
PAUL AND BARNABAS IN LYSTRA (ACTS 14:8-20)

THE CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE GOSPEL IN A GRAECO-ROMAN CITY

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will investigate the extensive Graeco-Roman characteristics of the Lystra speech and in so doing convey some clarity in the otherwise widely differing opinions held about it.

This will be achieved by showing that Lystra was a Hellenistic city of some importance with a varied population. It will be argued that the initial reaction of the Lystrians to the miraculous healing of the cripple is to be understood as representing typical Graeco-Roman notions. This will include Luke's use of a legend which not only adds local colouring to the narrative but also introduces Graeco-Roman themes such as the blurring of the distinction between humans and gods and the custom of sacrifice. This contextualization immediately portrays the Graeco-Roman nature of the Lystrians' behaviour and attitudes. In addition to these themes it will be argued that the Lystrians are shown to being reliant on secondary notions of God, which when exposed to the proclamation of the apostles will prove to be inadequate.

It will also be argued that the speech of the apostles is structured in a typically Graeco-Roman rhetorical form, where the errors are first exposed before the truth is presented. In conjunction with this structure it will be argued that the philosophical concept of *θεοπρεπές*, which Dibelius has shown to be clearly presupposed in the Areopagus speech, is not only present in the Lystra speech but forms the philosophical basis on which it is structured. This concept explains the insistence by the apostles that they are human and that God has no need of such worthless things as sacrifices. It also explains the presentation of God's activity in creation and providence as an antithesis to a god who is in need. The Graeco-Roman aspects are brought to a close with the discussion of idea that an awareness of God does not depend on secondary notions acquired from legends or customs but that the truth is grasped through a process of reflection on creation and providence. This is an important notion in the speech for it exposes the Lystrians as being in need of a reorientation of their beliefs in God, away from those which are secondary to those which are primary and compatible with the truth.

PREFACE

This work has been achieved with the help and support of numerous people, some of whom need special mention. I thank my promoter Professor P.G.R. de Villiers for his availability, day or night, and his patient guidance and encouragement.

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A few words are also necessary to explain the lay-out of the thesis. In order to refer to passages in their original context I have referred, whenever possible, to primary sources. However these have not always been available and as a result some quotes are in the original language while others are the English translations. This has resulted in an unavoidable lack of consistency. In the presentation of the thesis, I have followed the guidelines set out in "A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations" by K. Turabian.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

The presentation of the Gospel by the apostles in Lystra is reported briefly by Luke in Acts 14:8-20. After a description of the healing of a cripple (8-10), there follows firstly, an incident in which Paul and Barnabas are identified with Zeus and Hermes (11-14) and secondly, a speech of Paul (15-17) in which he responds to this identification. The last verses recount the final moments of the ministry in Lystra (18-20).

The events in this city culminate in a speech which is described by Luke in three verses only. This is in contrast to the much longer description of the preceding miracle and response to it which represent a rather extended framework within which the speech is placed as the focus.

Acts 14:15-17 is conspicuously short when compared to the long speech of Peter on Pentecost day in Jerusalem and to Paul's own speech in Athens on the Areopagus. The shortness of the speech is deceptive and should not lead one to underestimate its importance. The significance of the speech is clear from the fact that it is the first recorded speech in Acts preached to an entirely Gentile audience in a city where Paul does not first visit a Jewish synogogue.

Acts 14 would have been read by its first readers against the backdrop of Acts 10 where the conversion of the Roman centurion of the Italian Cohort, Cornelius, is described. Cornelius was, according to Acts 10, someone with a reputation of being devout and a God-fearer. It is even said of him that he prayed constantly to God. When an angel of God appeared to him, he is told that his prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God (Acts 10:3-4). A special relationship between this Roman centurion and the God of the Jews existed so that the Gospel is proclaimed in a sympathetic context.¹ There is no indication of such a special relationship in Acts 14. The readers of Acts would have realised that this speech was the first one given in a totally heathen context and that new terrain was being covered by the incident in Lystra. They would have recognised that there is a development in the story line of Acts. The story now moved from an initial Jewish context in Jerusalem to a heathen context. But in this heathen context there are different phases. In the first phase, born gentiles acquainted with Jewish religion are converted, while in the later phase gentiles who are not involved in Jewish religion at all, are confronted with the Gospel message.

This speech is not only a development in terms of the earlier parts of Acts. It is in a unique way a preparation of what is to follow in the rest of the book. It, in turn, forms the backdrop to future events reported later in Acts. There is a special link with the famous speech on the Areopagus reported in Acts 17. Dibelius in his well known discussion of the Areopagus speech, wrote: "The speech in Acts 17 gives, both from the point of view of form and subject-matter, a view of a cultured Christianity which we otherwise know only from the second century. In the New Testament this kind of Christianity is

¹ A God-fearer was someone who accepted the Jewish theology, though not the whole of the Jewish law. J.L. de Villiers, *Die Handeling van die Apostels*, deel 1 (Kaapstad: N.G.Kerk-Uitgewers, 1977), 213 writes, "Die uitdrukking 'godvresend' word in Handeling gebruik om heidene aan te dui wat nie gemoedsrus in hulle eie godsdiens gevind het nie, en, sonder om hulle te laat besny, hulle toevlug tot die Joodse geloof geneem het. Hulle het hulle aan verskillende Joodse voorskrifte onderwerp, gereeld die sinagoge besoek en die God van Israel gedien". De Villiers also draws attention to Cornelius' observation of the Jewish time of prayer and the Jewish custom of giving alms. Compare also G. Schille, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*, (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 242 for a similar description and for references to literature. He concludes: "Kornelius ist also ein für jüdische Ohren relativ unanstößiger Mann".

here, and, perhaps, in Acts 14.15-17."² By cultured Christianity, it is clear that Dibelius has a Hellenistic philosophical context in mind. "The speech is as alien to the New Testament (apart from Acts 14.15-17), as it is familiar to Hellenistic, particularly Stoic, philosophy".³

For Dibelius the Areopagus speech marked the beginning of the introduction of Hellenistic ideas about God into Christianity, at least in the report on its missionary development in the Book of Acts. Apart from this speech, the only other speech to a gentile audience in Acts, is the speech in Lystra. This is another strong indication of the importance of the speech. This gentile context of both speeches make it necessary to relate them mutually. In this sense the speeches in Lystra and Athens belong together.

But it is also necessary to read the Lystra speech in terms of the book as a whole.⁴ Here it is significant that the Lystra speech has a key position at the beginning of the second half of the Book of Acts, which describes the movement of the gospel into the gentile world. The relationship of the Lystra speech to its gentile context is therefore of the utmost importance.

When this link between speech and situation is taken seriously, one discovers that both the speech and associated events represent a unique contextualisation of the Gospel by the apostles. This has been overlooked in modern research. While Dibelius pays extensive attention to the Areopagus speech, the speech in Lystra is mentioned only in passing or in footnotes. It seems to be overwhelmed by the more extensive Areopagus speech as if it has little intrinsic value. One cannot accept that the speech in Lystra is made redundant by Paul's speech on the Areopagus. Even though there are definite links between them, and the Lystra speech paves the way for the Areopagus speech, it goes without saying that the Lystra speech has its own function and definite meaning. Luke is known as someone who treats his sources with respect and in a conservative way. He is, in addition, and as modern literary analyses have proved,⁵ a careful narrator who would not include irrelevant or unfunctional detail in his narrative. Only because of this, it is already clear that the Lystra speech must not be allowed to remain in the shadow of the longer Areopagus speech. That this happened, is proven by the relative paucity in research that has focused solely on the Lystra speech. The emphasis on the Areopagus speech and especially of its Graeco-Roman⁶ context, because of the gentile context in which it was given, has been a natural focal point for scholars in the light of research trends.⁷

Some of the most notable contributions to the study of the Graeco-Roman context and contents of Acts were made by the famous German New Testament scholar, Martin Dibelius. His work on the Areopagus speech excellently clarified the extent to which Luke has made use of philosophical concepts to show how the gospel can be contextualized in a Gentile setting. Dibelius was deeply interested in the movement of the Gospel towards the Graeco-Roman world and its transformation from its original Jewish context. For him "(T)he first sign of this transformation, ...embedded in the New Testament, is the Areopagus speech."⁸ This thesis reveals not only his focus on Acts 17 in his exegetical work, but

² M. Dibelius, Studies in the Acts of the Apostles, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 53.

³ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴ The reason for this will be discussed in some methodological observations in chapter 2.

⁵ Cf. the discussion of this in chapter 2.

⁶ The phrases "Hellenistic" and "Graeco-Roman" are used with exactly the same meaning in this thesis.

⁷ Like, for example, the History of Religions approach to the New Testament, and the more recent revival of this.

⁸ M. Dibelius, Studies in the Acts of the Apostles, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 64.

it is especially indicative of how he virtually ignored the speech in Lystra and its important information on the transformation of the Gospel to a Graeco-Roman situation. I wish to show in this thesis, that, in contrast with the thesis of Dibelius, the first signs of this transformation in the New Testament is the events and speech in Lystra. The discovery of the importance of the Lystra report leads on to reassess the delineation of the development of early Christian thought and contextualisation.

My aim is therefore to investigate this speech in its own right as a focal point in terms of the proclamation of the Gospel to the Graeco-Roman world. In doing this I will extend Dibelius' research on the Areopagus speech to the events and speech at Lystra, but I hope to correct his understanding of the dynamics of the transformational process which took place in the movement of early Christianity beyond its original setting.

This thesis is, however, not merely a response to the work of Dibelius. It relates to general research of the speech in Lystra. The need to investigate the Lystra events and speech is also necessitated by the general lack of clarity amongst scholars about the nature of this speech. The confusion that exists around this speech is well illustrated by the conflicting views expressed on it.

Jervell in his assessment of the nature of the speech, concludes that everything in Acts is Jewish. "The only exception in Acts could be the Areopagus speech in chap.17.... But this speech is more or less a foreign body within Acts, not a typical missionary speech, and from the point of composition and structure no lines lead from the speech to the other parts of Acts."⁹ He therefore does not even mention the Lystra speech or find the Hellenistic dimension worth investigating. For him "(T)he Gentiles are more like an appendix..."¹⁰ This interesting and strong perspective represents in perhaps the most consistent way the radical Jewish reading of Acts, and by implication the events in Lystra. In their classical work on Acts, Jackson and Lake, in similar vein, saw the Lystra speech as containing "characteristically Jewish teaching about God".¹¹ Even Dibelius in his brief analysis of this speech states that "on the whole, this 'speech' in Lystra is nearer to the Septuagint than is the Areopagus speech."¹² Although he is aware of its more cultivated style, he nevertheless feels that because the proclamation about God does not contain the word *κόσμος* it is "preached completely in Old Testament style."¹³

There is a strong trend in research which modifies the radical position of someone like Jervell to nuance the nature of the Jewishness attributed to the speech. Williams, accepting that the speech is directed towards a purely Gentile audience, nevertheless regards the speech as "Jewish-Christian tradition" because of its attack on idolatry - an attack which is only possible from a Jewish perspective

⁹ J. Jervell, *The Acts of the Apostles and the History of Early Christianity*, *Studia Theologica* 37 (1982): 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 22. His reason for saying this is that he believes that the Hellenisation of Christianity took place at a later stage, i.e. in the second century.

¹¹ F. Jackson and K. Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 4 (London: MacMillan, 1933), 166. They give the following points, which are indicative of Jewish thought, as their reasons: 1. God is presented as one; 2. Man must give up idolatry and worship the creator; 3. Evidence for His existence is the ordered and beneficent course of nature; 4. The past ignorance of men is said to have been overlooked.

¹² M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 71.

¹³ *Ibid.*

on gentile polytheism.¹⁴ In line with this, and an attractive solution to the problem of the context and nature of the speech is offered by Harrison and O'Neil. They relate the speech to the Diaspora apologetic literature.¹⁵ O'Neill argues that Luke's dependence on the Septuagint and especially the apocryphal books is an indication of his general dependence on their work for his literary inspiration.¹⁶ Within this approach attention is drawn to the way in which concepts and terminology in the description of the speech are used in a polemical, apologetical manner.¹⁷

Some of these scholars are aware that "Jewish" does not necessarily mean non-Greek, so that the use of the Septuagint, for example, will reflect a Hellenistic Jewish perspective. But this is not always the case. In many instances "Jewish" elements in the Lystra report are separated from "Greek" elements.

There are a number of scholars who represent the opposite position on the Lystra report and see it, in contrast to the previous Jewish parts of Acts, as essentially Hellenistic in nature. Hanson, for example, says of this speech, "(I)t is totally different from any that has occurred hitherto. It represents in fact a new type of Lukan speech, a speech to Gentiles. The structure is quite different from that of speeches to Jews, and the argument is different."¹⁸ His nuanced insight into the difference between Hellenistic and Jewish Hellenistic perspectives, becomes clear when he later, in connection with Acts 17:24, elaborates on this by saying that Luke is not "presenting the Hellenistic Jewish argument for the existence of God from the design of his creation (as presented, e.g., in Wisd. 13:1-5)."¹⁹

In his commentary on Acts, de Villiers seems to support this view, when he comments on the omission of any references to Old Testament salvation history and Jesus in this speech: The speech "doen slegs een ding: dit stel die ware God van die Skrif teenoor die valse Godsvoorstelling van die heidene...."²⁰ He also indicates the differences between this speech and other speeches to Jews by grouping this speech with Acts 17, rather than with the previous speeches: "Hier, soos later in Athene, gaan Paulus uit van God se openbaring in die natuur en sy voorsienige bestier, wat die mense moet bekeer van die aanbidning van die afgode tot die lewende God, die Skepper van alles wat bestaan...."²¹

¹⁴ C.S.C. Williams, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), 171; G. Schille, Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas, (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 307, also traces the speech to what he calls Jewish-Hellenistic polemics against polytheism.

¹⁵ E.F. Harrison, The Apostolic Church, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 32. J.C. O'Neill, The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting, (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), 139-159.

