

Job 42:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.

Analysis

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Job articulates the difference between secondhand knowledge and personal encounter with God. "Heard of thee by the hearing of the ear" (leshema-ozen shema'tikha, לְשֵׁמָא-אָזֶן שְׁמַעְתִּיךְ) indicates indirect knowledge—hearing about God through tradition, teaching, or others' testimony. This represents religious knowledge, theological propositions, inherited faith—accurate but abstract.

"Now mine eye seeth thee" (ve'atah eini ra'atka, וְעַתָּה עִנִּי רָאַתָּךְ) describes direct personal experience. The verb ra'ah (רָאָה) means to see, perceive, experience—Job encountered God personally, not merely intellectually. This wasn't physical sight (God is spirit, John 4:24) but spiritual perception—experiencing God's presence, character, and majesty directly. The contrast parallels knowing about someone versus knowing them personally.

Job's testimony transforms understanding of revelation and faith. Intellectual knowledge about God, while valuable and necessary, differs qualitatively from personal encounter. His suffering became the means by which secondhand faith became firsthand experience. This anticipates New Testament teaching: eternal life is knowing God personally (John 17:3), the Spirit bears witness directly to believers (Romans 8:16), and Christ promises to manifest Himself to those who love Him (John 14:21). Job's experience models the journey from inherited faith to owned faith, from knowing about God to knowing God Himself.

Historical Context

Ancient Israelite faith was communal and covenantal—knowledge of God typically came through family tradition, community worship, and covenant instruction. Job, likely a non-Israelite living before Moses, represents the patriarchal faith tradition. His knowledge of God came through creation, conscience, and perhaps oral tradition about God's dealings with earlier generations.

The contrast between hearing and seeing recalls Moses' unique privilege—seeing God's glory and speaking face to face (Exodus 33:11, 18-23). Prophets typically received God's word through visions, dreams, or audible voice, creating a hierarchy of revelation. Job's claim to have "seen" God after His theophany (appearance) from the whirlwind places his experience among the most direct encounters recorded in Scripture.

This distinction between secondhand and firsthand knowledge profoundly influenced Christian spirituality. The medieval mystics, Reformation emphasis on personal faith, Puritan experimental religion, and evangelical conversion theology all stress that true Christianity involves personal encounter with God, not merely intellectual assent to doctrine. Jesus' reproach to Pharisees—knowing Scripture without knowing Him (John 5:39-40)—and Paul's desire to know Christ personally (Philippians 3:8-10) reflect Job's discovery that direct encounter with God transforms everything.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between knowing about God through teaching (hearing) and experiencing God personally (seeing)?

2. How did suffering become the means by which Job moved from secondhand to firsthand knowledge of God?
3. In what ways can we pursue personal encounter with God rather than merely accumulating theological information?
4. How does Job's testimony challenge nominal faith that knows about God but doesn't know Him personally?
5. What role do trials and difficulties play in deepening believers' personal experience of God's presence and character?

Interlinear Text

לְשִׁמְעָה אֵל שְׁמַעְתִּי יְהוָה עַתָּה שְׁמַעְתִּי יְהוָה
 I have heard of the ear of thee by the hearing but now mine eye
 H8085 H241 H8088 H6258 H5869

בָּאָתָה:

seeth

H7200

Additional Cross-References

Romans 10:17 (Parallel theme): So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

John 12:45 (Parallel theme): And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.

Isaiah 6:5 (Parallel theme): Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

John 12:41 (Parallel theme): These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.

John 1:18 (Parallel theme): No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

Isaiah 6:1 (Parallel theme): In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

Job 33:16 (Parallel theme): Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction,

Job 4:12 (Parallel theme): Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof.

Job 26:14 (Parallel theme): Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?

Job 28:22 (Parallel theme): Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears.