

Elihu and the prophets

1. Elijah

Nigel Bernard

There are several similarities between Elihu and Elijah.

The comparisons include their similar names, whirlwinds, rain, and some words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 12.

THERE ARE several comparisons that can be made between Elihu and the prophets Elijah and Ezekiel. A consideration of these comparisons increases our understanding both of the work of the prophets and of the importance of Elihu. In this first article we consider Elihu and Elijah, and in the second article we will consider Elihu and Ezekiel. We begin by considering the similarity of the names of Elihu and Elijah.

Names

Elihu and Elijah are very similar in spelling and occur next to each other in the concordance. Their meanings are also very similar, both incorporating the Hebrew word *'el*. Elihu means 'My God is He' and Elijah means 'My God is Yah'.

Whirlwind

The end of the record concerning both men is marked by a whirlwind. Following the closing words of Elihu it is written, "Then the LORD [Yahweh] answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said . . ." (Job 38:1). Of Elijah it is written, "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2 Kgs. 2:11).¹

Rain

Both Elihu and Elijah emphasised the role of rain in the purpose of God. In Job 36 Elihu said, "For He maketh small the drops of water: they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof: which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly" (vv. 27,28). In 37:6 he says, "For He saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth; likewise to the small rain, and to the great rain of His strength". And later on in the chapter Elihu says, "Also by watering He wearieth the thick cloud:

He scattereth His bright cloud: and it is turned round about by His counsels: that they may do whatsoever

He commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth. He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for His land, or for mercy" (vv. 11-13).

In 1 Kings 17:1 it is written, "And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD [Yahweh] God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word". From James 5:17,18 we learn that, not only did Elijah later pray for rain to come (which we read about in 1 Kings 18:41-45), but he had also originally prayed for the rain to stop: "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit". Elijah would have been mindful that the Law spoke of rain being withheld if Israel sinned: "Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; and then the LORD'S [Yahweh's] wrath be kindled against you, and He shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD [Yahweh] giveth you" (Deut. 11:16,17). By praying for rain to stop and then come, Elijah was showing all three aspects of Elihu's words concerning

1. During the speech of Elihu it would seem from his words that a storm was building up in the background. As Brother Cyril Tennant wrote in *The Book of Job*: "It would appear that whilst Elihu is extolling the majesty of God (chapters 36,37), God is demonstrating the truth of His words by means of a thunderstorm, out of which He eventually speaks" (p. 33). This storm is the developing whirlwind, and hence Job 38:1 says "the whirlwind". However, in the case of Elijah there is apparently no prior storm, and thus 2 Kings 2:11 says "a whirlwind".

Job 32–38 and Luke 12		
Job		Luke 12
32:3	“his . . . friends” “my friends”	v. 4
34:22	“no darkness . . . may hide themselves” “neither hid” “in darkness”	v. 2 v. 3
35:11	“wiser than the fowls of heaven” “better than the fowls”	v. 24
36:19	“thy riches” “treasure for himself”	v. 21
37:17	“warm . . . by the south wind” “south wind . . . heat”	v. 55
38:3 40:7	“Gird up now thy loins” “Gird up thy loins now” “Let your loins be girded about”	v. 35
38:41	“Who provideth for the raven his food?” “the ravens . . . God feedeth them”	v. 24

“Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of Him Which is perfect in knowledge? How thy garments are warm, when He quieteth the earth by the south wind?” (Job 37:16,17). The Lord Jesus takes up this point when he says, “And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass” (Lk. 12:55).

In Luke 12 the Lord Jesus also used words taken from his Father’s speech to Job. When Christ said, “Let your loins be girded about” (v. 35), this echoed two separate statements in God’s speech. In Job 38:3 God said to Job, “Gird up now thy loins”, and in 40:7 He said, “Gird up thy loins now”. When Christ spoke of the ravens, as quoted above, this answers the question God asked Job: “Who provideth for the raven

rain; how it could be used “for correction, or for His land, or for mercy”.

