

Job 34:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If now thou hast understanding, hear this: hearken to the voice of my words.

Analysis

If now thou hast understanding, hear this: hearken to the voice of my words. Elihu issues a direct challenge to Job's wisdom. The conditional "if" (im, וְאֵ) assumes Job possesses binah (בִּנָה, understanding)—the capacity for discernment and insight. "Hear" (shama, שָׁמַע) is the Shema's foundational command (Deuteronomy 6:4), meaning to listen with intent to obey. "Hearken" (ha'azinah, הָעִזֵּן) from azan (אָזֶן, ear) means to give ear, pay careful attention—more intensive than ordinary hearing.

"The voice of my words" (qol millai, קֹל מִילָא) emphasizes Elihu's expectation that his speech carries authority deserving careful consideration. This verse marks a transition—having accused Job (verses 7-9), Elihu now shifts to theological instruction about God's character and governance (verses 17-37). The structure parallels wisdom literature's common pattern: "if you are wise, listen" (Proverbs 1:5, 9:9). Yet Elihu's confidence will prove premature—God later affirms Job spoke rightly while the counselors (presumably including Elihu, though not explicitly named) did not (42:7-8). The verse warns against assuming our theological formulations are beyond challenge. True wisdom holds convictions firmly while remaining teachable, recognizing that even sound doctrine can be wrongly applied. Job demonstrates this balance—maintaining his integrity while ultimately submitting to God's greater wisdom (42:1-6).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern wisdom tradition emphasized listening to wise counsel (Proverbs emphasizes hearing/listening over 90 times). The young were expected to defer to elders, but wisdom literature also acknowledged that age doesn't guarantee insight (32:9). Elihu's appeal to understanding rather than age attempts to establish his authority. His subsequent theological discourse, while more sophisticated than the three friends', still misses the book's central point—that suffering can serve purposes beyond punishment.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How do you balance confidence in biblical truth with humility about your own understanding and application of it?
2. When should we insist others listen to us, and when should we instead listen more carefully ourselves?
3. What distinguishes godly conviction from arrogant presumption that our interpretation is infallible?

Interlinear Text

אָמַר	בְּ יָנָה	שְׁמַע	לְ
H518	If now thou hast understanding	hear	H2063
	H998	H8085	H238
			H6963

מִלְּוִים:
of my words

H4405

