

Discussion-Starters With Non-Epicureans: Biblical References to Epicurus / Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Don" of February 29, 2020 at 3:08 PM

This is a great list! It has been some time since I've had access to DeWitt, so this is a nice refresher. I don't know why, but it's a little thrill to know that the actual word "Epicurean" appears in the Bible.

Being me, I had to take one of these and trace backwards to see if the original Greek words were the same in the Bible and in Epicurus. I chose Galatians 4:3 to check out for curiosity's sake. The key phrase is **τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου** (ta stoikheia tou kosmou (< "cosmos")) "the basic principles of the world". My question was: Does Epicurus refer to **τὰ στοιχεῖα** in his extant works? The answer: Yes!

In the Letter to Menoikos we find:

Do and practice, then, the things I have always recommended to you, holding them to be the **stairway to a beautiful life**.

This is where translations can trip you up! The phrase translated as "**stairway** to a beautiful life" is **στοιχεῖα** τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν which I personally would render something more like "the elements of living beautifully and nobly."

We also find the elements in the Letter to Pythocles which one translation gives as:

"**the ultimate elements of things** are indivisible" ἢ ὅτι ἄτομα <τὰ> **στοιχεῖα**

While I realize **στοιχεῖα** is a fine word that doesn't always have Epicurean implications, it's still interesting to see it used in such disparate texts.

Curiosity assuaged... for now. 😊