

# OpenTheo

## May 4th: Job 32 & 1 Peter 1:22—2:10

May 3, 2021



### Alastair Roberts

Elihu enters the fray. Living stones in a spiritual house.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>). My reflections are searchable by Bible chapter here: <https://audio.alastairadversaria.com/explore/>.

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share)).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Job 32. So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then Elihu, the son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, burned with anger.

He burned with anger at Job, because he justified himself rather than God. He burned with anger also at Job's three friends, because they had found no answer, although they had declared Job to be in the wrong. Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job, because they were older than he.

And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, he burned with anger. And Elihu, the son of Barakel the Buzite, answered and said, I am young in years, and you are aged. Therefore I was timid and afraid to declare my opinion to you.

I said, Let days speak, and many years teach wisdom. But it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand. It is not the old who are wise, nor the aged who understand what is right.

Therefore I say, Listen to me, let me also declare my opinion. Behold, I waited for your words, I listened for your wise sayings, while you searched out what to say. I gave you my attention, and behold there was none among you who refuted Job, or who answered his words.

Beware, lest you say, We have found wisdom. God may vanquish him, not a man. He has not directed his words against me, and I will not answer him with your speeches.

They are dismayed, they answer no more, they have not a word to say. And shall I wait, because they do not speak, because they stand there and answer no more? I also will answer with my share, I also will declare my opinion. For I am full of words, the spirit within me constrains me.

Behold, my belly is like wine that has no vent, like new wineskins ready to burst. I must speak, that I may find relief. I must open my lips and answer.

I will not show partiality to any man, or use flattery toward any person. For I do not know how to flatter, else my Maker would soon take me away. In Job chapter 32 the character of Elihu appears out of nowhere and then disappears once he has finished speaking at the end of chapter 37.

Some commentators argue for this reason that he was a later addition to the book. His material is weaker, they claim, and if his speeches dropped out we would have no idea that he was there at all. He is mentioned in neither the prologue nor the epilogue, nor in the speeches of any of the other speaking characters.

Indeed many have argued that his material is a later addition to the book. The voice of some later writer is intruding into the text to reassert some sort of orthodoxy. Troubled by the arguments of Job and the failure of the arguments of the friends, they want to insert a different position.

David Clines, although he significantly reorders the material of Elihu's speeches, placing them earlier in the text before Job's concluding speeches, argues against this assessment. He disputes the claim that the material belonging to Elihu is of a lower literary quality. He questions that the supposed intrusion of Elihu's material dissipates the dramatic tension of the text.

Indeed it could well be argued that it increases it. He also notes that if Elihu was added at a later point in the history of the text, the person who added him could also have added him within the prologue and the epilogue, so his absence from those parts doesn't really weigh strongly one way or another. Francis Anderson also argues that such

arguments are not compelling.

He writes, they misunderstand the role of Elihu as a protagonist rather than as an adjudicator. He is the first of two who record their impressions of what has been said in chapters 3-31. Elihu gives the human estimate.

Yahweh gives the divine appraisal. There is no need for the Lord to comment also on Elihu's summing up. His silence on this point is no more a problem than the absence of any final showdown with the Satan at the end.

Beyond his place in the structure of the book as a whole, the character of Elihu is one that has divided commentators. Most commentators see him as a pompous character, an opinionated young man who has overinflated views of his own importance. John Hartley follows others in referring to him as comic relief to break the tension.

Gerald Janssen argues that his position is undermined by virtue of style, framing and content. His voice is subverted because God speaks over his head and gives a different assessment of the situation. He is ignored in the epilogue.

He repeats many of the Friends' claims. He is verbose and his speeches have a lower literary quality. His account of Job's situation can also be falsified.

Some however do have more favourable readings of the character of Elihu. Clines observes the way that of all the people who speak, he is the one who is most sympathetic and generous towards Job. He really does acknowledge some legitimacy to Job's positions.

Eric Robinson makes a far stronger argument in this direction. He writes, He argues wisdom that prepares the sufferer to be in God's presence, eventually leading to full restoration. Robinson argues that after the cycle of speeches break down and the Friends are silenced by Job, the conversation has ended at an unsatisfactory point and the voice of Elihu is that of a mediator who will take up and move forward the broken down conversation, moving us to the point where God himself speaks into it.

