

Acts 17:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

Analysis

Thou bringest certain strange things to our ears (ξενίζοντά τινα εἰσφέρεις εἰς τὰς ἀκοὰς ἡμῶν)—The verb xenizonta means "foreign," "alien," or "surprising." The Epicurean and Stoic philosophers found Paul's proclamation of Jesus and the resurrection (anastasis, v.18) utterly novel—not merely unfamiliar, but intellectually jarring to Greek philosophical categories. Athens prided itself on intellectual sophistication, yet Paul's gospel defied their wisdom (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:23).

We would know therefore what these things mean (βουλόμεθα οὖν γνῶναι τίνα θέλει ταῦτα εἰναι)—The word boulometha expresses deliberate desire or intention. This wasn't casual curiosity but formal philosophical inquiry. The Areopagus court (v.19) evaluated new teachings for civic and religious propriety. Paul stood where Socrates was tried—a providential platform for gospel proclamation to the intellectual capital of the ancient world.

Historical Context

Athens in AD 50-51 remained culturally prestigious though politically diminished under Roman rule. The Areopagus (Mars Hill) functioned both as a location and a judicial council examining religious innovations. Luke notes Athenians "spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing" (v.21)—a characteristic observed by contemporary writers like Demosthenes and Thucydides.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the gospel remain "strange" and countercultural to modern intellectual trends and philosophical assumptions?
2. What can we learn from Paul's willingness to engage hostile intellectual environments rather than retreat to safer audiences?

Interlinear Text

ξενίζοντα	γάρ	τινα	εἰσφέρεις	εἰς	τὰς	ἀκοὰς	ἡμῶν·
strange things	For	certain	thou bringest	to		ears	our
G3579	G1063	G5100	G1533	G1519		G189	G2257

βουλόμεθα	οὖν	γνῶναι	τί	ἄν	θέλοι	ταῦτα	εἰναι
we would	therefore	know	what	mean		these things	
G1014	G3767	G1097	G5101	G302		G5023	G1511

Additional Cross-References

Hosea 8:12 (Parallel theme): I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.

1 Peter 4:4 (Parallel theme): Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:

1 Corinthians 2:14 (Parallel theme): But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

1 Corinthians 1:23 (Parallel theme): But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