¹⁶ J.C. O'Neill, The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting, (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), 139.

¹⁷ Harrison, for example, notes that in the speech of Paul and Barnabas "(t)he reference to nature has the same function, namely, to reinforce an attack on a false conception of God and a forceful polemic against idolatry." He also points out that this pattern is prominent in the Wisdom of Solomon 13-15. Similarities with the Wisdom of Solomon will be noted later in the examination of words in the speech. Cf. E.F. Harrison, The Apostolic Church, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 32.

¹⁸ R.P.C. Hanson, The Acts in The RSV, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 149.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

²⁰ J.L. de Villiers, Die Handeling van die Apostels, deel 1 (Kaapstad: N.G.Kerk-Uitgewers, 1977), 283.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 283.

This would imply that not Jewish arguments, but natural arguments form the contents and determine the nature of the speech - as happened in the Areopagus speech. These arguments would then have a more Graeco-Roman or Hellenistic character.

These positions are not always mutually exclusive. Some commentators mediate between them to find a combination of different elements in the speech. De Zwaan, in his very brief and concise commentary on Acts, saw the speech as a mixture of Jewish and Greek elements when he remarked that Paul and Barnabas rejected the misunderstanding by appealing "ten eerste op hun sterfelijkheid... daarna op de Joodsche gedachte van den Schepper, die de wereldgeschiedenis leidt, dan op de Grieksche van de weldadige godheid, tenslotte op de hoogste inheemsche voorstelling: den hemelgod, die de jaargetijden met hun zegeningen regelt".²² This position accommodates Jewish, Greek and, surprisingly as something new, local motifs in an explanation of the speech.²³

In this thesis I shall focus on this lack of clarity about the nature of the Lystra report by paying special attention to its Graeco-Roman characteristics which are either denied, or in any case underestimated. This investigation will not limit itself to the speech, but will include the events in Lystra. It will therefore take into consideration the narrative framework in which the speech is embedded. In the light of recent developments in literary analyses of biblical texts,²⁴ it is important that the speech of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra be integrated with the narrative. The speeches of Luke comment on his narrative and should not be investigated without clarifying their links to their surrounding text.

My analysis in this thesis of the speech in Lystra in its narrative framework, will show how Luke portrays two main phases in the process of the contextualization of the Gospel in Lystra.

A close reading of the text will reveal that the first phase deals with the reaction of the Lystrians to the miraculous healing of the cripple. They assume that the apostles are gods and set about preparing to sacrifice in their honour.

The second phase will deal with the speech, its structure and its form of argumentation. It will be argued that in both these phases Graeco-Roman characteristics are present. These characteristics illuminate the impact of the speech as well as the events in Lystra.

²² J. De Zwaan, De Handelingen der Apostelen, (Groningen: Wolters, 1920), 108.

²³ Another aspect of the debate about the nature of the speech took place after Wilckens indicated that the speeches in Acts 14 and 17 are rooted in a gentile Christian missionary tradition also found in 1 Thessalonians 1:9f. and Hebrews 5:11-6:2. The tradition consists of a call to repentance (turning away from idols to God the creator), the judgment which will follow the time of ignorance and the resurrection as prove of the judgment. Cf. the remarks by and criticism of G. Lüdemann, Early Christianity According to The Traditions in Acts, A Commentary, trans. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1987), 193-194.

This debate which focusses on a form critical perspective and concentrates on the prehistory of the text, does not relate the speech to a purely Hellenistic context and will be bracketed in this thesis.

²⁴ Cf. the discussion of this in chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

HERMENEUTICAL PERSPECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Before the problem on which this thesis will focus can be discussed further, some preliminary remarks about certain presuppositions and methods of interpretation need to be made. Research on Acts is a highly specialized field. It is impossible to cover all aspects involved in the interpretation of the relevant section in Acts. Certain positions in the research on the Lukan texts are, however, of decisive importance in the interpretation of these texts. In so far as they will determine the discussion later on, they need to be discussed briefly.

2.1 Historicity of Luke-Acts

The historical reliability of the Lukan texts is a moot point in Lukan scholarship. The historicity of Acts has been under constant attack. There are scholars who find it difficult to accept that Luke reported events in the growth of the early church reliably. Some commentators (e.g. Haenchen) have come to the conclusion that Acts is not historically accurate, because the author was primarily a theologian who wanted to proclaim a specific message about his contemporary history.²⁵

There are several reasons for this questioning of the historical reliability of Acts. Many interpreters, for example, drew attention to the differences between the information about Paul given in Acts and what Paul writes about himself in his letters.²⁶ While Paul does not report any miracles, Luke, in the tradition of Hellenistic aretologies, described several of his miracles.²⁷ Early in the history of research on the Lukan texts, attention was drawn to the fact that there are many gaps and lacunae in Acts. Much information on the early church is omitted. It was also pointed out that Luke was not an eyewitness of the events he described. All these observations were regarded by some scholars as arguments against the historical reliability of Luke's writings.

These are but a few examples of the reasons why the historical reliability of Acts was questioned.

²⁵ E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, paperback reprint, trans. B. Noble and G. Shinn (Padstow: T.J. Press, 1982), 103 states that Luke does not portray the spread of Christianity in a historical way. He rather portrays an ideal curve. Further: "Everything he (Luke) knew concerning apostolic times, or thought himself entitled to infer, he had to translate into the language of vivid and dramatic scenes."

²⁶ Cf. J.L. de Villiers, *Die Handeling van die Apostels*, deel 1 (Kaapstad: N.G.Kerk-Uitgewers, 1977), 17ff. on this point.

²⁷ For a discussion of this issue, cf. G. Schille, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*, (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 16. His discussion about the historical reliability of Acts is very sophisticated and impressive, cf. pp.15ff.

These problems, together with the nature and message of Acts, have been extensively scrutinized by scholars. Three interesting writings in this regard were written by Kümmel in a provocative publication on Luke in modern scholarship.²⁸ Van Unnik published a famous article on Luke-Acts, *A Storm Centre in Contemporary Scholarship*,²⁹ while Marshall investigated it in his well-known publication on Luke.³⁰

In the above quoted article of van Unnik, he remarked about the debate whether Luke was a historian or a theologian: "A decision can be reached here only if the relations, if there are any, between Luke and historiography in antiquity, both in its theory and its practice, have been investigated properly. Far too little study has been given to this aspect of the case. Of course, the statement is often repeated that Luke was a historian not in modern times but in antiquity and therefore could allow himself certain liberties. But a thorough study comparing him to well known historians of his own times is missing. It may be that such an investigation would reveal aspects that have been overlooked so far and which might be important for a proper understanding of his undertaking."

This work has now been done, and it did reveal important aspects. David Aune compared Luke to ancient historiography and wrote in connection with the speeches in Acts: "Since Luke wrote about events of the previous generations, it is unlikely that he found speeches in written sources. His options were three: (1) to interview those present (if he was present) to recall the substance of what was actually spoken, (2) to freely improvise speeches according to the principle of appropriateness, or (3) to combine research and memory with free composition. Luke followed the last route."³¹

For the purpose of this work it will be taken that even though the narrative of events as given by Luke is not historiography in the modern sense of the word, it is based on traditions and is reliable. This is therefore true even of the speeches, although some scholars tend to question the speeches even more than the historical narrative.³²

What will emerge from this analysis of the events in Lystra is that what Luke represents as having taken place in Lystra is indeed quite plausible as a report about events in the life of Paul and his ministry in Lystra. It is, therefore, assumed in this thesis that the interplay between Lukan narrative and Graeco-Roman context does not exclude a relationship of this report of Luke, at least in its kernel, with historical events. This statement, however, needs more clarification:

²⁸ W.G. Kümmel, *Lukas in der Anklage der heutigen Theologie*, ZNW 63 (1972).

²⁹ In L.E. Keck and J.L. Martyn, eds., *Studies in Luke-Acts. Essays presented in honor of Paul Schubert*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1968), 29 he writes: "Would it not be wise to be somewhat more moderate in the questions we ask of Luke? Because he was not omniscient on all events of the apostolic age, it does not follow that he was unreliable in what he does tell us, or that he is a pious but untrustworthy preacher.... I am sure that if the same test to which Luke has often been subjected were applied to historians of our own time, e.g. about World War II, they would not stand the test".

³⁰ I.H. Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

³¹ D. Aune, *The Literary Environment of the New Testament*, Library of early Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 125.

³² As a survey of how commentaries treat this subject will reveal.

2.2 Levels of interpretation

It is widely accepted that the Lukan writings originated towards the end of the first century.³³ Luke indicated in the prologue to his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4) that he was aware of other writings about the history of Jesus and early Christianity. He himself decided to write down everything "in order". These remarks of Luke already indicate that his two writings are separated by several decades from the events they described. In line with these remarks it is widely accepted that Luke made use of traditions and sources about these events when he wrote his two books.

This implies that one cannot read the Lukan writings in a simple way merely as eyewitness accounts of the events. What is true of the other Gospels, where the use of sources and traditions have been widely accepted, and where a sophisticated reading of the texts is developed, is also true of these writings: They should be read on more than one level.

Achtemeier gives a good description of three levels of interpretation that are useful for an analysis of a text like Luke. These levels will be kept in mind in this thesis.³⁴

The first level of reading is done on the final form of the text, in this case Acts, and more specifically, Acts 14: 8-21. This level is the one about which there is the least doubt as it reflects the finished work of the author. It is on this level that such methods as redaction criticism and literary analyses are applied.

The second level moves further back and takes into account the traditions or sources available to and used by the author. These "forms" of earlier traditions can be detected in the text especially by the method of form criticism. It focusses strongly on the oral phase of the traditions and the community in which they circulated. Source criticism is another method which determines the material used by the author to write his own text. Both these methods have been applied by scholars on Lukan writings, including Acts. In Acts 14: 8-21, for example, evidence can be found of a possible number of sources used by Luke. They are an Antiochean tradition and a possible Caesarean tradition. From a form critical perspective scholars pointed out the evidence of Jewish Hellenistic missionary traditions in this passage,³⁵ as well as oral traditions about the Lystra events, and legends. These perspectives will be referred to when most appropriate in the text.

The third level on which the text is read, goes behind the second level (the sources used by the author), to the actual historical events that the sources reflect. In other words, and important to note, this level is twice removed from the final text as found on the first level of reading. This distance between the first and last levels makes it difficult to determine the actual historical events. I will show that, although it is difficult to say with certainty that the events in Lystra are historically accurate, they are nevertheless quite plausible. This is therefore an indication that these events, despite the complicated levels of reading involved in reading Luke's text, should be taken as historical, as was said in the previous section.

In his recent commentary, Schille wrote as follows about this third level: "Geben die Geschichte auch sicher kaum noch Auskünfte über die tatsächlichen Umstände zur Zeit der betreffenden

³³ Leaney concludes that it must be after A.D. 70. A.R.C. Leaney, The Gospel According to St. Luke, 2nd ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), 10. Lagrange states that: "Une opinion très répandue aujourd'hui parmi les critiques indépendants, c'est que Luc a écrit vers l'an 80." M.-J. Lagrange, Évangile selon Saint Luc, 3rd ed. (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1927), xxi.

³⁴ P.J. Achtemeier, Mark. Proclamation Commentaries, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 14-20.

³⁵ On this topic the work of J.C. O'Neill, The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting, (London: S.P.C.K, 1970), is important as he argues that Luke was following a tradition which was already developed in Hellenistic Judaism missionary literature. Hellenistic concepts had been used and adapted to complement a proclamation of the faith.

Gemeindegründung, so weisen sie doch Momente auf, die einen echten Nachklang enthalten könnten. Hier hat man zuerst an die Ortsbindung zu denken: Die Erinnerung an den Missionserfolg eines oder mehrerer großer Apostel der ersten Zeit im eigenen Ort dürfte sich lange erhalten haben. Sie wird in vielen Fällen die Ursache für die spätere Erzählung gewesen sein. Denn es fällt schwer anzunehmen, daß hier, wie in der Legende späterer Jahrhunderte, willkürliche Erfindung vorherrschte".³⁶ These comments are not only important and accurate with regard to the historicity of Acts as text, but they have particular reference to the Lystra narrative and to the work which will be done in this thesis. Precisely such a connection between the Lystra narrative and traditions about Lystra as a place where the apostles were successful, is to be found in Acts 14, and indicate that this chapter should be related to historical events which took place there.

These remarks about the historicity of Acts are important because they confirm the missionary development in early Christianity and the dynamic transformation which took place in a process of contextualization. It is hard to believe that such dramatic events as reported in Lystra, were the fabrications of a good storyteller. An analysis of the text will reveal too many intricate connections with early Christianity for this to be the case.

2.3 Contextuality

It was earlier pointed out how Dibelius related the speeches in Acts 14 and 17 to their Hellenistic context. In Van Unnik's seminal article on Luke-Acts as a storm center in contemporary scholarship, he writes: "The problem of Luke-Acts is also inseparably linked with the wider problem of the 'Hellenization' of Christianity. The transition from the Jewish to the Greek world is often seen in simple terms of opposition to the Hellenistic synagogues seen as Christianity's rather questionable and suspect forerunners. It is more suggested than clearly expressed that this transition was a betrayal of the real message, the beginning of the great apostasy. But is this true to fact? What would have been the alternative?"³⁷

With this seemingly innocent remark Van Unnik indicated an important area of research. He knew how seminal the Hellenistic context is to the understanding of the Lukan texts. One of the alternatives he asked about must have been the fact that the Gospel is not exposed to a process of degeneration into a Greek context, but that it is contextualized in the sense that the Jewish gospel is translated to be accessible to groups who live in the Greek world.

In this thesis the focus will be on the first level, that is, the level of the final text, as well as on the third level. Both these levels relate to the Hellenistic context in which the Gospel was proclaimed. This focus implies an investigation into the following aspects:

1. How Luke portrays what the events meant to the Lystrians in their own context. This will include their understanding of the healing of the cripple, the identification of Barnabas and Paul as gods, the desire by the Lystrians to offer sacrifice, and the themes that are introduced in the speech.