There is a drawn out introduction to Elihu and his speech in verses 1-5. Although the last speech of the Friends was back in chapter 25 with Bildad, verse 1 mentions that the three men cease to answer Job. Elihu is introduced to us with his patronym, his people and his family.

Elihu, Buz and Ram are all names that we find elsewhere in scripture used of different people. Elihu is a name that we see of Hebrews in places like 1 Samuel chapter 1. In Genesis chapter 22 verse 21, Buz is the name of a nephew of Abraham. In Jeremiah chapter 25 verse 23, we also see the name Buz.

In that context, associated with people of Edom, the giving of these various names

alongside those of Elihu maybe suggests that although he was a young man, he had pedigree and status within the society on account of his family. Elihu's response to the whole situation is one of anger. He burns with anger.

He burns with anger at Job. He burns with anger at Job's friends. Once again, for a fourth time, we are told that he burned with anger at the situation in verse 5. Norman Harville argues that anger is the defining characteristic of Elihu.

He is a hot-headed young man. He sees a possible indication of this in Elihu's threefold use of an idiomatic Hebrew expression of self-assertion in verses 10 and 17. He writes, the words themselves suggest a hidden rendering of, I am anger.

Elihu is not happy with the unresolved character of the situation. Job has seemingly been playing a zero-sum game between himself and God. One of the two has to be in the right and since Job is insisting upon his integrity, God must therefore be in the wrong.

There is the possibility, as we will see in later parts of Elihu's speech, that he wants to present both God and Job as being in the right, at least in the case of Job in the principal matter. The introduction of Elihu at this point opens our eyes to the fact that there was an audience to the earlier speeches. Job's dialogues with his friends occurred in the presence of at least one other person and probably a larger community.

Once again, we should recall that Job's crisis was the whole community's crisis. Job was one of the chief men of the East and most of the people around him would have been led by him and dependent upon him in various ways. When Job and his household are struck so catastrophically and signally, it is a crisis for the entire community.

A great many people will have lost wives and husbands. As Job's wealth was taken from him, all the people that depended upon him would also have been struck. In submission to the social etiquette and the customs of the culture, Elihu has not spoken to this point as he is the youngest of the company.

But by this point he is burning, he needs to speak. Everyone else has been struck down and so he enters the fray. His speech begins with a lot of throat clearing.

Indeed, we don't actually get to the substance until the next chapter. Ascertaining whether this is pomposity or hesitancy on the part of a youth is nowhere near as straightforward as many commentators presume it to be. He begins by explaining why he has not spoken to this point.

He has been respectful of seniority. Wisdom is associated with age and so those who are older should be especially listened to. However, he pushes back against the association of wisdom with the aged at this point.

The source of wisdom is the spirit of man, the breath of God within him. The gift we

might say of the Holy Spirit. His statement in verse 9 is probably not as categorical as it is rendered within the ESV.

Anderson suggests we should read it as, not many old people are wise. The aged don't always have wisdom and on the other hand they don't have a corner upon wisdom. There are young people with the spirit of God in them who can nonetheless speak with wisdom above their elders.

We might think of characters like Joseph or Daniel or maybe the boy Jesus speaking in the temple. Elihu has done what he ought to have done as a respectful young man. He has heard out his elders.

He has listened to. He has paid attention to. He has weighed and he has considered their arguments.

And now he is going to speak. The friends he sees have laid down their cases. They have left God to deal with Job.

However, they had not effectively answered Job. Job had been speaking to them and addressing their concerns and criticisms. But these don't scratch where Elihu itches.

He has his own set of arguments and believes that he can make a case himself. Job has not effectively answered his position yet and so his speaking at this point would not just be repetitious. He turns to Job in verse 15 and describes the state of the friends.

They have been silenced. They have nothing more to say. However, it is time for Elihu to speak his part.

He is bursting to speak like a fresh wineskin filled with new wine. His belly full of words is about to burst open. Harvald sees Elihu's self-description at this point as exposing his true character.

He writes, The full expose of Elihu as a fool who claims to be wise is unveiled in the third unit of his speech, in verses 17-22. Earlier Eliphaz had said, in a snide remark to Job, Should a man answer with a mind of wind, and bloat his belly with an east wind? 15-2. The prophet with wry humour has Elihu describe his condition in precisely these terms.