Luke 12

There are many connections between Luke 12 and Elijah, and these have been written about before in the *Testimony*.² Key words and phrases in Luke 12 which find an echo in the record concerning Elijah include: “hairs of your head”, “the ravens”, “seek . . . eat”, “Let your loins be girded”, “fire” and “a cloud”. However, there are also several links between Luke 12 and the speeches made by both God and Elihu in the book of Job. These are shown in the table above.

In his speech Elihu remarked that “There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves” (Job 34:22). The Lord Jesus, too, said that darkness would not be a hiding place: “For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops” (Lk. 12:2,3). Elihu said of God that He “maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven” (Job 35:11), and the Lord Jesus spoke generally of how man is superior to fowls: “Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?” (Lk. 12:24). Finally, Elihu spoke of a south wind bringing warmth:

his food?” (38:41).

That Christ alludes to both the speech of Elihu and the life of Elijah in Luke 12 reflects the strong link between these two men. The way Christ also seamlessly moves between the speech of Elihu and the speech of God that follows, also provides evidence that Elihu’s words were rightly spoken.

Last word?

The point was made earlier that the Scriptural record concerning both men ends with a whirlwind. But of course this is not the last we hear of Elijah. Wherever he was taken, he was later to write a letter to Jehoram (see 2 Chron. 21:12-15). And it seems that Elijah was raised from the dead to meet with Christ at the transfiguration. It may also be the case that the whirlwind is not the last we hear of Elihu. In Job 32 Elihu says, “They were amazed, they answered no more: they left off speaking. When I had waited, (for they spake not, but stood still, and answered no more;) . . .” (vv. 15,16). These words sit a little awkwardly in his speech. This can be explained by the suggestion that Elihu was the man who wrote the book of Job and these verses are inspired words of Elihu which he inserted into the record to tell the reader how the friends reacted to him.

2. See “Woe unto you . . . hypocrites”, by Brother R. Ebbs, *Testimony*, Oct. 1986, p. 310; and “Neither be ye of doubtful mind”, by the present writer, *Testimony*, Aug. 1996, p 311.

Preparing the way

John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. As Christ said of John: "This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" (Lk. 7:27). John came "in the spirit and power of Elias" (1:17). Elijah and Elisha point forward in parallel to John the Baptist and Christ. In turn we can see that Elijah was very much in the spirit of Elihu. Elihu prepared the way for God to speak to Job. Later, once Job had acknowledged the words that God had spoken to him, Job took on a role that pointed forward to Christ. Thus Elihu also prepared the way for Job to speak to his friends. In other words, the pairing of Elihu and Job lies behind the pairing of Elijah and Elisha, with both pairs pointing forward to John and Christ.*

Before the day of the Lord

Malachi wrote: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD [Yahweh]" (4:5). The same Hebrew words translated "great" and "dreadful" were used by Elihu in his speech. Elihu spoke of God doing "great things" (Job 37:5), and he said that "with God is terrible [dreadful] majesty" (v. 22). So Elijah's future work is couched in language that echoes Elihu's.

Elihu spoke of how "God thundereth marvelously with His voice" (v. 5). These words are taken up in Revelation 14:2, where John hears "a voice . . . as the voice of a great thunder". Later on in this chapter John says, "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (vv. 6,7). This preaching is primarily emphasizing that God is the Creator, an initial message relevant for a world steeped in evolution. The message matches the theme of Elihu's speech, which spoke of God's power manifest in creation. Whereas Elijah goes forth to the tribes of Israel scattered round the world, could it be that Elihu will be among those responsible for preaching to the Gentiles?

[\(To be concluded\)](#)

* Brother Tom McCarthy has also drawn attention to parallels between Elihu and John the Baptist in *The Spiritual Journey of Elihu—A Reflection*, Printland, 2008, p. 68.—G.H.