2. The context of Luke's own readers and what Luke wanted to communicate to them. This aim will help to explain why Luke found it necessary to include those events and what he wishes his reader to understand from them.³⁸

³⁶ G. Schille, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*, (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 17.

³⁷ W.C. Van Unnik, *Luke-Acts, A Storm Centre in Contemporary Scholarship*, in: L.E. Keck and J.L. Martyn, eds., *Studies in Luke-Acts*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1968), 29.

³⁸ Maddox concludes that Luke's purpose can be categorised into two basic divisions: 1. To meet the challenges facing the church of his day. 2. To answer such theological questions as i) Who are the Christians? ii) Where do they come from? iii) What is their vocation? iv) What is their place in history? R. Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*, ed. J. Riches (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), 2.

The first two matters will be discussed throughout the text at relevant places. Despite these different questions, there is the one overriding concern which link them together, namely to indicate how the important events in Lystra displays a Graeco-Roman nature. It is clear that both these contexts relate directly to the Graeco-Roman world.

2.4 Redaktionsgeschichte and literary criticism

It is important not only to spell out some hermeneutical positions assumed in a study like this, but also to indicate the methods which will be used. In this study the established methods developed in New Testament scholarship will be applied. New Testament scholarship is characterized by a constant reflection on methodology. Twentieth century scholarship designed the methods of source, form and redaction criticism in what is generally known under the umbrella term of "historical criticism". Each of these methods was developed and used for many years. They lead to many publications in which the particular method was refined and meticulously applied to the New Testament texts. These methods are built on each other and every one of them contribute in some way to the understanding of the texts. But each one of these methods display its own shortcomings, which were often the reasons for the development of the subsequent method.

The last decades saw a growing interest in the application of literary and sociological approaches to New Testament texts. It is especially these two approaches which shaped the work in this thesis, although extensive models within these two approaches have not been implemented. These remarks need some clarification:

The discipline of redaction criticism emerged as a reaction to form criticism which assumed that the Evangelists simply compiled their material which had been collected from various sources.

Redaction criticism reacted against this position and emphasized the contribution of the Evangelists and authors. They assumed that the Evangelists had a particular purpose and theology which is reflected in their writings. Redaction critics therefore examine the text to discover

- a) the sources used
- b) the intentions of the author
- c) the theological questions upper-most in the author's mind
- d) the problems Christians were facing at the time in order to clarify the possible apologetic purpose the author had in mind. Haenchen for example found that Luke's work was determined by the two theological questions of his day; the expectation of the imminent end of the world; and the mission to the Gentiles without the law.³⁹

Redaction criticism also endeavours to identify the purposes operating at different levels of redaction and to place them in temporal sequence.⁴⁰ Redaction criticism mostly found the theological intention and purpose of the authors in the framework which bound the different traditions and forms. The authors were seen as editors who commented on the forms they preserved in their texts. Often the assumption seems to have been that the authors were unable to master their traditions completely.

In recent years the creative rôle of the authors throughout the text was increasingly stressed. This happened only partially as a reaction against the redaction critical understanding of the author. Working with models from science of literature, researchers, who analysed the New Testament from a literary perspective, illustrated the author's incisive contribution to the creative process. One of the most recent examples of such an approach is the work by Tannehill. The difference between literary

³⁹ E. Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles, trans. B. Noble and G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 94.

⁴⁰ Cf. O. Kaiser, W.G. Kümmel, Exegetical Method, trans. E.V.N. Goetschius and M.J. O'Connell (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), 15.

criticism and redaction criticism is amply demonstrated in the introduction to his book: "I am concerned with Luke-Acts in its finished form, not with pre-Lukan tradition. Furthermore, I do not engage in elaborate arguments to distinguish tradition from Lukan redaction of that tradition.... Moreover, all material in Luke-Acts, whether it originated as tradition or redaction, is potentially important for my task. The decision to include a unit of tradition in the work is a choice which affects the total work. Even if the wording of the traditional unit is unchanged, it has been redacted by inclusion in a new writing".⁴¹ These remarks represent an apt criticism of the shortcomings of redaction criticism. How sophisticated this debate has become, is illustrated by the sensitivity of someone like Culpepper to the question of redaction in John's gospel. There the issue is between the real and implied author. He indicates how the real author can hide or reveal his true identity in the way that he has crafted the work.⁴²

But the newer literary approach to the New Testament is not without its own problems. There are basically two problems: In the first place they assume a sophisticated reader, that is, someone who possessed a written text was able to make sophisticated literary links. It is a question whether the oral nature of the New Testament texts is sufficiently taken into account in this approach. The second problem is that they often interpret a Biblical text in terms of modern theories and models, without taking into account contemporary models in the Graeco-Roman world. It was only recently that someone like Aune drew attention to the literary environment against which the New Testament should be understood.⁴³

But all the different literary approaches to the New Testament share the same important insight. The author wanted to communicate a message to his audiences. All the different sections of a text therefore are related, not only mutually, but also to the message the author had in mind. One will have to analyse a section of a text in terms of the whole text. Methodologically this means that the discussion of the Lystra events in Acts 14 should take cognisance of its position in the Book of Acts. This reiterates what was said above in terms of, for example, the relationship between Acts 14 and 17.

But the discussion should also be related to the purpose Luke had in mind when he wrote for his readers. The Lystra events are used to convey this message. It is exactly on this point that the final level, mentioned above, functions. Acts 14:8-20 receives a special meaning in the light of the social function of the text. Although this thesis is not an attempt to a technical literary analysis of Acts (and specifically Acts 14:8-20) in terms of a narratological model, it does keep in mind how the Lystra events relate to the overall text as well as to its social function. The main focus of the thesis is, however, not to analyse the Lystra speech in its relationship to Acts as a whole in terms of a narratological or literary model.

2.5 Socio-historical approaches

Recent New Testament scholarship saw a renaissance in the socio-historical or sociological approach to Biblical texts. It relates to the literary analysis of texts in so far as the social function of a text can only be determined when the text is situated in the context within which it originated. Some scholars want to apply sociological models, developed in modern contexts and societies, to Biblical texts. Others, like Meeks, aware of the problem of the illegitimate transfer of information, are more reserved. They do sometimes make use of modern sociological insights and models, but

⁴¹ R. Tannehill, The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts. A literary interpretation, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 6.

⁴² R.A. Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 16.

⁴³ D.E. Aune, The literary environment of the New Testament, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987).

prefer to work more historically. They are, however, consciously working on the societal contexts in which Biblical texts originated, and often describe their own approach as socio-historical. Kee, for example, emphasises the need to enter into the thought worlds of an earlier era. This is achieved by the construction of the cosmic dimensions of peoples' existence.⁴⁴

One of the well known representatives of a sociological approach to the New Testament, is Gerd Theissen. A discussion of his work may clarify the value of a sociological reading of Biblical texts. He identifies three areas that are problematic when dealing with historical sociological research.⁴⁵

1. We are dependent for these analyses on chance sources that have survived.
2. The sources available were produced with a different purpose in mind than an explanation of sociological aspects.
3. The Bible deals with religious experiences that focuses primarily not on this world but on the beyond. This is not always helpful when one is looking for historical evidence.

The question that faces the historian is, how does one derive historical and sociological information from non historical and non sociological sources? Theissen explains that the methodology in extracting historical and sociological information entails the seeking out of that which represents "typical", "recurrent" or "general questions". One is also not concerned with individual cases but with structural relationships that apply to several situations.

Theissen explains that there are three methods of extracting historical and sociological information:

1. The constructive method seeks statements that give descriptions about groups, institutions and organizations. In the events at Lystra, one can see such "group" statements in the crowd's desire to sacrifice, as well as the mob's stoning of Paul.
2. The analytical method seeks inferences drawn from historical events, social norms and religious symbols. Reports of historical events usually focus on the unusual, as the usual is not seen as worthy of being reported. For example, the identifying of Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes was a most unusual experience for the apostles. Conflict situations are also important as they reflect the unusual and allow one to deduce the usual. The causes of a dispute can reveal what the values are that are worth fighting over. An example in this area would be the reasons for the stoning of Paul in Lystra by the Jews. Social norms can be identified in the text by the spontaneous desire to sacrifice to the two men who are believed to be gods. Symbols, such as the tearing of the clothes, Acts 14:14, say something about the self awareness of the Christians. The overall purpose of the analytical method is to lead to understanding.
3. The method of comparative procedures which seeks divergences from, or similarities to the surrounding culture also gives historical and sociological information about the cultures. For example, the fact that the speech in Lystra is different to from previous speeches to the Jews, but similar to the speech in Athens reveals information about the Jewish and Greek cultures.

In the following thesis this socio-historical approach will become evident, mostly in an indirect way, although no specific method or model will be applied. The focus is not on the method, but on the text.

2.6 History of Religions Approach

The History of Religions school represents a famous and controversial phase in New Testament scholarship. This school, known through the work of Göttinger scholars like Eichhorn, Bousset, Weiss, Wrede, Wernle, Heitmüller and Gressmann, illustrated the links between early Christianity and the "general religious feeling of the Hellenistic period".⁴⁶ They made a thorough study of the

⁴⁴ H.C. Kee, Christian Origins in Sociological Perspective, (London: SCM Press, 1980).

⁴⁵ G. Theissen, The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 175ff.

⁴⁶ D. Lührmann, An Itinerary for New Testament Study, (London: SCM, 1989), 53.

Hellenistic world and its documents. This school became controversial because their work was seen as a relativizing of early Christianity. Because of this controversy, many publications originated as a conscious response to their work (e.g. Billerbeck, *The Theological Dictionary to the New Testament*, etc.).⁴⁷

The History of Religions school helped prepare the way for a growing understanding of the importance of the Hellenistic world to understand early Christianity itself. It finally led to a widespread agreement in modern scholarship: "Judaism and Hellenism are not understood as being in strict opposition. Judaism in the Hellenistic period is seen rather as part of Hellenism and as the distinctive framework of interpretation for at least the first and second generations of early Christianity. The Greek tradition will also have been communicated through it".⁴⁸

When scholars nowadays investigate the Hellenistic world as "framework" of the New Testament, it is done in a way very different to the quest of the original History of Religions school. The method is also more sophisticated. In this approach resemblances and contrasts with texts from the Hellenistic Umwelt are examined. This enables one to identify various categories which describe aspects of the relationship between an early Christian text and those of its Hellenistic Umwelt.

Much valuable work on this methodology has been done by Berger and Colpe.⁴⁹ They propose the two basic categories of "resemblance" and "contrast/difference", each with many possible subdivisions. Within the confines of space, it is possible only to mention a few which are relevant to the events in Lystra, starting with the resemblances:

1. "Presuppositions" because of a common historical context. Presuppositions from the original cultural context are found to be essential for the understanding of a phenomenon in its new context. An example would be the presence of wandering wonder-workers in the pagan world which is important to understand the reaction of the Lystrians to the healing of the cripple.
2. "Parallels" between the different contexts. An example would be the parallel between Moses who is compared to Hermes in Jewish Missionary literature, and Paul who is compared to Hermes in Luke's work.
3. The evidence of a "common basis/origin". Here an example would be the legend preserved by Ovid which is similar to the report in Acts 14 and which points to a common oral tradition also known by Luke.

Here are also a few examples from the categories of contrast and difference:

1. "Intentional contrast". An example in Acts 14 is the rôle of Zeus as supreme god and the presentation of the "living God" in contrast to him.
2. "Repeal". An example is the honour that is showered upon Paul and Barnabas which is rejected by them and replaced by their call for the need to worship the "living God".

These remarks indicate the sensitivity for proper methodology. There is not a rush for endless parallels without real relevance to the text and its meaning. This approach is in fact much more useful for the understanding of the New Testament once one realises that the relationship between Hellenism and the New Testament comprises much more than "parallels". There is also a greater soberness regarding the usefulness of the investigation, because it is realised from the very beginning that an analysis of the Graeco-Roman world will be more important in the case of, for example, such New Testament texts as the Johannine and Lukan texts.

But the newer history of religions work is furthermore different in so far as the question of 'truth' is bracketed off, since it is not seen simply in an overarching Hellenistic religious sense or in a connection between the tradition and the Old Testament and Judaism. Rather, history of religions investigations are meant primarily to help to clarify the difference between the presuppositions and associations of the readers of the time and ours today. Both socially and culturally, we live in a very different world from the world of that time, so historical knowledge

⁴⁷ Ibid., 53ff., gives interesting examples.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁹ K. Berger and C. Colpe, Religionsgeschichtliches Textbuch zum Neuen Testament, (Göttingen and Zürich: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987).

is needed to explain New Testament texts".⁵⁰

In this thesis the most basic approach is that of this newer interpretation of the New Testament. The text in Acts 14:8-20 is related to a Hellenistic context. This thesis therefore, from a methodological point of view asks some of the questions Lührmann formulates as typical of history of religions: "The defining question for the history of religions is: In what context of questions of their time are the statements of the New Testament to be put? The auxiliary questions are: Are there parallels in content to individual statements of themes of the text in the New Testament itself, in Judaism, in the Old Testament or in Greek texts? What keywords or themes from problems of the time are taken up? Does this allow us to argue to a tradition which has been formed?"⁵¹

⁵⁰ D. Lührmann, An Itinerary of the New Testament, (London: SPCK, 1989), 57. Note his important hermeneutical remark in the following paragraph: "The aim of work in the history of religions is to prevent the texts being dominated by our present associations". This quotation also illustrates the above mentioned remarks about context.

⁵¹ Ibid., 57.

CHAPTER 3

OUTLINE OF STRUCTURE

In this chapter an outline is given of the contents of this thesis and how the material in the different chapters will be presented.

The passage dealing with the events in Lystra is found in Acts 14:8-20. The report of Luke can be divided in three main parts: the healing of the cripple, the response of the Lystrians to this healing, and finally the address that the apostles give in an attempt to clarify a misunderstanding.

