

John 16:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith.

Analysis

Verse 18 intensifies verse 17's confession: **They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith** (οὐκ οἴδαμεν τί λαλεῖ/ouk oidamen ti lalei). The repetition emphasizes their complete bewilderment. The verb λαλέω (laleō, "to speak") appears twice—they heard Christ's words but lacked understanding.

The double negative οὐκ οἴδαμεν (ouk oidamen, "we do not know") is emphatic denial of knowledge. Despite three years with Jesus, witnessing miracles, hearing teaching, the disciples still don't grasp redemption's central mystery: Christ's death and resurrection. This demonstrates human inability to comprehend spiritual truth apart from divine illumination (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The question τί ἔστιν (ti estin, "What is?") seeks definition, explanation, clarity. Yet some divine truths transcend human categories until God's appointed time. The disciples' frustration mirrors every believer's experience of walking by faith, not sight (2 Corinthians 5:7)—trusting God's word even when understanding eludes us.

Historical Context

This moment of confusion occurred in the Upper Room, possibly as they reclined at the Last Supper table or shortly after (John 13-17). The Passover context would have heightened expectation of messianic deliverance—this was the feast celebrating Israel's exodus liberation. Instead, Jesus speaks of departure and

absence. The disciples' repeated questioning shows they debated among themselves, seeking to decode Jesus's meaning through mutual discussion. This reflects Jewish rabbinical methods where students would discuss the master's teaching. Yet spiritual truth requires more than intellectual analysis—the Spirit must open understanding (Luke 24:45).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How do you respond when God's word seems unclear or His ways mysterious—with honest admission of confusion (like the disciples) or pretense of understanding?
2. What does the disciples' inability to comprehend central gospel truths before the resurrection teach about the necessity of the Spirit's illumination?
3. When is it appropriate to wrestle with difficult Scripture through discussion (as the disciples did), versus waiting for God to reveal understanding in His timing?

Interlinear Text

λέγει	οὖν	τοῦτο	τί	ἐστιν	ὅ	λέγει	τὸ
They said	therefore	this	What	is	G3739	They said	G3588
G3004	G3767	G5124	G5101	G2076		G3004	
μικρόν	οὐκ	οἴδαμεν	τί	λαλεῖ			
A little while	G3756	tell	What	he saith			
G3397		G1492	G5101	G2980			

Additional Cross-References

Luke 24:25 (Parallel theme): Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

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