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Elihu—A Witness in Defense of Jah

It may sound strange to think of “Jah God” (Psalms 68:18) needing any kind of “witness” to stand up on his behalf, especially one made of flesh. But, really, when you consider the range of accusations that are made against the Maker of all things by men and woman today the need for witnesses of Jah becomes apparent. In the history presented to us in the Bible book of Job, Jah was also wrongly accused by the now famous man named Job from the “land of Uz” (Job 1:1). Is this same story we are told of a young man named “Elihu,” who stood up on Jah’s behalf against Job and against several others who spoke wrongly about God in part because of circumstances and judgments that they wrongly attributed to Jah himself. Elihu was one of Jah’s witnesses against these men.

The name “Elihu” actually refers to three distinct persons mentioned in several books of the Bible (for example, 1 Samuel 1:1 and 1 Chronicles 12:20). The most well-known of these is the Elihu mentioned above from the story of Job. This Elihu was also known as “the son of Barachel the Buzite of the family of Ram” (32:2). It is really a great irony that this Elihu is the most well-known, however, because as we will see below it was never Elihu’s intention to become a figure of such renown. As we will see, he was compelled to take on his role when it became apparent that those older, and presumably wiser than he was, refused to take a stand for what could be shown to be right for good reasons.

Before giving attention to the actions of Elihu and thereby becoming better acquainted with him, I will provide some of the story’s context. This will help us better understand Elihu’s intentions so that we can learn from him how we might act under similar conditions. As noted above, the Book of Job (the date and authorship of which is uncertain) tells the history of a man named “Job” from the “land of Uz” (Job 1:1). The exact location of Uz is unknown, though the Watchtower Society’s Bible encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 2 (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988), page 1145, under “Uz,” gives a reasonable explanation for believing that Uz was “E[ast] of the Promised Land and near Edom, somewhere in N[orth] Arabia.”

Job himself was a man whom Satan (a being who appeared before God together with God’s other “sons” [Job 1:6]) ‘set his heart upon’ because Job was “blameless and upright, fearing God and turning aside from bad” (Job 1:7, 8). Based on this, it appears that it was Job’s righteous character that presented Satan with an opportunity to challenge the integrity of those loyal to God. Indeed, after God referred to the good

character of Job, Satan spoke to Jah with these words, “For a change, thrust out your hand, please, and touch everything he has [and see] whether he will not curse you to your very face.”—Job 1:11.

It appears, then, that Satan saw in Job an opportunity to make a point that had something to do with Satan’s view of man and why some of them chose to serve God. Jah appears also to have seen something in Satan’s challenge that was important enough to let the proposed test take place. But Jah himself refused to be the one directly responsible for any wicked treatment toward his servant: “Accordingly Jehovah said to Satan: ‘Look! Everything that he has is in your hand. Only against him himself do not thrust out your hand!’ So Satan went out away from the person of Jehovah.” Yet, because of the heavenly order put in place by Jah, and perhaps also because of man’s ability since Adam’s and Eve’s sins to know good from bad (Genesis 3:22), this level of testing was permitted before God and before his “sons.”

After receiving authority from Jehovah to test Job against everything but “him himself,” Satan did indeed proceed to “touch everything” Job had, from the lives of his attendants (1:15, 16, 17), to his cattle, she-asses, sheep, and camels (1:13–17), even to the lives of his sons and his daughters (1:18). Satan took all of them away and then waited to see how Job would respond, how his view of Jah would be affected by what Satan had been allowed to do. Yet, Job proved faithful to Jah under all of these trials by ‘not sinning or ascribing anything improper to God.’—Job 1:22.

But when these losses were not enough to cause Job to ‘curse God to his very face,’ Satan extended the challenge further to that which Jah had previously denied him, that is, against the person of Job himself. Satan contended that Job’s love for his own life would be enough to cause him to curse God, showing that ultimately man cared more for himself than for the one who gave him life. Though Jah again refused to let Satan put Job to death, he did allow Satan to touch Job as far as his “bone and his flesh” (Job 2:5–6). So that is exactly what Satan did: He “struck Job with a malignant boil from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.”—Job 2:7.