Elihu declares that he plans to answer with the dictates of his own mind or knowledge because he is bloated with arguments and has a belly bursting with wind, in verses 17-18. Unwittingly Elihu characterises himself as a windbag and a constipated fool by appropriating the sarcastic language chosen by Eliphaz to taunt Job. David Clines however is one who questions this reading.

Elihu concludes his description of his qualification to speak by asserting that he is without partiality. He will try and be even handed, acknowledging with a fair mind what

is true and false in the arguments of all the various participants in the conversation. A question to consider, at this point in the text what arguments do you find most persuasive for determining the character of Elihu? 1 Peter 1.22-2.10 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth, for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.

For all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever. And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

So put away all malice, and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to Him, a living stone, rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

So the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. There is a strong theme of Christian initiation throughout the passage that begins at the end of 1 Peter 1. A few commentators have gone so far as to claim that this is a baptismal liturgy and that the baptism occurs between verses 21 and 22 of chapter 1. This is highly speculative and I think unlikely, but Peter does exhibit a peculiar attention to the beginnings of Christian life.

He starts off by speaking about coming to Christ in an obedient response to the summons of the gospel. This leads to purification of the soul. It leads into the life of a new family, where brotherly love should be the manner of our behaviour.

Our hearts have been purified so that we might love each other. There is likely here an allusion to the process of Christian initiation. We receive the gospel, we confess the faith, we are baptised into Christ's body, where we are united with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And Peter is calling his hearers to live out this new life that they have been brought into

to the full. And the focus on loving our brothers and sisters is really pronounced. This love must be sincere, it must be unfeigned, it must be true, and it must be earnest, a deep and a fervent love for other people in Christ.

The process being described is our being born again, we're rising to a new life, and the word of God is the means by which this happens. This word is an incorruptible or imperishable seed. It endures, it won't perish or die.

It is this word by which we were called, it is this word that gave us new spiritual life, it is this word with which we were sealed in baptism, it is this word that we grow in and from. And to underline the point, Peter quotes from Isaiah chapter 40 verses 6 and 8. This is a powerful passage about the good news of God's reign. In verses 1-9 we read, Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries, In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low.

The uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. A voice says, Cry, and I said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows on it. Surely the people are grass, the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news, lift up your voice with strength.

O Jerusalem, herald of good news, lift it up, fear not, say to the cities of Judah, Behold your God. As with the rest of the New Testament authors, when Peter quotes from the Old Testament, he typically wants us to think about the surrounding context of the quote, and here that context is the context of the Gospel message itself, God's salvation coming, God being established as King, His righteousness being worked out in history, and the powerful word by which this prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled is the means by which they have been brought into the body of Christ. This is the word that is at work in them.

Coming to Christ and the truth entails putting away all these other things that are against the truth, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. There must be a purging, a putting off, a clearing out of all those things that are contrary to Christ. As we take Christ on, as we clothe ourselves with Christ, all other things that are contrary to Him must be removed.

And in the place of this deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander, we must cultivate a hunger for the purity of the truth of Christ. Peter compares it to newborn infants desiring milk from their mothers. And it seems here that he is addressing this to infants in the faith.

These are people who have just been born again, just been baptised. They've tasted something of the great goodness of God. They've been brought into the body of Christ and now they are being encouraged to grow up into salvation through constantly feeding on the truth.

Growing up into salvation means that this is an ongoing matter of life. The moment of being born again is not the finish line, it's the starting line, it's the place where our new life in Christ begins. And we grow and we develop and we persevere in this life to enter into the full possession of the salvation that God has prepared for us.

He appeals to the fact that they already have some taste of the goodness of God. And that taste should give them an appetite for more. If you know that God is good, then seek more and more goodness from Him.

He won't disappoint you. Becoming a Christian involves coming to Christ, the living stone rejected by men but chosen by God. But this is necessarily something that makes us part of a body too.

We are being built up into a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. In Ephesians 2, verses 19-22, Paul speaks about this. Peter himself would have known something about this, this coming to Christ as a living stone, as living stones ourselves.

His own name Peter was given to him by Christ, speaking about the fact that he was a stone or a rock. And in that context of Matthew chapter 16 verse 18, Christ spoke about building his church, an image that mixes together a community, an assembly of people and a building. It seems very appropriate that Peter brings together those two images here.