For convenience and clarity the analysis of this passage is divided into the three sections named above. The thesis therefore follows the story and analyses the different elements in it according to the development of the narrative. This means that the different sections of the passage will be discussed one after the other. A final section will be added, namely a summary.

The sections in greater detail are:

Chapter 4: Introductory remarks

The Gentiles in salvation history. An overview of Luke's theological plan.

Chapter 5: "Religion in Lystra"

The different religious perceptions and the religious suppositions that could be expected in a place like Lystra.

Chapter 6: "Setting the scene"

The healing incident which gives rise to the set of circumstances which dominate the remainder of the events in Lystra (Ac. 14:8-10).

Chapter 7: "Superstition as misdirected faith"

The attempt of the Lystrians to deify the apostles and to offer a sacrifice in their honour (Ac. 14:11-13). The subsections to this part will examine:

The Hellenistic concept of the interchangeability of humans and gods.

i) Legends concerning the visits to the world by gods, especially the legend about the visit by Zeus and Hermes to Anatolia as it is preserved by the Latin author Ovid.

ii) Wandering magicians.

iii) The Hellenistic understanding of sacrifice. This section will deal with the desire of the Lystrians to respond to the ministry of the apostles by wanting to offer a sacrifice to them. It will also deal with the difficulty the apostles had in trying to prevent the sacrifice from going on, even after Paul's address.

Chapter 8: "The presentation of the gospel in Lystra".

This section will comprise four main subsections (Ac. 14:14-17)

i) The structure of the speech.

ii) The introductory stages of the speech.

iii) The philosophical basis to the speech.

iv) The positive dimension of the speech.

Chapter 9: Summary

A discussion on the passage looking for the meaning that Luke intended his readers to grasp.

CHAPTER 4

THE GENTILES IN SALVATION HISTORY

4.1 The theological plan of Luke

In this section I will focus briefly on the overall theological plan that Luke had in mind as he wrote Luke-Acts. This will highlight the importance of the Lystra episode not only for us in retrospect but as being a very significant point of transition for Luke himself.

As mentioned previously, Van Unnik has written an illuminating article in which he outlines the development of scholars' opinions on Luke-Acts.⁵² He shows that there has been a move away from seeing Luke simply as a historian recording the expansion of the church. Luke is a theologian who has accepted that the parousia is no longer an imminent event.⁵³ This is in contrast with other New Testament texts in which there is a strong expectation of the second coming as imminent. Luke is writing to help the church through a period of re-adjustment. He does this by outlining the course of salvation history which begins in the Old Testament and proceeds through John the Baptist to the time of Christ. This is then followed by the time of the church, as represented in Acts. Behind the progress in salvation history is the outworking of the plan of God.⁵⁴ An important ingredient in the plan of God is that the gospel should be preached to all nations.⁵⁵ This is an obvious reference to the inclusion of the Gentiles in the unfolding of salvation history.

The point at which Gentile history on its own and not in association with Jewish history, is for the first time seen to be part of salvation history is in the Lystra episode. Luke draws his reader's attention to the significance of this important event. He writes about the return of the apostles to Antioch and states how they reported that "God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles." Acts 14:27. Munck recognises this when he indicates that with this speech and especially as a result of the Areopagus speech, the earlier period when Gentiles could "go their own way", is over and it is now imperative for them to repent before the judgement of the world.⁵⁶

The significance of these events can be appreciated from the consequences that flow from it. The first missionary journey is followed by the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), which shows the difficulty that the Jewish Christian church had in accepting Gentiles. In an implied reference to the events at Lystra, Paul and Barnabas were able to report how the Gentiles had received God's blessings. This report contributed much to the decision of the Council to "not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God" (Ac. 15:19).

All these remarks reiterate that the speech in Lystra represents for Luke a new phase in the history of early Christianity. This new phase is well established and accepted by the church council in Jerusalem before the Areopagus speech. In Luke's understanding the Lystra episode is an important moment in his text and its importance should not be underrated because of the Areopagus speech.

⁵² W.C. Van Unnik, Luke-Acts, A Storm Centre in Contemporary Scholarship, in: L.E. Keck, and J.L. Martyn, eds., Studies in Luke-Acts, (London: S.P.C.K., 1968).

⁵³ This point is also accepted by such scholars as Conzelmann, Bultmann and Haenchen.

⁵⁴ The plan of God as the leading idea of Luke's theology was especially elaborated by S. Schulz, "Gottes Vorsehung bei Lukas." ZNW 54 . (n.p., 1963), 104ff. op. cit. W.C. Van Unnik Luke-Acts, A Storm Centre in Contemporary Scholarship, in: L.E. Keck and J.L. Martyn, eds., Studies in Luke-Acts, (London: S.P.C.K., 1968), 25.

⁵⁵ This aim forms part of the conclusion to the gospel; Lk.24:47 and is restated at the opening of the Acts: Acts 1:8.

⁵⁶ J. Munck, The Acts of the Apostles, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1967), 132.

4.2 Lystra the Hellenistic city

The Areopagus speech of Acts 17 draws the attention of scholars because it is given by Paul in the famous ancient city of Athens before an audience of some of the most well known philosophical groups in history. In contrast, Lystra as a Hellenistic city has generally been overshadowed by the fame of Athens with its philosophical schools. Consequently the events and speech in Lystra have been regarded as simply preparatory to the Areopagus speech. This however should not detract the reader of Acts from the significance of Lystra as representing a Graeco-Roman city of some importance.

In this section I wish to point out that Lystra was a Hellenistic city of some importance, in her own right. An analysis of the city will also contribute in other ways to an understanding of Luke's narrative. During recent years New Testament scholarship, especially in North America, experienced a renewed interest in archaeology and geography and their contribution to the interpretation of the New Testament. One example of the contribution of archaeological and geographical information to the reading of Pauline texts is the publication by Meeks in which he placed the letters of Paul within a city context. He set out to avoid the "vague generalities" (like the Greek concept of immorality, etc.) and "to try to discern the texture of life in particular times and particular places".⁵⁷ He starts this study with an analysis of the cities in the Roman Empire which Paul visited and uses this picture to paint a refreshing and often surprising picture of early Christianity and Pauline theological thought.

What is true of Paul and his letters, would also be valid for Luke. By taking the particular places and times of cities mentioned by Luke into consideration, it is possible to understand part of his texts better. The geographical position and social composition of Lystra⁵⁸ could contribute to the understanding of the conditions that Paul and Barnabas would have found and the picture Luke presents of the actions of the Lystrians. This analysis will help clarify the extent to which the events in Lystra were part and parcel of the Graeco-Roman world.

4.3 Position

Lystra was situated about 40 kilometres south-west of Iconium.⁵⁹ Paul, having come up from Pamphilia in the south, would have joined the Via Sebaste at Pisidian Antioch.⁶⁰ The Via Sebaste,⁶¹ which has its beginnings at Ephesus on the western shore of Asia Minor, runs in an easterly direction through Antioch in Pisidia, then through Iconium and on to Caesarea in central Asia Minor. Paul would have travelled eastward, along this great commercial route, to Iconium.

⁵⁷ W.A. Meeks, The First Urban Christians, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 2.

⁵⁸ K. Lake and H.J. Cadbury, in: F. Jackson and K. Lake, The Beginnings of Christianity. Part 1. The Acts of the Apostles, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 163, discuss the singular accusative (Lustran) and dative plural (Lustrois) and see this as an indication that the word is heteroclitic and not metaplastic. This remark is followed by the following intriguing comment: "It is perhaps (!) only an accident that the singular accusative comes each time in an introductory and summarizing narrative, the plural dative in a 'story' which must come from a 'tradition,' if not from a source". This remark poses the traditions-geschichtliche analysis which could be helpful in determining the traditions of Luke. But this is a difficult and intricate study which represents a research project on its own.

⁵⁹ A.S. Peake, A Commentary on the Bible, (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1929), 792.

⁶⁰ This route began at Ephesus in the west and ran through Iconium, eastwards to the boundaries of the empire.

⁶¹ It is still debated whether Lystra lay on the Via Sebaste. Cf. H. Conzelmann, Acts of the Apostles, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 108.

Thus Antioch and Iconium, situated in strategic places, would have been cities exposed to many travellers and commercial activities. At Iconium, Paul would have turned southwards towards Laranda using the minor-route that runs in a North-South direction. Lystra was situated about 20 kilometres to the west of this particular route, on the western borders of the Anatolian Steppe, with mountains to the South and West.⁶² One may easily have the impression that Lystra was a small town tucked away in a secluded glen and therefore of no consequence, but this is not the case. Given the nature of the area, Lystra must have been a focal point and consequently a significant city. Munck states that the whole area in question was "much more heavily populated than it is now; its many cities were probably close to one another and the well developed network of roads that served commerce and industry was now to hasten the spreading of the Gospel."⁶³

Lystra did not differ much from these cities and should therefore not be seen as less civilized and less important than them. Ramsay rejected a theory (of Conybeare and Howson in their *Life and Epistles of St. Paul*) that the apostles, having been persecuted in the greater towns, went to uncivilised areas. "We now see that Lystra was a town of precisely the opposite character, a centre and stronghold for the civilisation of the governing people.... So far from going to the less civilised parts, [Paul] always sought out the great civilised centres."⁶⁴ In fact, Lystra became a colony under emperor Augustus again (*Colonia Julia Felix Gemina Lustra*).⁶⁵ Ferguson, in his classification of the privileges that cities could enjoy under the Roman empire, puts these colonies of Roman citizens at the top. Such were their status that they were sometimes granted partial or complete immunity from taxation which would increase their economic potential. Apart from Lystra, Pisidian Antioch and Iconium also enjoyed this status.⁶⁶ Thus Lystra was of equal status to the two cities situated on the commercial route. The importance of Lystra is further confirmed by an inscription found in Antioch, which read: "To the very brilliant colony of Antioch her sister the very brilliant colony of Lystra did honour by presenting the statue of Concord".⁶⁷ There is therefore ample evidence to indicate Lystra's importance both politically and economically.

4.4 Composition of the society in Lystra

When the apostles began to minister in Lystra, the inhabitants did not take much notice of them. The visit of the apostles in itself did not seem to have drawn much attention. The visit of foreign travellers was not an unusual event in a city that enjoyed the status of Lystra. This would also be typical of a cosmopolitan society like the one in Lystra where there was quite a mixture of people.

⁶² B. Levick, *Roman Colonies in Southern Asia*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 76-79; Cit. ap. C. Breytenbach and C. le Roux, eds., *Bybelse Argeologie*, Studiegids 2 vir BAR212-A (Pretoria: Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1987), 135.

⁶³ J. Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1967), 133.

⁶⁴ W.M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire before A.D. 170*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1893), 100-101.

⁶⁵ H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 108; R.B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 5th ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1910), 230, note 1.

⁶⁶ E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 32.

⁶⁷ W.M. Ramsay, *The Cities of St Paul; The Cities of Asia Minor*, 5th ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1897), 50.

Romans were present because Lystra was established as a colony in 25 B.C.⁶⁸ This was done in order to keep the warlike mountain people at bay. It appears that the Roman soldiers intermarried with the local population.⁶⁹ This in itself must have led to the creation of a group of people who were neither Roman or local, and contributed to the complex constitution of the society. Professor Sterrett who identified the site of Lystra in 1885, did so by deciphering fourteen inscriptions, half of which were in Latin and the rest in Greek.⁷⁰ This is a confirmation of the mixed population of Lystra, within which Romans played an important part. It also indicates a very Hellenistic context within which the apostles knew they were proclaiming the Gospel.

There were, furthermore, Lycaonians whose language was spoken in Lystra and which the apostles could not understand (Ac. 14:12).⁷¹ Ramsay wrote concerning them, that "the majority were evidently uneducated, not well acquainted with Greek, but more naturally expressing themselves in the Lycaonian tongue, and much under the influence of native superstition".⁷²

Despite its varied composition Lystra maintained a strong Hellenistic character.⁷³ The fact that Greek, the lingua franca of the time, was spoken in Lystra, indicates how the process of Hellenization was at work there too. Paul preached most of his speeches, including the one in Lystra, in Greek. Thus there were at least three languages spoken at Lystra; Latin, Greek and Lycaonian.

There were apparently some Jews in Lystra, although they do not seem to have been a significant group. No mention is made of Jews being present at Lystra in Acts 14, except when a contingent arrives from Antioch and Iconium to win the crowd over to their side and oppose the apostles (Ac. 14:19). In Acts 16:1-3, however, Luke recounts the family circumstances of Timothy who lived in Lystra, and states that his mother was a Jewess while his father was a Greek. He also mentions that Timothy was uncircumcised. This intermarriage and the non observance of religious requirements indicates a lack of interest as well as a lack of cohesion in the Jewish community of Lystra. Despite the presence of some Jews in Lystra they were not organized into a strong cohesive worshipping community.⁷⁴ The contingent of Jews who came from Antioch and Iconium seem to have had little trouble in convincing the local Lystrians to turn against Paul and Barnabas.⁷⁵ Rackham states that "(T)here was no synagogue at Lystra, and therefore only a few Jews."⁷⁶ This

⁶⁸ W.M. Ramsay, Lystra, in A Dictionary of the Bible. J. Hastings, ed. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1900), 178-180. He dates the establishment of the colony in 6 B.C.

⁶⁹ B. Levick, Roman Colonies in Southern Asia Minor, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 191, note 1. Cf. also J.L. de Villiers, Die Handeling van die Apostels, (Kaapstad: N.G.Kerk-Uitgewers, 1977), 279.

⁷⁰ R.B. Rackham, The Acts of the Apostles, 5th ed. (London: Methuen & Co, 1910), 230.

⁷¹ H.H. Wendt, Die Apostelgeschichte, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupr., 1913), 220, remarks: "Über die lykaon. Sprache wissen wir nichts Genaueres".

⁷² W.M. Ramsay, A Dictionary of the Bible, J. Hastings, ed. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1900), 179.

⁷³ W.M. Ramsay, The Cities of St Paul; The Cities of Asia Minor, (5th ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1897), 407-418.