After all his losses, and now after having been struck physically, Job proceeded to take a “fragment of earthenware with which to scrape himself” and he sat “among the ashes” (Job 2:8). But through it all Job refused to “curse God and die,” as even his own wife admonished him to do (Job 2:9–10). No matter how bad things got for him personally, Job would not go that far, even though he could not rightly understand what was happening to him and who was really to blame.—Job 16:11.

Eventually others heard about what had befallen Job, and three of his “friends” (Hebrew: *rea*) came to visit him (Job 2:11). The names of these three are Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, and they are said to have come to

‘sympathize and comfort’ Job. But ‘they did not recognize him’ because of what Satan had done (Job 2:11–12). Nevertheless, like good friends “they kept sitting with [Job] on the earth seven days and seven nights, and there was no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that the pain was very great.”—Job 2:13.

But, unlike true friends, the sympathy and comfort shown initially by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar waned during the course of Job’s great suffering, as he attempted to understand his great losses and affliction that had come upon him. Instead of turning aside only from Job’s self-righteousness (Job 32:1), Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar went on to ‘speak what was untruthful concerning Jah’ (42:7–8). It is in this context where Job struggles with his great affliction and self-righteousness and where his three friends speak what is not truthful about Jah when in responding to Job, that Elihu, son of Barachel, speaks.

Realizing that Job had “declared his own soul righteous rather than God” (Job 32:2), and that his three friends “had not found an answer but [instead] proceeded to pronounce God wicked” (Job 32:3), Elihu argues:

Job 32:6–10 (NWT)

Young I am in days and YOU men are aged. That is why I drew back and was afraid to declare my knowledge to YOU men. I said, ‘Days themselves should speak, and a multitude of years are what should make wisdom known. ‘Surely it is the spirit in mortal men and the breath of the Almighty [that] gives them understanding. It is not those merely abundant in days that prove wise, nor those just old that understand judgment. Therefore I said, ‘Do listen to me. I shall declare my knowledge, even I.’

Elihu was compelled to speak out against Job and against his three “friends” even though “they were older than he was in days” (Job 32:4). Elihu could not keep silent when truth was not being spoken concerning the Most High, when Jah himself was under attack. He ‘opened his lips in answer’ and defended Jah against those who, whether unknowingly or not, spoke untruthfully about God. Critical to being able to do so was Elihu’s ability and desire to remain impartial, to not show favor to any man regardless of his position or titles:

Job 32:21–22 (NWT)

Let me not, please, show partiality to a man; and on an earthling man I shall not bestow a title; for I certainly do not know how I can bestow a title; easily my Maker would carry me away.

While it is understandable that people might first look to those accomplished in a particular field of study for insight on a particular matter, to rely entirely on “scholars” or to show partiality to men or women just because of their “title” would be a serious mistake. We are all, no matter how accomplished, subject to error and to our own

desires. So caution should always be exercised, especially when it comes to matters pertaining to God. For example, given Elihu's comments above, it would be a mistake to exalt or let be exalted those who today have received or 'bestowed upon themselves a title' in a religious sense, such as "Dr.," "Pastor," or anything but "brother" (Matthew 23:8). Similarly, it is also inappropriate to *call yourself* "faithful and discreet," as if we ourselves can make such a determination, when in fact that is something which belongs to Jah or to Jesus Christ "when he comes."—Matthew 24:46; Greek: *elthon*.

The self-righteousness involved in giving oneself a title or appointing oneself to a position when that appointment should come from someone else is the very trap Elihu sought to avoid. He not only kept himself from this snare, but he also wisely chose to defend Job only where he was in the right before God. By doing this, Elihu prevented Job's self-righteousness from lessening the greatness and the righteousness of Jah in the eyes of others. Elihu thus showed greater concern for God than he did for any man, including himself.

What matters most is not our "title" or any position we may have or think we have. What matters is how we represent ourselves in our speech and in our conduct to others and what we can demonstrate based on the best available reasons to most likely be true. It is a trap to think that we can use any real or imagined position as a substitute for good reasons when trying to convince others of what they should believe, and how they should live where it concerns God himself. This is essentially what Paul had in mind, I think, when he wrote: "For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he is deceiving his own mind. *But let each one prove what his own work is*" (Galatians 6:3, 4). Elihu had a similar disposition. That is why he invited a response to his words, knowing that he was no better than those to whom he was about to speak. Only his good reasons might be better than the reasons others had given:

Job 33:5–7 (NWT)

If you are able, make reply to me, array [words] before me; do take your station.
 Look! I am to the [true] God just what you are; from the clay I was shaped, I too.
 Look! No frightfulness in me will terrify you, and no pressure by me will be heavy upon you.