Christ described himself in John chapter 2 as the temple and we are described in him as temples of the living God, each one of us individually and also all of us corporately. The purpose of the church is to be this spiritual body, this living temple. We might think about the events of the day of Pentecost, where like the lampstand of the temple or the tabernacle, the disciples are lit with the living flame of the spirit.

The spirit descends into their midst as the spirit descended upon the tabernacle in Exodus chapter 40 or upon Solomon's temple in 1 Kings chapter 8. We are a new temple, we are a new building of God that is being established, formed by people and the chief purpose of the church is to offer spiritual sacrifices. The temple was there as a means of sacrifice, as was the tabernacle, but now the sacrifices are performed by persons. The true purpose of sacrifice was always spiritual sacrifice, the offering up of the human



spirit in prayer and in worship and in self-dedication.

The New Testament speaks about this in a number of different places. We offer the fruit of our lips in worship, we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God, we are washed as sacrifices in baptism, our bodies presented to him for his service, our limbs and our organs, like those limbs and organs of the sacrifices of the animals that were separated and placed upon the altar, our limbs and organs are presented to God for his worship and his service. Our resources are another form of sacrifice, our praise and our prayers are also forms of sacrifice.

The primary purpose of the church, as we see in these verses, is a Godward one. Some people have said that the church primarily exists for the sake of outsiders, as if its primary purpose was mission and evangelism. That is not the case.

The primary purpose of the church is the purpose of a temple. We are to offer spiritual sacrifices to God. Our purpose, primarily, is a Godward one.

And these sacrifices are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. He is the one who has provided a living way through his sacrifice. All of our sacrifices are a participation and on the basis of his sacrifice.

Without the way and the acceptance that he has won for us with God, we could never approach. Peter goes on to develop his position from Old Testament quotes, developing and exploring the meaning of the term stone. Jesus did something similar to this in Matthew chapter 21 verses 42-44.

Jesus said to them, Have you not read in the scriptures, The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a people producing its fruits.

And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. Here Peter quotes from Isaiah chapter 28 verse 16, Psalm 118 verse 22 and Isaiah chapter 8 verse 14, all of which help to develop his point about Christ as the cornerstone. God is building a new temple in Zion, the mount of his habitation.

He has placed this special dress stone, this particular stone of great beauty and value, and it is the cornerstone of this grand new edifice. Everything else is going to be built around and according to this stone. And for those who believe, they will not be put to shame, they will not be condemned, but will be vindicated on the day of testing.

However, for those who reject, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Their whole building project has been rejected. The stone, or in the parable of the wicked vine dressers, the sun, that they have rejected, will become the one that everything else is built around.

What's more, that stone will become a cause of stumbling, a rock of offence. The stone is a cause of division. For some it leads to their glorification and building up and for many others it leads to their destruction.

The dividing factor, once again, is the word. Their disobedience of the word is something that they were destined to do. And God's placing of this stone in Zion is on the one hand a means of judgement upon those who reject and on the other hand a means of blessing to those who accept.

People's destinies will be determined according to how they respond to this stone. There is a contrast drawn now between those who disbelieve and those who accept Christ. Here Peter draws once again upon Old Testament scripture, Exodus 19, verses 5-6, in the context of Sinai where God calls his people to the mountain and tells them what he will do with them.

And then in Isaiah chapter 43, verses 20-21. These sorts of statements were used of Israel in the Old Testament. And here the language that was applied to Israel in the Old Testament is applied to the people in the church, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Not only is the church a new temple, the church is a royal priesthood, it's a holy nation, it's a people of God's special possession, God's name is placed upon us. And we have a priestly purpose but also a heralding purpose. We proclaim the excellencies of God to the wider world.

While our primary purpose is to offer spiritual sacrifices, we are also to be a light on the hill, to be those who bring light to the surrounding world. We have been called out of darkness into God's marvellous light for this purpose. Once we were not a people but now we are God's people.

Once we had not received mercy but now we have received mercy. And here he is referring to Hosea chapter 1-2. There the prophets spoke about disowned people that God was receiving back.

And here Peter speaks not only about Jews who are forgiven but about Gentiles who were never a people at all, who were brought into the body of Christ and in him become a new people. The language here might also make us think about creation, called from darkness into light. Once not a people but now a people, God has created something out of nothing, God has brought light into the darkness.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. A question to consider, how in our presentations of the gospel could we speak about the church in a way that gives it the same centrality and importance to the message of the faith as Peter gives it here.