

Acts 17:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

Analysis

For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else—Luke provides this parenthetical cultural observation to explain the Athenian response. The Greek phrase εὐκαιροῦντες εἰς οὐδὲν ἔτερον (eukairountes eis ouden heteron) literally means 'had leisure for nothing else,' highlighting how the Athenians devoted their abundant free time exclusively to intellectual novelty.

But either to tell, or to hear some new thing (καινότερόν τι, kainoteron ti)—the comparative form 'newer' (rather than simply 'new') captures Athens' insatiable appetite for the latest philosophical speculation. This cultural obsession perfectly positioned Paul's message about the resurrection as both novel and compelling, yet also revealed the underlying spiritual emptiness: intellectual curiosity divorced from truth-seeking. Athens represents the danger of valuing innovation over wisdom, novelty over revelation—a perpetual quest for 'something new' that never satisfies because it rejects the ancient truth of God.

Historical Context

Athens in Paul's day (c. AD 50) had declined from its classical glory but remained the intellectual capital of the Roman world. As a free city with numerous philosophical schools (Stoic, Epicurean, Academic, Peripatetic), Athens attracted scholars and tourists. The Athenian addiction to novelty was noted by ancient

writers including Demosthenes and Thucydides, making Luke's observation historically accurate.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does modern culture's obsession with 'the latest thing' mirror first-century Athens' addiction to novelty?
2. What is the difference between genuine intellectual curiosity that seeks truth versus the Athenian pursuit of novelty for its own sake?

Interlinear Text

Αθηναῖοι	δὲ	πάντες	καὶ	οἱ	ἐπιδημοῦντες	ξένοι	εἰς
the Athenians	(For	all	and	which	were there	strangers	in
G117	G1161	G3956	G2532	G3588	G1927	G3581	G1519
οὐδὲν	ἔτερον	εὐκαίρουν,	ἢ	λέγειν	τι	καὶ	
nothing	else	spent their time	but either	to tell	some	and	
G3762	G2087	G2119	G2228	G3004	G5100	G2532	
ἀκούειν	καινότερον						
to hear	new thing						
G191	G2537						

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