⁷⁴ E. Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles, trans. B. Noble and G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 429. He states that it seems there were no Jews in Lystra.

⁷⁵ This points to the Lystrians as being people who were open to outside influences. J.L. de Villiers, Die Handeling van die Apostels, (Kaapstad: N.G.Kerk-Uitgewers, 1977), 285: refers to the "wispelturigheid" of the crowds: "Dit is vreemd dat die skare een oomblik gewillig was om aan Paulus en Barnabas te offer, en die volgende oomblik oorgehaal kan word om hulle te volg".

⁷⁶ R.B. Rackham, The Acts of the Apostles, 5th ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1910), 230.

may explain the passive rôle of Jews in Lystra and the need for Jews from other areas to go there and stir them up (Ac. 14:19).

The small Jewish presence represents a further contribution to the cosmopolitan nature of Lystra. It is a further indication of the special nature of Lystra as an important Hellenistic city.

CHAPTER 5

RELIGION IN LYSTRA

A survey of the religious life will reveal important information for the understanding of the Lukan narrative about events in Lystra.

5.1 Religion

On the historical level of the text, one needs to keep in mind that something unusual, like the healing of the cripple, was needed to arrest the attention of the Lystrians.⁷⁷ Only such a special event would provide reason for Paul's speech to have been recorded. There is therefore nothing unusual in Paul's speech in Lystra. His speech would not have been recorded simply because it took place. The fact that it was recorded indicates that there were special circumstances which made it a unique and memorable occasion. This furthermore indicates that the Lystrians, like the Athenians, were willing to welcome foreigners who engaged in religious activities to their city. But more than this, they were so open to them, that they could enthusiastically integrate these foreigners and their teaching in their existing religious belief system.

The rôle of the Jews in the reaction against Paul illustrates something about the place of religion in such a city as Lystra. The Jews clearly had the will and the ability to assert themselves in terms of their religion. They were able to "persuade" the people and to incite them to such drastic action against Paul like stoning (Ac. 14:19). It indicates how the Lystrians could move from being impressed by their visitors to persecuting them. It illustrates their receptiveness, their open-mindedness and their fickleness. A similar general picture of religion in this era emerges from the work of Grant, who describes the Hellenistic age as a very religious one, "uncritical, superstitious, and ever receptive to new ideas from whatever source".⁷⁸ He refers to Paul's ministry in Athens and Lystra as examples of this.

This gives an indication of the nature of religion in a city like Lystra. Against the backdrop of this description and from the location of the city and events described in Acts 14:8ff., it is clear that the two motifs of syncretism and polytheism are important for an understanding of religious life in Lystra.

5.2 Polytheism

On the one hand it goes without saying, and it is proven by the speech, that the Lystrians had a polytheistic religion. Ramsay has found indications that the Anatolians worshipped different gods simultaneously. He argues that the god with the Phrygian name of Men (Hermes) was worshipped in conjunction with the Near-Eastern mother goddess.⁷⁹ Conzelmann states that: "the two gods appear together on an inscription from this region."⁸⁰

Polytheism would be one of the most important aspects of the religious belief system of the

⁷⁷ Cf. the discussion in the previous chapter on the historicity of Luke's writings.

⁷⁸ F.C. Grant, Roman Hellenism and the New Testament, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 16.

⁷⁹ W.M. Ramsay, The Cities of St Paul. The Cities of Asia Minor, 285ff. Cit. ap. E. Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles, trans. B. Noble and G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 432.

⁸⁰ H. Conzelmann, Acts of the Apostles, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 110. Conzelmann bases his information on W.M. Calder, A Cult of the Homonades, CIR 24 (1910): 76-81.

Lystrians. According to Haenchen the purpose of the healing in the Lukan narrative is precisely to introduce Paul as facing the polytheism of the pagan society. For him there is an inherent contradiction in the Lukan text. He argues that for the cripple to have had "faith to be healed" (Acts 14:9), Paul must have spoken of Jesus Christ, and therefore, by implication, of Him as the Saviour. If Paul had been preaching Jesus Christ then it would have been impossible for the Lystrians to mistake him for one of their own gods, because he had been proclaiming a new god.⁸¹ Haenchen believes that this confusion shows that Luke wanted to represent Paul as taking pagan polytheism as his starting point for his speech; i.e. urging them to turn from "vain idols" (*μῦτραια*) to the "living God".⁸² Jackson and Lake also hold the view that the monotheistic presentation of God is something new to the Lystrians.⁸³ Bultmann likewise is of the opinion that Christian missionary preaching to the Gentiles had to begin with the proclamation of "One God", because Gentile religion was basically polytheistic.⁸⁴

There is, however, evidence to show that polytheism was not an absolute characteristic of pagan societies in the Graeco-Roman times. Hellenistic society was more monotheistic than previously believed, even though the concept of one "god" was not being generally grasped by ordinary society of Paul's day. "This Hellenistic monotheism seems to have remained the property of certain intellectuals,⁸⁵ however never becoming a widespread or popular belief."⁸⁶ In the case of the Lystra events there is no indication that the audience of Paul were exposed to monotheistic beliefs.

⁸¹ E. Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 431.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 431.

⁸³ F. Jackson and K. Lake, The Beginings of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles, vol. 4 (London: MacMillan, 1933), 166. They imply that there is an emphasis on the oneness of God which naturally contrasts with the polytheism of the local inhabitants of Lystra.

⁸⁴ R. Bultmann, Theology of The New Testament, vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1952), 65.

⁸⁵ The issue of monotheism is not important on the historical level of the text. It is perhaps more of an issue on the level of the communication between Luke and his readers, where the concept of God is discussed with philosophical terminology in a context of educated people. This relates to the issue of the cultural level of the readers of Luke. Were they people exposed to these "intellectual" monotheistic trends? A.J. Malherbe, The Social Aspects of Early Christianity, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 35 argues that Christianity was spreading amongst people that were often of a higher social status than previously believed. He shows that Deissmann's conclusion that "...taken as a whole the New Testament is a Book of the people." The interpretation of A. Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament illustrated by recently discovered texts of the Graeco-Roman world, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927), 143, has undergone some serious reappraisal. He refers (op. cit. 39) to Wifstrand who argued that Hebrews, James and I Peter is written by people of some education. A. Wifstrand, Stylistic Problems in the Epistles of James and Peter, and Marrou who concluded that the lowest educational level of New Testament writers would be equivalent to an upper level of secondary-school instruction. Marrou, A History of Education in Antiquity, 233-242; Cit. ap. A.J. Malherbe, The Social Aspects of Early Christianity, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 45. Malherbe's general conclusion is that though more investigation is needed, Paul's letters represented a level of education early in the tertiary stage. Thus Christianity spread amongst a higher social level in society than originally thought. *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸⁶ W. Meeks, The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 165. He argues that it was the Stoics and Platonists who were able to synthesize and incorporate many gods into their concept of one supreme deity. "Because all gods are ultimately aspects of the One, the wise man could acknowledge them all and draw whatever benefit he might from as many of their cults as he chose."

5.3 Syncretism

In the process of syncretism, attempts were made to integrate faiths from different quarters of the empire by identifying different deities with one another. Because of the cosmopolitan nature of the Lystrian society, the process of syncretism was inevitable. Lystrians, who were used to foreign gods and their appropriation in the traditional religion, would not find it too difficult to accept Barnabas and Paul as gods they already knew, and their response is not as illogical as Haenchen believes it to be. Lystra was situated near the regional capital, Iconium, which in turn was on the great east-west commercial route. As discussed above, Lystra was also a Roman colony with Greek being widely spoken. Thus Lystra was exposed to the trends of the day. Except for the obvious polytheistic nature of the religion in Lystra, it is striking that the Lystrians were able and willing to incorporate new religious ideas and messages in their existing religion as they did when Paul and Barnabas visited them. This reflects the very widespread syncretistic approach of people in the Graeco-Roman period.

Ferguson, discussing the dissolution of religion in the classical age, writes how new cults were introduced in this period. "By the Hellenistic Age the outward forms of religion were being applied to new loyalties - ruler worship and the personification of abstractions like *Tyche* (luck)". This does not mean that the traditional religion is abandoned: "But very few would have attempted to dismantle the old religion, and the traditional gods and the civic religion showed a remarkable staying power, as the later record shows. Paul's experience at Lystra (Acts 14:8ff.) illustrates the continuation of the old polytheistic religious practices".⁸⁷

Stambaugh and Balch write about the syncretistic trend of the Graeco-Roman world that "when the Romans met the Greeks and were overwhelmed by the facile charm of their culture, this straightforward but rich religion of the soil was overlaid with tales from Greek mythology. The Roman Jupiter was identified with the Greek Zeus, Juno with Hera, Minerva with Athena, Vulcan with Hephaestus. At the same time, however, a specifically Roman genius persisted in the prayers and rites that were conducted by the official priests of the state. This assumed, in common with most polytheism, that there was always room in the pantheon for another god, that human knowledge has not succeeded in discovering all the divine beings that existed. It also assumed that the welfare of Rome and of its empire depended on the continued goodwill of the gods".⁸⁸

This process of syncretism is not a coincidental one. In this regard a remark by Johnson is helpful to understand the basic dynamics at work behind the process of syncretism. Johnson argues that the process of Hellenization helped to give some cohesion to the vast empire. This binding force rested on three pillars: the Greek city, language and religion. Religious syncretism was positively encouraged so that the local gods of communities could be identified with their Greek counterparts.⁸⁹ Seen in this light the events at Lystra is part of a wider process that must have been repeated in many areas.

This binding process was actively encouraged. Even the Jewish author Josephus was familiar with this practice and actively participated in it. He identified the God of Judaism with the Greek concept of God. "They (the Jews) and we revere the God who has ordered all things, by naming him in an etymologically correct way Zeus and giving him his name on the basis of the fact that he breathes life into all creatures."⁹⁰

⁸⁷ E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 125.

⁸⁸ J. Stambaugh and D. Balch. The Social World of the First Christians, (London: SPCK., 1986), 128.

⁸⁹ L.T. Johnson, The Writings of The New Testament, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 24-25.

⁹⁰ Ant. 12,22. Cit. ap. M. Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 266.

Syncretism was an important problem in early Christianity, although there was never any possibility of integrating polytheism as such within a Christian framework. On the positive side an "acceptable" syncretism could lead to Christianity being assimilated within a Graeco-Roman context. On the negative side, however, Christianity could simply be seen as another aspect of religion already known to people from the Hellenistic period. This latter position would inevitably lead to the loss of the distinctive character of Christianity and was therefore unacceptable to most Christians.⁹¹

The problem that syncretism posed to Christianity already confronted the early missionaries like Paul. We find traces of this problem in a text like Acts. In Acts 17 Luke reflects the syncretistic tendency of the Greeks by the inscription on the altar "To an Unknown God". This passage seems to imply that the Greeks are expecting to be introduced to new gods which they will add to the gods they already worship. Since the speeches in Lystra and in Athens are closely connected, the refusal by Barnabas and Paul to be identified with Zeus and Hermes is not something peculiar to the events in Lystra. Luke has, before the Areopagus speech, introduced his readers to the fact that the proclamation of the Gospel cannot be identified with or seen as only another form of the religion of the Greeks or any other religion.

The events in Lystra as reported by Luke, are therefore fairly representative of what one would find in an important Hellenistic city. It therefore underscores the importance of the aim stated above in assessing the Graeco-Roman concepts and terminology of Acts 14:8-20, for it relates in a dramatic way the challenge of Christianity's first steps in becoming a world religion and its reflection on its own relationship with other religions.

⁹¹ That this was an ongoing problem can be seen from Origen's apology against Celsus, written in approx. A.D. 248. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5. Celsus argued that it did not matter what name was given to a god. It could be Zeus or the names used by Indians or Egyptians for their gods. In the end they all referred back to the one god. Origen found this unacceptable and to be rejected, even if it led to the persecution of Christians. He discusses the difficulties that Christians faced when they rejected the syncretizing tendency of their day: "And so on such grounds as these we defend the conduct of Christians, when they struggle even to death to avoid calling God by the name of Zeus, or to give him a name from any other language."

CHAPTER 6

SETTING THE SCENE

This chapter focuses on the form and nature of the introduction of the narrative which describes the miracle in Lystra. This introduction forms the setting of the scene for the speech. The analysis will reveal the mastery of Luke in the composition of his work and show how Luke prepared the ground for the message Paul addressed to the Hellenistic audience in a major gentile centre.

Before the analysis is done, it should be remarked that the introduction to the narrative has its own importance and value. Even though it prepares the ground for the speech of Paul in 14:15-17, it should be read carefully in its own right. The "setting" of the scene provides seminal links for the understanding of the section, and particularly of the later speech. Too often it is skimmed over as if it is of minor importance.

The introduction forms a unit of its own. This is clear from its difference in style when compared with the following description of the later events which took place in Lystra after the healing of the cripple. Commentators often, for example, drew attention to the differences between this introduction and the speech in Acts 14:15b-17.⁹²

These differences are noteworthy, because otherwise the description of the miracle is in many respects similar to other miracle stories in Acts. There are many similarities between the miracle described at the beginning of the ministry in Lystra and the healing of the cripple by Peter in Acts 3:2-8.⁹³ Both accounts share several formal features. A number of scholars have noted that Luke wanted to picture Paul as a pendant to Peter through the description of this miracle,⁹⁴ though not

⁹² E. Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary, trans. B. Noble and G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 430, who refers to Spitta.

⁹³ It has been noted that there is a deliberate attempt in the Western text to increase the similarities between the two miracle stories. For a discussion of the similarities, cf. K. Lake, and H.J. Cadbury, in: F. Jackson, and K. Lake, The Beginnings of Christianity. The Acts of the Apostles, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 163. Cf. also e.g. H.H. Wendt, Die Apostelgeschichte, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 220. He quotes Sorof who considers verses 8-11a as an addition of the editor (Timothy) and 11b-20 as material from the Barnabas-source. He does not consider this history as Lukan because of these similarities, although he admits that the detail stems from him. "Ohne Anknüpfung an eine bestimmte Überlieferung, etwa nur in der Absicht, ein Seitenstück zu dem Petrus-Wunder 3.2ff. zu geben... hätte er sie gewiß nicht gebildet". Most commentators accept that Luke found the story in his sources. The passage does not form a consistent unity, because, as G. Schille, Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas, (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 304: notes the miracle is done by Paul, but ends with Paul and Barnabas as the heroes.

