

2 Corinthians 12:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

Analysis

And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) The repetition intensifies both Paul's humility (maintaining third-person distancing) and his epistemological honesty. The phrase **God knoweth** (ho theos oiden, ὁ θεὸς οἶδεν) acknowledges divine omniscience while confessing human limitation—even in receiving revelation, Paul remains creature, not omniscient.

This verse's apparent redundancy serves rhetorical purpose: it separates the location of the vision (third heaven, v. 2) from its content (paradise, unspeakable words, v. 4). The dual structure mirrors Jewish merkabah mysticism's distinction between the journey and the arrival, but Paul subverts self-congratulation by his uncertainty and passivity throughout.

Historical Context

First-century Judaism had developed elaborate speculation about heavenly ascents and merkabah (throne-chariot) visions based on Ezekiel 1. The Mishnah later warned against such speculation (Hagigah 2:1), but in Paul's era, mystical experiences carried prestige. Paul's refusal to exploit this experience for 14 years, and his confusion about its mechanics even now, radically contradicts the boastful mysticism of his opponents.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's repeated "I cannot tell" model proper response to experiences beyond our comprehension—acknowledging mystery rather than manufacturing false certainty?
2. What does the phrase "God knoweth" teach about the limits of human knowledge even in the context of divine revelation?
3. Why does Paul maintain the third-person voice even when Corinthians would know he's describing himself?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	οἶδεν	τὸν	τοιοῦτον	ἄνθρωπον	εἴτε	ἐν	σώματος
And	I knew	G3588	such	a man	(whether	in	of the body
G2532	G1492		G5108	G444	G1535	G1722	G4983

εἴτε	ἐκτὸς	τοῦ	σώματος	οὐκ	οἶδεν	ό	θεὸς	οἶδεν
(whether	out	G3588	of the body	I cannot	I knew	G3588	God	I knew
G1535	G1622		G4983	G3756	G1492		G2316	G1492