped talking, and so God had the chance to finally be heard. But no, instead of God, into the scene of Job sat in conference with his friends walks a young man no one seems to know or had previously observed. Elihu had apparently been watching all that had passed between Job and his friends, and he could not stay silent anymore.

Now the story of Job does not really need the interjection of Elihu, and so it is thought that his speeches were a later addition, maybe by the same author or another. However, they do pick up some of the loose threads left by the speeches of Job's friends. They also suggest that wisdom does not always come with age. Our young people too can make valuable arguments. Although, in the case of Elihu, one might argue the arrogance of his youth outweighed his wisdom.

Elihu enters the fray as an angry young man, believing he knew much better than Job and his friends and that he could settle this once and for all. He rebukes both Job and his friends, and self-styles himself as God's spokesperson!

Elihu's arguments are based on two premises: 1. God is just; and 2. God is great. Elihu also asserts that God communicates with humanity in different ways including dreams, suffering, and warnings. God does this to guide them and save them from destruction.

In chapter 34, Elihu focuses very much on the justice and sovereignty of God. He rebukes Job for questioning God's righteousness and insists that God cannot do wrong. Elihu defends God's actions as just, even when humans fail to understand them. He does this through drawing Job's and our attention to God being creator. This is something that will come to the forefront later in the story. In opening up the idea of God as omnipotent and omniscient, Elihu makes the suggestion that as creator, God is not accountable to humanity, but God is impartial. Consequently, this, apparently, clearly shows God as just as well as almighty.

As Job sits in the ashes, suffering for no reason, Elihu's logic does seem a bit flimsy and does not get any stronger as, in chapter 35, he argues that human righteousness or wickedness does not affect God. If God is immune to human actions and behaviour, then one would assume that God is not going to react. There is no reason for judgement and this thing called sin that Elihu and Job's friends have been worried about becomes unimportant. Yes, the actions of one person will impact other people, but given Elihu's argument, does God care? The fact God has remained silent, so far, may suggest an answer.

Despite tying himself up into very similar knots to Job's friends and being pretty sure that Job's problems are all about Job having done something wrong which has displeased God, in chapter 35, Elihu alludes to the fact that bad things can happen for no reason. What Elihu says about this is that God uses those experiences to teach and educate. This is the greatness of God and something that we should not overlook.

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Lyrics from "Losing my Religion" by REM released as a single in 1991