⁹⁴ Zeller called it a pendant to Peter's miracle. op. cit. E. Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary, trans. B. Noble and G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 430; while others indicate it as a parallel to Peter. J.W. Packer, Acts of the Apostles, (Cambridge: University Press, 1966), 116; G. Lüdemann, Early Christianity According to The Traditions in Acts, A Commentary,

all see it as such.⁹⁵ What is clear, though, is that Luke wanted his reader to realize that what happened in Jerusalem with the apostles is repeated in gentile countries in the ministry of Paul.⁹⁶ Miracles accompany the proclamation of the Gospel everywhere. In this way not only formal features, but also patterns, are the same in the two stories.

6.1 The historical basis of the miracle

The similar descriptions of the miracles does not imply that Luke created both the stories about the healing and that the introduction is a product of Lukan fantasy. There are quite incisive differences between the descriptions of the healing of the cripple in Acts 3 and 14 which reveal Luke's dependence on tradition and would point to the historical nature of the events. In contrast to the miracle story in Acts 3, the cripple in Lystra is said to have believed and the healing follows only after Paul proclaimed the Gospel.⁹⁷ These differences with Acts 3 indicate that Luke drew on traditional material for his description of the miracle in Lystra. This traditional character is confirmed by the above mentioned fact that the introduction of the Lystra ministry with the miracle story also differs from the rest of Acts 14:11-20.

An analysis of the introductory miracle reveals, therefore, that Luke made use of local traditions from the area of Lystra to describe the events during the ministry of Paul. These traditions must have originated early in order to explain the existence of churches in that area and in order to commemorate their founding fathers. The local tradition must have had a Hellenistic context and nature.

6.2 The miracle and the speech

The introduction also reveals the compository skills of Luke. This becomes clear when almost nothing is said about the contents of Paul's proclamation to the cripple before his healing, although the reference to the faith of the cripple in Acts 14:9 presupposes it. This omission is not without good reason. The Western text, aware of other similarities between the miracles of the healing of the cripple, changed the account of the Lystra miracle to approach the description in Acts 3. It

trans. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1987), 160; C.S.C. Williams, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), 170.

⁹⁵ Not all agree that this is a pendant to Peter: e.g. J. Munck, The Acts of the Apostles, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1967), 131; F. Jackson, and K. Lake, The Beginnings of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles, vol. 4 (London: MacMillan, 1933), 163. The reason that is given is that this is a typical way of presenting a healing.

⁹⁶ J.L. de Villiers, Die Handeling van die Apostels, Deel 1 (Kaapstad: N.G.Kerk-Uitgewers, 1977), 280. Haenchen, however, finds that the similarities are to be explained as typical of such healing stories. E. Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary, trans. B. Noble and G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 430.

⁹⁷ The fact that Paul was preaching the Gospel message can be deduced from verse 9. Paul was "speaking" and the cripple had "faith" to be healed. He would not have been able to have "faith" unless Paul had been preaching the salvation message.

takes over parts of Acts 3:6 and extends Paul's command to the cripple in Acts 14:10 to include the formula "in the name of the Lord Jesus". Haenchen correctly argued that Luke omitted this description because if Jesus was indeed proclaimed it would be difficult to explain why the crowds misunderstood Paul⁹⁸. Luke therefore carefully omitted any reference to a proclamation of the Gospel to the cripple in order to explain the behaviour of the crowds after the miracle. He wants the speech to follow, rather than precede the miracle, and he wants to move away from the miracle. This omission therefore illustrates the deliberate attempt of Luke to focus on the problem of the understanding of the gospel in a Hellenistic context where there were Hellenistic religious presuppositions which had to be questioned and removed.

6.3 The miracle and the response of the Lystrians

Because Luke wants to focus on the response of the Lystrians, the description of the miracle is dramatic. Luke uses three different phrases to describe the helpless situation of the cripple: The cripple could not use his feet, he was cripple since his birth, and he had never walked. This information indicates the duration and severity of the illness.⁹⁹ The fact that the cripple had been sick for so long, reiterates the miraculous nature of the healing and prepares the way for the exuberant response of the local people.

This perspective also proves that the miracle prepares the reader for later events as it does not draw attention to itself. Luke intended this miracle to introduce later events, because the cripple fades completely from the picture. The characterization of the cripple confirms this impression, even though he is initially in the centre of attention, he is a flat character. He does not take any initiative, does not speak or indicate his faith. It is Paul who articulates the fact that he had faith.¹⁰⁰

The attention of the reader is therefore turned from the cripple to the crowd's response to the miracle and their attempts to deify the apostles. It is, therefore, not the healing, but the impression which it had on the crowds and their response which are the important issues. As will be shown later, their response typifies Graeco-Roman presuppositions. Once again the nature of the introduction brings out the real issue in this visit to Lystra.

6.4 The miracle and Graeco-Roman religion

The reader of Acts would have understood the religious implications of the response of the

⁹⁸ Cf. E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. B. Noble and G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 73. But cf. also the good discussion of Haenchen's position by Marshall, *Acts*, 235.

⁹⁹ H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 109. The same features are found in Acts 3, where there is a similar focus on the response of people to the miracle.

¹⁰⁰ The insertion of the Western text that the cripple was afraid when he heard Paul speak (*ὀπίσθωθεν ἐν φόβῳ*) is an attempt to stress his faith, but in the end only further underlines his passivity in the existing text.

Lystrians immediately. The idea that gods visited human beings would have been recognised as typical of the religion of their own world as well as the world of the Lystrians. The conviction about worldly visits of gods existed widely among groups in the Graeco-Roman world during the ministry of Paul and the writing of the Lukan texts. These convictions are therefore part of the final, second and third levels of the text and can be presupposed in its prehistory. The particular reaction of the Lystrians during the visit of Paul and Barnabas in proclaiming the apostles as gods is once again not Lukan fantasy, but reflect his sources. These convictions will be discussed later.¹⁰¹ While the healing of the cripple provided the necessary spark which exposed their pagan beliefs, the exposure of the pagans' beliefs gave Paul the opportunity to witness to the "living God", which is, as Acts 17 indicates, an issue in the Hellenistic mission. This confirms that the contents of the speech can be understood only when it is realized that it is preached to an entirely Gentile audience with convictions which are foreign to the Christian Gospel or Jewish religion. Luke's interest in the response of the Lystrians leads to his discussion of their religious convictions and to a debate in which he contrasts his own religious system with theirs.

Thus the Gospel's first encounter with a totally pagan audience begins with a controversy over differing perceptions of and responses to a miraculous event which took place among them.

6.5 The authority of Paul in the Gentile mission

Another issue, which relates to the place of the Lystra events in the Book of Acts as a whole, needs to be mooted here. At this point the first level of the text and its social function is in focus. For the reader of Acts, the incident in Lystra underlines the authority of Paul as being equal to the other apostles when it comes to the proclamation of the gospel and its accompanying miraculous events. The ministry of Paul in Lystra continues the ministry of the other apostles (esp. Peter, see Ac. 3:1ff), but can also be traced back to the ministry of Jesus himself. The commission which Jesus gave to the disciples is being fulfilled through Paul (Acts 1:8).¹⁰²

Although Paul will act decisively as authoritative teacher in the following speech, his miraculous power is described in the introduction. As in Iconium where signs and miracles (σημεία καὶ τέρατα, Acts 14:3) took place through their hands, the same happens here. These signs and miracles are exactly that which has been reported as so striking of the ministry of the apostles in Jerusalem (cf. Ac. 2:43). The reader of Acts will realize that Paul needs to be taken as seriously as all the other church leaders. His message to the Lystrians will be considered as authoritative and contributed to his reputation as the apostle who knew the gentile mission and its problems. The

¹⁰¹ In section 7.3.4.2.

¹⁰² There is, however, a tendency in Luke not to place Paul on the same level as the Jerusalem apostles and to let him share the same status. Cf. e.g. the remarks of G. Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, vol. 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1982), 39. The twelve retain a unique and privileged position. This point is also brought out by R.R. Williams, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: SCM Press LTD., 1953), 170. Conzelmann in his comments on Acts 9:29, makes the interesting observation that Paul appears to step into the gap left by Stephen. This places Paul in an interesting position of not being likened to the Jerusalem apostles but as the leader in the Gentile missions. H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 75.

reader of Acts will be impressed by this authority, because it comes out at the seminal point of the transformation of the mission to a Graeco-Roman context. He and Barnabas were the ones who determined the theological issues involved in contextualising the gospel in a non-Jewish, Graeco-Roman situation, as will become clear in Acts 15. The deliberations in Jerusalem about the gentiles, the signs and wonders reported to the delegates by Paul and Barnabas (Ac. 15:12), are given an important profile by the Lystrian events. If one reads the text of Acts, it is really only the Lystrian miracle which could be the point of reference for the Lukan remark in Acts 15:12. What is said at this meeting about not making it difficult to the gentiles to become believers (Ac. 15:18) would be in line with how Paul authoritatively (and non-abusively) addresses the Lystrians about their errors.

All these remarks about the nature of the introduction, made on the basis of a literary analysis of the text, make it so much more important to realize that the speech in Lystra relates closely to a totally new phase within the mission of the church and can be more naturally seen against the background of the Graeco-Roman world.

CHAPTER 7

SUPERSTITION AS MISDIRECTED FAITH

After the discussion of the nature of the introduction, this chapter consists of two main parts which will investigate the contents of the introduction more fully. The first, section 7.1, deals with a general analysis of Luke's description of responses to miracles. This will provide important information for understanding the second section (7.2) which analyzes the misconceptions about God in the response to the miracle. Luke uses these misconceptions to introduce the issues that will be raised and corrected in the speech.

7.1 Responses to miracles in Acts

The previous section indicated how important the response of the Lystrians to the miracle was to Luke. When the Gospel is proclaimed in a gentile context like Lystra through and accompanied by the miraculous sign of healing, it does not come as a surprise to the reader of Acts. An analysis of the two Lukan writings show that the reader would, by the time he or she reads Acts 14, know that signs and wonders are hallmarks of the ministry of the apostles¹⁰³. In Jerusalem they contributed to the growth of the gospel and to people accepting Jesus as the *Κυριος και Χριστος*. These signs and wonders elicited a specific response from people: In Acts 2:43 the response of "every person" to the ministry of the apostles is described as *φοβος*. Schneider comments: "Die Furcht als religiöse Scheu entsteht angesichts der sich in den Wundern manifestierenden Macht Gottes"¹⁰⁴.

Luke also stresses the responses of people to the healings of Jesus. These responses are constantly mentioned in his gospel. This is done by describing the impact Jesus had on geographical areas: He became famous in the areas around Capernaum (Lk. 4:37), every village in Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem (Lk. 5:17) and in all the Jewish land, Jerusalem, the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon (Lk. 6:17-18), while Luke 7:17 reports that the whole Jewish country and the neighbouring areas heard of Jesus. No wonder that Peter could address the gentiles in Caesarea as if they had heard of Jesus

¹⁰³ This is also true of the ministry of Jesus. Luke recorded that the apostles underlined the importance of miracles in the work of Jesus when they proclaimed the Gospel. Peter mentioned the healings of Jesus in Acts 10:38 in his summary of His ministry, but, in typical Hellenistic manner (before the Roman centurion!) linked the healings with exorcisms. So important are his miracles, that the miracles of the apostles mirror and reflect the ministry of Jesus. The apostles, therefore, did not only repeat the miracles He did when they themselves healed people, but also proclaimed Jesus as the healer of people in their sermons.

¹⁰⁴ G. Schneider, Die Apostelgeschichte, vol. 1, Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 287, note 25.

(Ac. 2:22).¹⁰⁵ The assumption is that people were impressed by the healings of Jesus and spread the word about Him.

In general then, the response of people, when positive, would be surprise, interest and faith. Luke often mentions negative responses together with these positive ones: In Acts 2:13 the tongues are perceived with surprise by some, while others mockingly attribute them to the drunkenness of the apostles. In Acts 4:7 the uncertainty and doubt of the leaders in Jerusalem about the healing of the cripple are in contrast to the surprise and wonder of the people.¹⁰⁶ Luke also describes two responses (positive and negative) to the proclamation of the Gospel in Athens.

Thus the response of the Lystrians to the healing is of great value to the development of the account of events in Lystra. Their response is also important in the preparation of the speech which will not be given in a vacuum but linked to their response.

7.2 The response to the miracle in Lystra

A closer comparison of the above mentioned responses with the pentecost events in Acts 2 will illuminate the description of events in Lystra further. The Jews who were surprised and embarrassed by what happened on pentecost day are only converted after the speech of Peter. In this way Luke created a unity between the initial miraculous, ecstatic events and the proclamation, by describing the first response of those who witnessed the miracle and their conversion which followed the speech. This is confirmed by the fact that Luke mentioned the tongues only briefly in the introduction without elaborating on the message of the tongues. This allows him to let Peter proclaim the message in his pentecost speech.

In Lystra, Luke also describes the miraculous events first. Although the healing of the cripple assumes the proclamation of the gospel, this is not (as at pentecost) described by Luke. It is only after the response of the Lystrians is mentioned that Luke reports a message of Paul in which the gospel is proclaimed. A remarkable unity between the miraculous and the proclamation through the Word is obtained in this way.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Cf. R.C. Tannehill, The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 85-86.

