

1 Corinthians 1:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

Analysis

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom (epeidē Ioudaioi sēmeion aitousin kai Hellēnes sophian zētousin, ἐπειδὴ Ἰουδαῖοι σημεῖον αἰτοῦσιν καὶ Ἑλληνες σοφίαν ζητοῦσιν)—Paul identifies two human demands that the cross refuses to satisfy. **Jews require a sign** (sēmeion aitousin, σημεῖον αἰτοῦσιν)—miraculous, supernatural validation of messianic claims. Despite Jesus' many miracles, the religious leaders demanded still more signs (Matt 12:38, John 6:30). They expected a conquering Messiah who would defeat Rome, not a crucified criminal.

Greeks seek after wisdom (sophian zētousin, σοφίαν ζητοῦσιν)—philosophical sophistication, rational explanations, intellectual coherence. Greek culture prized dialectic, rhetoric, and speculative thought. The idea of salvation through a crucified Jew seemed primitive and absurd, lacking the intellectual elegance Greeks admired. Both Jews and Greeks approached God with demands and prerequisites. The cross satisfies neither—yet saves both (v. 24).

Historical Context

Jewish messianic expectations centered on prophetic signs fulfilling Daniel 7 and other texts—a glorious Son of Man coming in power. The crucifixion seemed to disqualify Jesus as Messiah. Greek intellectuals, meanwhile, viewed Christianity as a crude superstition beneath philosophical consideration. Paul declares that God

deliberately chose a method—the cross—that offends both Jewish and Greek sensibilities, refusing to play by human rules.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How do modern people similarly demand "signs" (proof, evidence, experience) or "wisdom" (intellectual sophistication, rational coherence) before believing?
2. Why does God refuse to satisfy these human prerequisites for faith?
3. In what ways do we approach God with our own demands and conditions rather than receiving the gospel on His terms?

Interlinear Text

ἐπειδὴ καὶ Ἰουδαῖοι σημεῖον αἰτοῦσιν καὶ Ἕλληνες

G1894

For

the Jews

a sign

require

For

the Greeks

G2532

G2453

G4592

G154

G2532

G1672

σοφίαν ζητοῦσιν

after wisdom

seek

G4678

G2212

Additional Cross-References

Mark 8:11 (Parallel theme): And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him.

John 2:18 (Parallel theme): Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?

Luke 11:16 (Parallel theme): And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven.

Luke 11:20 (Parallel theme): But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.