In speaking this way, Elihu was able to take the attention away from himself so that whatever he said only served to highlight the righteousness and the justice of the living God, Jah. Like Elihu, then, those who know and who love Jah today should not put "pressure" or a heavy burden on the shoulders of anyone looking for answers. That does not mean we tolerate indecision when good reasons have been given for a sufficient period of time. What it means is we give our forth our good reasons, we let others speak, and then we leave the matter in the hands of Jah rather than trying to coerce

anyone to do something simply because of who we think we are. In fact, we are all simply “from the clay.”

Job’s three friends only added to Job’s burden by arguing that God himself was the cause of Job’s suffering. Indeed, they argued that it was just on God’s part to cause such suffering! So, too, many today have put unnecessary burdens “pressure” on others who simply want to do what is right before Jah and Jesus. These false shepherds also, at the same time, refuse to have open discussion like Elihu about questions of genuine concern. It is just such false teachings and misrepresentation of God and Christ that has led many today and in times past to ‘set aside the commandment of God in order to retain their ungodly traditions’—Mark 7:9.

Again, it is often the case that those who act these ways do so because they perceive that they have a privileged position before God, that they have been appointed by him as his special messengers or representatives. Elihu knew that God has his messengers. But he also knew that those who truly speak for Jah would do so knowing that God had rescued them “from going down into the pit” (Job 33:24). In other words, any such messenger from God was him– or herself one whom God had saved and therefore mindful of how he or she should represent him– or herself:

Job 33:23–24, 27–28 (NWT)

If there exists for him a messenger, a spokesman, one out of a thousand, to tell to man his uprightness, then he favors him and says, ‘Let him off from going down into the pit! I have found a ransom! ... He will sing to men and say, ‘I have sinned; and what is upright I have perverted, and it certainly was not the proper thing for me. He has redeemed my soul from passing into the pit, and my life itself will see the light.’

Keeping the above perspective will likely prevent anyone from thinking more of him– or herself than he or she should think, especially if such thoughts occur to anyone during a time of service to God. For the turning back of man or woman from their sins and any enlightenment they receive thereafter is by God alone, not of ourselves, as Elihu told Job:

Job 33:29–30 (NWT)

Look! All these things God performs, two times, three times, in the case of an able-bodied man, to turn his soul back from the pit, that he may be enlightened with the light of those living.

Any resulting enlightenment should never cause a person to forget how close they came to “the pit,” and it should moderate a person’s view of him– or herself in order to keep he or she from becoming self-righteous.

Elihu knew that no matter how righteous Job was before Satan's tests had come upon him that Job was indeed now headed toward "the pit," in part because Job was "certainly on his way to companionship with practicers of what is hurtful" (Job 34:8). As a result of his condition Job had come to believe that it was 'not profitable to take pleasure in God' (Job 34:9). Elihu corrected him, however, and he rejected any suggestion that Jah would "act wickedly" or "unjustly."—Job 34:10.

Elihu allowed the reasons for Job's sufferings to remain entirely with what he understood as the higher ways of God, but without making the mistake of directly attributing the condition of Job to the will and desire of Jah. Elihu knew that Job's new perspective, resulting from his great sufferings, one where he now asked, "What benefit do I have more than by my sinning?" (Job 35:3), was wrong no matter how bad things had gotten:

Job 35:5–7 (NWT)

Look up to heaven and see, and behold the clouds, [that] they are indeed higher than you. If you actually sin, what do you accomplish against him? And [if] your revolts actually increase, what do you do to him? If you are really in the right, what do you give him, or what does he receive from your own hand?

If we sin then its consequences will come upon us. If we act righteously then righteousness will come back to us from the hand of Jah. But to think of either act as affecting God in any enduring way is foolish. Jah loves us, but his love and his ways are higher than ours and so we must not lower them.

On the other hand, Job's and our responses to Satan's challenges apparently have a significant impact on the person of Jah in the eyes of others, and what we choose to do can in some sense either further or cause him to adjust his intentions where we are concerned, as we see in the cases of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–4, 13–19). In some respect, realized in a greater sense in the "realms above" (John 8:23), there is more going on than any of us likely realize.