¹⁰⁶ Although no miracle is performed in Athens, it is interesting to note that here too Luke describes a positive and negative response to the proclamation of the apostles. While some become believers (Acts 17:34), delay and mocking is the responses of others (Acts 17:32). For similar responses in a context where a miracle does not take place, cf. Acts 23:6-9; 28:24. Cf. further G. Schneider, Die Apostelgeschichte, (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 256; and E. Haenchen, The Acts of The Apostles, trans. Noble & Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 171.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. E. Haenchen, The Acts of The Apostles, A Commentary, trans. Noble & Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 175. That Luke does not consistently unite miracle and word in the sense that the word has the greater importance, is clear from the proclamation of the Gospel to Cornelius and his house. According to Acts 10:44, the Spirit is given to them while Peter is talking and before they are converted. Cf. also G. Schille, Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas, (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 103: "Zur Exposition dient das bei Lukas übliche Motiv einer gemischten Beurteilung der Sache; das ist die literarische Gestalt des an und für sich wertneutralen Momentes jeder Epiphanie- und Wundergeschichte, die man positiv... und negativ... beurteilen kann. Die Epiphanie besitzt Eindeutigkeit nur für die unmittelbar Betroffenen, nicht aber für die Zuschauer.

It is furthermore important to note that Luke stresses the supernatural nature of the signs and wonders. Peter responds in Acts 3:13 to the reaction of the Jews on the miracle of the healing by asking: "Why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?" It corresponds to his warning at the beginning of his pentecost speech in Acts 2:15 that the miraculous events cannot be explained in human terms as drunkenness. Peter, at the beginning of his speech in Acts 2:15 provides an argument against the response of some in the audience that the miraculous signs were a result of drunkenness and stresses their divine origins. Luke describes in Acts 14:8ff. how Paul wanted to reiterate that the divine work of God does not make his agents gods. They are as human as every one else. It seems as if Luke is interested in keeping the humane and the divine clearly separated.

But if there are some similarities between the way the response of the Lystrians is presented with other responses to miracles and the proclamation in Acts, there is something very special about the response of the Lystrians. This is already clear from a summary of the reaction of the Lystrians: they believed that the gods had come down amongst them; they called Barnabas "Zeus" and Paul "Hermes"; they prepared to sacrifice to them. This reaction seems to have caught the two missionaries by surprise. It is not the normal kind of response to the preaching of Christ. The response of the Lystrians is in fact very enthusiastic and unique, which is already an indication that these events were not invented by the author, but can be, at least, traced to sources or eyewitness accounts.

7.3 The legend recorded by Ovid

An explicit part of the response of the Lystrians to the healing of the cripple in Lystra is their impression that Barnabas and Paul were the gods Zeus and Hermes. The idea that gods could visit the world in human form was widespread in the Hellenistic world, and is a clear indication of how the gospel is seen here related to a popular belief in Graeco-Roman society of the first century.

To prove the reference, commentators generally refer to a legend about a comparable event which is recorded by Ovid.¹⁰⁸ Galinsky states that the recounting of the events at Lystra by Luke

Bei diesen kann die positive Beurteilung nur durch Interpretation erzielt werden, also durch eine deutende Rede". Schille is correct that Luke presents miraculous events in such a way that they are understood either positively or negatively. It is, however, in the light of the Cornelius history in Caesarea, a question whether the positive judgement is only possible when an interpretation is given. It seems that Luke is more interested in the combination of word and sign rather than the priority of word to the sign.

¹⁰⁸ Other legends also dealing with the concept of the gods visiting humans are known. Legends on this subject reflect their influence on the society within whose bounds they circulated. Rackham, quotes from Frazer's Golden Bough, "The Greeks were quite familiar with the idea that a passing stranger may be a god." Frazer, Golden Bough, 2nd ed., 237. Cit. ap. R.B. Rackham, The Acts of the Apostles, 5th ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1910), 232, note 1. A legend recorded by Eunapius illustrates the point well. Eunapius lived in Sardis during the fourth century A.D. The legend he records could well have been known in Lystra in the early Christian era as Sardis is not far from Lystra. It deals with the visit to a farm of two gods in human disguise. These two gods are so impressed by the kind reception which they are given that they reward the master of the farm. His daughter, Sosipatra, is nurtured by the two guests in such a way that the father is scarcely able to recognize her because she has been transformed into the appearance of a divine being. The father

in Acts 14 "attests that many decades after Ovid had composed his story, the religious belief in the reality of theophany still flourished in its locale".¹⁰⁹

This reference is, admittedly, not always accepted¹¹⁰ as a legitimate one. Hanson, for example, argues that Luke's story could not refer to a local cult of Zeus and Hermes. The Lycaonians would have worshipped local non-Olympian gods which would have been vaguely identified with Greek gods.¹¹¹ But there are enough arguments in favour of such a reference, which will be discussed later.

7.3.1 The legendary source of Luke

Luke both knew and made use of a legend in order to portray the events which he is narrating. He wanted a point of contact with local thought and custom from which the speech of Paul could be worked out. There are enough indications that Luke had access to a legend which was similar to the one used by Ovid in his work. He did not know Ovid's legend, as the differences between the two accounts prove, but he used another account, either written or oral, of the same legend.

Here one should keep in mind two aspects about reporting events like those in Lystra. On the one hand in an attempt to explain how Luke came to know about the setting of the events in Lystra, Hargreaves, for example, believes that Timothy provided Luke with information about what had taken place in Lystra.¹¹² But this is only one side of the picture. Once such information has been obtained, the actual description of the events can take on many forms. The use of eyewitness accounts, like those of Timothy, who knew Lystra well, does not exclude the possibility that Luke took over similar traditions also used by Ovid and was influenced by it in his retelling of the Lystra events.

Lüdemann, in turn, believes that Luke generally made use of material he had gained from

then recognized the two guests as divine beings. Eunapius then goes on to state that the father in his heart praised Homer for "having sung of such a supernatural and divine event: For the gods disguise themselves as strangers from abroad / And assuming the most varied shapes wander through the cities." (Odyssey 17.485f). "Lives of the Philosophers" Loeb Classical Library, K. Latte, Lesebuch, No. 43; ed. and trans. W. C. Wright, 400ff. Cit. ap. F.C. Grant, Hellenistic Religions, The Age of Syncretism, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), 49ff.

¹⁰⁹ G.K. Galinsky, Ovid's Metamorphoses, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 198.

¹¹⁰ Ovid, Metamorphoses 8. Scholars who find the legend important for the understanding of the events in Lystra, like G. Krodel, ed. Acts, Proclamation Commentaries, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 55, refer only to the legend as recorded by Ovid as the basis for this incident. H. Conzelmann, Acts of the Apostles, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 110: notes Ovid's account but also finds other reasons for linking Zeus and Hermes to the Lystra episode. He finds the work of W.M. Calder: A Cult of the Homonades, (n.p. 1910), 76-81, enlightening, because it illustrates how the names of Zeus and Hermes have been found on an inscription near Lystra. C.S.C. Williams, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), 170: similarly notes Ovid's legend as "striking" and the inscriptions of Hermes and Zeus found near Lystra, as recorded by Calder as "very significant."

¹¹¹ R.P.C. Hanson, The Acts in the RSV, (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1967), 148.

¹¹² J. Hargreaves, A Guide to Acts, (London: S.P.C.K. Sheldon Press, 1990), 135.

reading and that the legend is the result of the working in of local colouring.¹¹³ He argues that Luke made use of literary legends available to him and concludes that "Luke was especially stimulated by literary models, on the basis of which he composed this stirring story." Also "at this particular point in Acts Luke made use of the knowledge he had gained from reading".¹¹⁴ Here the tradition used by Ovid is seen as the creative impulse for Luke's version of the Lystra events in Acts. This insight of Lüdemann correctly reflects the literary activity of Luke in creating a good narrative, although it need not mean that Luke fantasized about these events and that they do not reflect the history of Paul's ministry in some way or other.

Another indicator that Luke would have wished to include such material to give contours to his sources, comes from Conzelmann's observation that Luke follows the general example of ancient historiography by inserting speeches which serve not only to instruct but also to please.¹¹⁵ The reference to well known legends would be one way of pleasing one's reader. It means that their own world is brought closer to the text, which in turns enhances a pleasurable reading experience.

There is, however, more to the use of legends than simply the enjoyment of the reader. The point can be made that, on an historical level, the Lystrians, remembering legends about this incident, assumed that the manifestation of power in the healing of the cripple by Paul and Barnabas, was an indication of their divinity. The Lystrians not wishing to make the same mistake as their forebears who were punished for their oversight, were enthusiastic in the welcome and deification of the two visitors, Barnabas and Paul.

But before discussing the use that Luke makes of the legend and the rôle it plays in the account of events in Lystra, it is appropriate to introduce the legend itself more thoroughly, especially because of the way in which it retains certain motifs and thoughts similar to Luke's text.

7.3.2 The contents of Ovid's legend

In his account of the legend,¹¹⁶ Ovid refers to the two Roman gods Jupiter and the grandson of Atlas (Hermes) as having visited the area of Phrygia in the guise of men. According to the legend they visited a thousand homes before they were finally welcomed by an elderly couple, Philemon and Baucis. The couple gave their two guests a good meal without realizing that they were gods. It was when the couple noticed that their mixing-bowl and wine continually filled up on their own accord that they correctly deduced the true identity of their divine guests. They lifted their hands up in prayer to the two visitors. The elderly couple then wished to sacrifice a goose for their divine guests, but were unable to do so because they were too slow of foot to catch it. The goose finally found refuge with the two gods, who saved it from death. The two guests then openly acknowledged that they were gods, and with that lead the elderly couple away from their humble dwelling to the safety of the mountainside. From that vantage point the elderly couple saw the whole countryside

¹¹³ G. Lüdemann, Early Christianity According to The Traditions in Acts, A Commentary, trans. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1987), 162.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 162. If Lüdemann has in mind that Luke read Ovid's account of the legend, then I would disagree with him as the differences are too great.

¹¹⁵ H. Conzelmann, Acts of The Apostles, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), xliii.

¹¹⁶ Ovid Metamorphoses 8.620-724.

covered by a flood, except for their own dwelling which was soon transformed into a temple. Baucis and Philemon were then given the opportunity to make a wish. They asked to be given the privilege of serving as priests in the temple. Their wish was granted and they lived to a ripe old age. They realised that they were finally dying when they were transformed into trees. The legend ends with the statement that the Bithynians still point out a tree with a double trunk on which people hang wreaths.¹¹⁷ Thus the kindness of Philemon and Baucis is remembered and they are worshipped.

7.3.3 The prehistory of the legend

I wish to show that this legend existed at the time of the events which are delineated in Acts 14 and before Luke actually made use of it.

The reason to believe that Luke made use of a legend which actually circulated in the time and region about which he was writing is to be found in the fact that Ovid himself used legendary source for his narrative. This would be in line with how his contemporaries approached their art of writing and the extensive use of sources by them. As far as the reliability of Ovid's sources are concerned, Ovid states that the legend came to him from "staid old men who have no reason to deceive."¹¹⁸ The reference Ovid makes to his oral sources reflects the typical approach of the Hellenistic historiographies. Galinsky states that,¹¹⁹ "(t)he hallmark of the Hellenistic writer on mythology was his erudition; he would engage in considerable researches to find little-known and quaint stories and legends".¹²⁰

Not only is the prehistory of the legend significant, but it is also interesting to note the geographical region in which it circulated. There seems to be strong indications that the legend was circulating in and around the area where Lystra was situated and that the Lystrians would have

¹¹⁷ The act of hanging wreaths should be seen as an act of worship. I wish to give two examples from Lucian, On Sacrifices 3, 12. In writing about an old man called Chryses, who voices his complaint against Apollo, Lucian indicates the connection between wreaths and sacrifice/temple worship. "My good Apollo; I have often dressed your temple with wreaths (*στεφάνου*) when it lacked them before, and have burned in your honour all those thighs of bulls..." A similar connection is seen when he describes the sacrificial gifts that are brought to the altar: "When they have established altars and formulae and lustral rites, they present their sacrifices...But those who offer victims (to come back to them) deck the animal with garlands, (*στεφανώσαντες*)."

It is necessary to point out that in Acts 14:13 the word to describe wreaths is *στέμματα* while Lucian uses the word *στέφανος*. However I do not think that this difference is a problem as both words are derived from *στέφω* and can be used interchangeably.

¹¹⁸ Ovid Metamorphoses 8.720.

¹¹⁹ G.K. Galinsky, Ovid's Metamorphoses, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 1. Cf. also the description of D.E. Aune, The Literary Environment of the New Testament, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 81 and his more general account of how historiographers designed their works.

¹²⁰ The third century author, Philostratus, describes how he collected his information in order to compose his The Life of Apollonius of Tyana. He used sources from cities where Apollonius was loved, from temples where he restored rites, from accounts left of him by others and from his own letters.

been aware of it. Ovid indicates that he was told about the legend in Phrygia and Bithynia.¹²¹ Lystra was in the region known as Lycaonia, the province immediately to the east of Phrygia and south of Bithynia.

When Luke used the legend in his narrative, it not only contributed to the impression of veracity he wanted to create for his reader, but it strengthens the argument that Luke was using a Graeco-Roman setting in which to place the first proclamation of the gospel to Gentiles and that he related his narrative to topical issues in Graeco-Roman religion.

The question of whether Luke used the existing legend is clarified by the number of parallels as well as contrasts between his text and the legend. The parallels are:

1. The theme about the visit of gods in human form.
2. The number of gods (two).
3. The geographical location.
4. A miracle takes place (the mixing bowl remains full - the cripple is healed).
5. The visitors are identified as gods only after the miracle takes place.
6. The names / identities of the gods as Jupiter and Mercury (Latin in the legend) and the Greek equivalents, Zeus and Hermes in Acts.
7. The act of sacrifice which follows the recognition. The immediate reaction of the elderly couple in the legend is to kill a goose as a sacrificial token to the two gods. The reaction of the Lystrians is to prepare to sacrifice bulls.
8. The reference to "wreaths". Ovid states that the Bithynians still commemorate the event by hanging wreaths on trees. Luke states that wreaths were being brought with the bulls.¹²²
9. The priesthood in the events. The elderly couple are transformed into priests who serve in the neighbouring temple of Zeus. In Acts 14:13, the priest of Zeus whose temple was just outside the city, leads the crowd in preparing the sacrifice.

