

John 9:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.

Analysis

We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is. The Pharisees' statement reveals profound irony—they claim certainty about Moses but ignorance about Jesus, yet their very certainty betrays ignorance while the blind beggar, in confessed limitation, grasps truth.

We know that God spake unto Moses (ἡμεῖς οἶδαμεν ὅτι Μωϋσεῖ λελάληκεν ὁ θεός/hēmeis oidamen hoti Mōusei lelalēken ho theos)—the emphatic pronoun and perfect tense verb **know** (οἶδαμεν/oidamen) express absolute confidence. God's speaking to Moses was foundational to Jewish faith, recorded in Scripture, undeniable. The perfect tense **spake** (λελάληκεν/lelalēken) emphasizes completed action with ongoing results—God spoke to Moses and that revelation abides.

But the dismissive **as for this fellow** (τοῦτον δὲ/touton de)—literally 'but this one'—shows contempt. They refuse Jesus's name, reducing Him to 'this fellow.' The claim **we know not from whence he is** (οὐκ οἶδαμεν πόθεν ἐστίν/ouk oidamen pothen estin) is staggering in its willful blindness. They knew Jesus's hometown (Nazareth), His parents (Mary and Joseph), His occupation (carpenter's son)—yet claimed ignorance.

Deeper irony: **from whence he is** (πόθεν ἐστίν/pothen estin) asks about origin, source, authority. They claimed not to know, yet the evidence surrounded them—Scripture testimony, prophetic fulfillment, miraculous signs. Their 'not knowing' was willful refusal. Jesus earlier declared His origin: from the Father, from heaven

(John 6:38, 8:23). They rejected this, preferring ignorance to submission.

The blind beggar will devastate this claim in verse 30: 'Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes.' How can they not know the origin of One who performs messianic miracles?

Historical Context

The Pharisees' claim to know Moses but not Jesus reflects the central conflict of John's Gospel: will Israel's leaders recognize their Messiah or reject Him? Their appeal to Moses's authority was unassailable in Jewish culture—Moses was the lawgiver, the prophet, the mediator of the covenant. To claim discipleship to Moses was to claim the highest religious authority.

Yet Moses himself prophesied One greater: 'The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken' (Deuteronomy 18:15). Peter and Stephen both applied this prophecy to Jesus (Acts 3:22-23, 7:37). True disciples of Moses would recognize Moses's successor.

The phrase 'we know not from whence he is' may also reflect the rabbinic tradition that Messiah's origins would be mysterious—He would appear suddenly, with hidden early life. Some rabbis taught that Messiah would be revealed, then hidden, then revealed again. The Pharisees may be using this tradition to dismiss Jesus: 'We know His earthly origin (Nazareth), therefore He cannot be Messiah.' Yet John's Gospel repeatedly affirms Jesus's dual origin—earthly (Bethlehem, Nazareth) and heavenly (from the Father).

For John's first-century readers, both Jewish and Gentile, this passage warned against religious pride that claims knowledge while rejecting revelation. The educated elite missed what the blind beggar saw: Jesus is from God (v.33).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How can religious knowledge (knowing Scripture) become a barrier to recognizing truth when it hardens into pride?
2. What does it mean to 'know' Moses (or Scripture) truly versus claiming him as authorization for our own positions?
3. How does willful ignorance ('we know not') differ from honest seeking, and what makes the difference between the two?

Interlinear Text

ἡμεῖς	οἶδαμεν	ὅτι	Μωσῆ	λελάληκεν	ὁ	θεός
We	fellow we know	that	unto Moses	spake	G3588	God
G2249	G1492	G3754	G3475	G2980		G2316
τοῦτον	δὲ	οὐκ	οἶδαμεν	πόθεν	ἐστίν	
as for this	not	fellow we know	from whence	he is		
G5126	G1161	G3756	G1492	G4159	G2076	

Additional Cross-References

John 8:14 (Parallel theme): Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go.