The history of Job shows us in part that it is Satan who challenges the basis for a person's service to Jah, perhaps to justify, ultimately, his own choice not to do so. The account of Job further shows that there is a tendency on the part of man to blame God for what we do not understand. But in allowing Satan to bring forth wickedness Jah provides an opportunity for each of us to show who we are, truly, even though imperfect. It is a legal case we are involved in before God, one that involves our faith in the 'ransom Jah has found' for us in Jesus Christ (Job 33:24; Acts 10:43). Every trial of man, from Job to Christ Jesus, from those brought against you to those that come upon me, any "legal case with his people" (Micah 6:2) takes place before Jah himself:

Job 35:14–15 (NWT)

The legal case is before him, and so you should wait anxiously for him. And now because his anger has not called for an accounting, he has also not taken note of the extreme rashness.

There is always time to turn back from our wickedness. There is always an opportunity to give up committing wrongs in Jah's name. Those who cannot allow for a change of heart will themselves not be allowed one (Matthew 7:1–2). For those bearing Jah's name it is imperative that we seek him alone, and not our own wisdom and righteousness. Job sought his own righteousness, but he was also a prized servant of Jah. He simply lost sight of who and what matters most: God and his righteousness.

Elihu never lost sight of Jah or of his righteousness. He was rightly outraged at Job's conduct and at the words of Job's "friends." All of them were either too caught up in their own self-righteousness (Job) or they were unable or unwilling to speak truthfully about God (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar). Given their 'wisdom in years,' these four should have been the ones to take the lead in speaking what is right before Jah. Instead it fell to the younger Elihu to speak truthfully about God and to convince Job in particular that it was not God who "takes [us] for an enemy of his" (Job 33:10); it is not Jah who "puts [our] feet in the stocks" (Job 33:11). But God does 'let the testing go to the limit' (Job 34:36), apparently so the judgment he renders cannot be questioned.

Elihu finished his words to Job by speaking about Jah's "justice and abundance of [his] righteousness" (Job 37:23). He also considered the fact that Jah "does not regard any who are wise in [their own] heart" (Job 37:24). After this, Elihu is not mentioned again in the book of Job, and for good reason. For now it is time for Jah himself to speak (Job Chapter 38 and following). Though Job had been faithful to God in an extraordinary way before Satan's testing revealed his limitations, only after his "own eye" saw Jah in the windstorm did Job "make a retraction" and "repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Job also then prayed on behalf of his friends who spoke falsely concerning Jah. Because of Job's repentance and the fact that he never did "curse God," Jah blessed him and he did not punish Eliphaz, Bildad, or Zophar:

Job 42:10 (NWT)

And Jehovah himself turned back the captive condition of Job when he prayed in behalf of his companions, and Jehovah began to give in addition all that had been Job's, in double amount.

Elihu Books was founded in part on the spirit and disposition shown by Elihu. It was founded on the principle that Jah should be defended above all else. Jah should be defended above ourselves, above those with any titles, and even above Jah's own people, who like Job himself, no matter how righteous they may be at a given time, are

nothing unless they seek “first the kingdom and *his righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33 [emphasis added]). Indeed, who was Job without Jah? Who are we, without Jah? Men, woman, and nothing more. Let us never forget.

If Jah is spoken of falsely because of those who claim to serve and to worship him, then may remember the words of Elihu and act so that others do not wrongly say, ‘We have found wisdom and it is God that drives [them] away, not a man’ (Job 32:13). Men may sin and cause others to turn away from God, but Jah himself does no such thing. Ultimately, each of us must distinguish between the truth that comes from Jah and the lies that men speak, even in his name.—Romans 3:3.

Defending Jah above all else, as Elihu did, will keep us from thinking more of ourselves than we should. Defending his people ‘in whose righteousness we take delight’ (Job 33:32) should only be done if it does not ‘declare their or our own soul righteous rather than God.’—Job 32:2.

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***This article was re-written in large part on the date indicated, but the substance of the first article remains. This article represents my attitude and feelings as of September, 2006, only now they are presented with further reflection on my part and with adjustments to the style and presentation of what I wrote at that time.**