The differences between the two accounts are also informative:

1. In Ovid's legend, the two divine visitors reveal their divinity and in time the elderly couple are worshipped as divine.¹²³ The apostles reject all attempts to accept divine status and instead reveal the identity of the living God.
2. In the legend, punishment in the form of a flood is dispensed on those who failed to receive the gods. Luke portrays God as having been very patient in the past while the Gentiles failed to recognise Him. In contrast to the legend Luke portrays God as being very gracious and forgiving.

The parallels and contrasts that Luke brings out, are illuminating. It is clear that the use of this legend is sufficient to describe a setting which is Graeco-Roman and which clearly illustrates to the reader that a change in culture has taken place. They also allow Luke to introduce themes that can be dealt with in the speech. The differences are just as illuminating as the parallels, for they enable Luke to bring out the distinctive character of the Gospel.

¹²¹ Ovid Metamorphoses 8.620-621, 719: "tiliae contermina quercus collibus est Phrygiis... ostendit adhuc Thyneius illic incola de gemino vicinos corpore truncos."

¹²² Acts 14:13.

¹²³ Ovid's legend ends with the couple being accorded divine status and worshipped. Ovid Metamorphoses 8.724.

7.3.4 The legend and religion

Luke was able to use the legend because it had a strong religious content. This enabled Luke to give his account of events in Lystra a typically Graeco-Roman character with particular religious relevance. It would also enable Luke to present the speech of Paul as a response to the Lystrians beliefs by echoing some of the religious themes introduced by the legend. The themes that Luke draws from the legend are; firstly, that the Gentiles are basically enthusiastic about religious matters and deserve encouragement not condemnation. This will dwell on the leniency God has shown to them. Secondly, and more importantly, is that the gentile's misconception of God needs correction. In this connection there are three aspects to reckon with: 1. The blurring of distinction between God and humans. 2. Their representation of God as needing sacrifices. 3. Their religion is based on notions of God which have been erroneously acquired. These themes will be identified in the text and discussed from the perspective of the legend and of the sociological background of Graeco-Roman society further, below. Their correction will only be discussed when the speech is being dealt with.

In dealing with Luke's use of the legend one has to investigate its religious dimension. Galinsky makes the observation that the original legend had a greater religious content than that which is evident in Ovid's account. Ovid had his own purpose in recording the legend. He was writing an epic poem about the transformation of the world from creation to its present day, using about 250 different legends woven together poetically. He therefore plays down the religious aspects of theophany and tree cult.¹²⁴ He does this by adding humour to lighten the religious heaviness that his poetry would otherwise reflect.¹²⁵ Therefore, understanding the changes Ovid would have made, helps one have an idea of the legend in its more original form.

Since Ovid plays down the religious aspects of the legend, one could reasonably assume that the religious aspects that do come through would have been more central and dominant in the original. Such a "religious legend" would be of great value to Luke. Luke was writing about the religious event of the Gospel being preached for the first time to an entirely Gentile audience and would have been interested in the religious world within which these Gentiles lived and in motifs which may assist him in proclaiming the message of the Gospel. As mentioned above it would give him a point of contact with the local situation which could be used as a point of departure for Paul's speech. Luke takes certain points from this legendary tradition, illuminates them with the gospel message so that they are transformed into stories with a new meaning. At other points the gospel message is in complete contrast to the religious beliefs portrayed in the legend. This then highlights the relevance of the gospel either by its contrast or similarity with something that is familiar to the people. In this way Luke represents Paul as beginning where his audience is.

Such literary activity is not unique in Luke's texts or in early Christianity. One notices a similar technique in Luke's presentation of the gospel in Athens.¹²⁶ One also sees in the work of Clement

¹²⁴ G.K. Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 198f.

¹²⁵ The humour that Ovid adds to the legend can be seen at four points: 1. Mercury takes his wings off so that he is not recognised. 2. The three legged pot needed to be levelled since one leg was broken. 3. The elderly couple chasing the goose. 4. The bark closing over the mouths of the elderly couple.

¹²⁶ Luke represents Paul as beginning his discussion and presentation of the gospel by referring to one of their own altars with the inscription "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD". From that point onwards the gospel is presented as the answer to that which the Athenians themselves have

of Alexandria a similar process. In his "Exhortation to the Greeks", Clement begins with the legends that are known in the Graeco-Roman world and deals with their errors as a springboard for the presentation of the Gospel.¹²⁷

The religious aspects in Ovid's legend are as follows:

1. The belief in theophany (in this case the appearance of Jupiter and Mercury or Zeus and Hermes to the Greeks).
2. The power of the gods. "The power of heaven is indeed immeasurable and has no bounds; and whatever the gods decree is done".¹²⁸ This would fit in well with Luke's purpose of wanting to apply these attributes to the "Living God".
3. Punishment of evil people. All people are swept away by the waters except Philemon and Baucis.
4. The good are rewarded, e.g. Philemon and Baucis.
5. The need to sacrifice in the presence of the gods. Philemon and Baucis wish to offer a goose to the gods.
6. Tree cult. The remark that the Bithynians still hang wreaths on the trees.
7. The possible deification of people. The apparent recital of verses such as "(t)hose whom the gods care for are gods; let those who have worshipped be worshipped" apply to Philemon and Baucis.¹²⁹
8. The richness of providence. Although Philemon and Baucis were poor, they were able to offer the two divine guests a rich, mouth-watering assortment of 17 different kinds of food.¹³⁰ The gods make their presence known through the unending supply from the mixing bowl and of wine.

These religious aspects are echoed in the Acts 14 account at one point or another, either by being affirmed¹³¹ or by being corrected.¹³²

7.3.4.1 Religious enthusiasm

One is struck by the way in which religious enthusiasm is delineated in the account of Luke and the legend. Luke seems to have been well informed about this part of Graeco-Roman religious life. His description of this is a further indication of how he relates his text to its Graeco-Roman contexts, and deserves more attention.

The enthusiastic reception accorded to two guests by Philemon and Baucis are echoed in the Acts 14 account by the enthusiastic reception given to the two apostles. The parallel is intensified when

admitted to be unknown.

¹²⁷ Clement The Exhortation to the Greeks 1.

¹²⁸ Ovid Metamorphoses 8.618-619: "inmensa est finemque potentia caeli non habet, et quicquid superi voluere, peractum est."

¹²⁹ Ovid Metamorphoses 8.724: "cura deum di sunt, et, qui coluere, colantur."

¹³⁰ Galinsky feels that the assortment of food represents Ovid's idealized picture of country life. The meal was typically Roman. G.K. Galinsky, Ovid's Metamorphoses, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 202.

¹³¹ For example the power of God and the richness of providence.

¹³² The identity of God, the need for sacrifice and the deification of people.

the elderly couple in the legend wish to express their response by offering a sacrifice to the visiting gods. The Lystrian crowd's natural response to the belief that they are in the presence of gods is also to offer a sacrifice.¹³³

The enthusiasm of the Gentiles is also echoed in the reference to the wreaths that were part of the ceremonial procession in Lystra. The use of garlands in sacrifices appears to have been a common practice in the Graeco-Roman world. Lucian, for example, refers to them when he writes, "(B)ut those who offer victims... deck the animal with garlands ..."¹³⁴, and, "(T)he altar was the essential item for sacrifice. Many were decorated with bull's head and garland."¹³⁵ In the Loeb translation the translators have used the term "votive wreaths" for the Latin "serta" (ln 723). This gives it a sacrificial connotation. The sacrifice that the Lystrians were preparing to offer can best be described as a votive sacrifice particular to a Graeco-Roman context. In their commentaries on the Acts text, Wendt, Schneider and Schille refer to the wreaths as decorations of sacrificial animals.¹³⁶ Ferguson states: "Reliefs and paintings testify to the practice of placing a garland wreath around the bull led to sacrifice."¹³⁷

¹³³ One needs to mention at this point that the Loeb translation of Ovid does not mention sacrifice but in fact speaks of the elderly couple's attempts to "kill" the goose. Ovid uses the word "mactare" to describe the couple's desire to "sacrifice" the goose (ln. 685). This word is translated as "to kill" by the Loeb translators, but its primary meaning is religious and signifies "to sacrifice". Cf. Freund's Latin Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979). The understanding that the goose was being offered as a sacrifice does not come out in the Loeb translation and this does not do full justice to the response of the couple to the visit of the gods. This is all the more unfortunate as the question of sacrifice will later be seen to be of great importance in the speech.

¹³⁴ Lucian On Sacrifices 12: "ἀλλ' οἱ γε θύοντες στρεφάνωσαντες τὸ ζῷον"

¹³⁵ E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 148.

¹³⁶ H.H. Wendt, Die Apostelgeschichte, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupr. 1913), 220; G. Schneider, Die Apostelgeschichte, (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 158, and G. Schille, Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas, (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 306.

¹³⁷ E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 146. Some scholars believe that the wreaths were meant for the apostles. W. Schmithals, Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas, Zürcher Bibelkommentare, (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1982), 132 says: "Mit den Kränzen will man die 'Götter' bekränzen". Lucian in his work "On Sacrifices" refers to wreaths in both ways. He links wreaths with sacrifice when he says, "(B)ut those who offer victims (to come back to them) deck the animals with garlands (στρεφάνωσαντες)". Cf. Lucian On Sacrifice 12. But he also refers to wreaths as decorations or gifts when he writes, "they have many things on sale for the price of a cock or a wreath (στρεφάνου) or nothing more than incense." Cf. Lucian On Sacrifice 2. There is yet a third possibility, that the wreaths were worn by the people bringing the bulls. In Judith 3:7-10, Holofernes, the general-in-chief of Nebuchadnezzar's army, was poised to attack the coastal towns of Sidon, Tyre and others and proclaim Nebuchadnezzar as god. The people being intimidated, went out to meet him and welcomed him "wearing garlands and dancing to the sound of tambourines". In this case however the garlands were worn by the people doing the welcoming, which is significantly different from what is happening in Luke's text. This possible use of wreaths emphasizes the similarity between Luke and the legend about the sacrificial

What makes this reference to "wreaths" in Acts 14:13 so interesting and brings out its unique (Hellenistic) nature is that it is the only time it is used in the New Testament. Although Luke uses *στέμματα* and not *στεφάνος*, the two words, are both derived from *στεφω*. It is hard to discover any difference in nuance between them. The "wreaths" in Ovid's account are to hang on trees as an act of worship to the memory of Philemon and Baucis.¹³⁸ In Acts 14:13, they are presumably to decorate the bulls as part of the sacrificial process. It forms part of the sacrifice and indicates the act of worship taking place here. Despite the limited information given by Luke, it is clear that the wreaths enhanced the importance of the sacrifice and the festive atmosphere surrounding it. It is without doubt a reflection of its symbolism and use in Graeco-Roman society.

Another facet of the description of the wreaths should be discussed here. Although Paul and Barnabas strongly opposed the attempt to sacrifice to themselves, the speech and text do not contain a theological fulmination against religious enthusiasm. This is in line with the rest of Luke's narrative. One finds a similar, perhaps more direct representation and tolerance of religious enthusiasm amongst the Gentiles in the Areopagus speech. The speech opens with Paul making a reference to their religious commitment.¹³⁹ Likewise Dibelius can say of the Areopagus speech that "...the writer does not wish to speak in the tone of one accusing the heathen world of their sin, but one who is enlightening them in their ignorance."¹⁴⁰ Along the same line he can speak of the introduction of the Areopagus speech by saying "The apostle's words signify not a judgment upon the lost state of the Gentiles, but rather a fulfilment of their unconscious longings."¹⁴¹ In focusing on the Lystra speech Rackham says in similar vein "the apostles' mission was not at once to subvert all their religious ideas but simply to turn their allegiance from one to the other."¹⁴² Rackham also refers to Acts 26:18 as an example of Luke representing Paul as not condemning Gentiles.¹⁴³ It is clear that Luke is gentle in his handling of the Gentiles and of Hellenistic piety, as will become

use of wreaths and confirms that Luke was engaged in presenting a religious narrative.

¹³⁸ W. Schmithals, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lucas*, Zürcher Bibelkommentare, (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1982), 132: believes that the crowd wanted to give the wreaths to the apostles: "Mit den Kränzen will man die 'Götter' bekränzen".

¹³⁹ Acts 17:22: "Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious." Haenchen indicates that the use of the word "*δεισιδαιμων*" in this case expresses "cautious appreciative 'religious'". E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. B. Noble and G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 520, note 7.

¹⁴⁰ M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 55.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁴² R.B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 5th ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1910), 233.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 233, note 3. In Acts 26:18 Paul speaks of God's command to him concerning the Gentiles: "I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light...".

clear from the speech (Ac. 14:16)¹⁴⁴ itself and the description of the act of tearing clothes by the apostles.¹⁴⁵ One realizes how important this is when one compares his attitude to the much harder rejection of the gentiles by Paul in his letters. In this sense Romans 1-3 would represent a different way of formulating the position of Paul than the one ascribed to Paul by Luke in Acts 14. There can be no doubt that the Graeco-Roman context of Luke leads him to this position. It is also clear that Luke is sending out a message to a Graeco-Roman audience.

7.3.4.2 The errors that need correction

The Graeco-Roman character of the Lystra events is aptly illustrated when Luke moves on to discuss the errors of which he considers his characters to be guilty. The first of the three errors is the blurring of distinction between gods and humans.

The legend also highlights this Graeco-Roman phenomenon of belief in gods visiting humans. It introduces this topic in two ways. There is first the reference to the gods being able to assume human appearance. The two gods Jupiter and Mercury, wander about the Phrygian countryside disguised as men and unrecognised as gods. Secondly, the ability of some humans to become gods as seen at the end of this particular legend where the elderly couple are transformed and assume godlike qualities in the minds of the inhabitants of Bithynia. The Bithynians regularly hang wreaths in their honour and say the words "Let those who have worshipped be worshipped."¹⁴⁶

This motif in the legend is only a particular manifestation of a widespread concept. The attempt by the Lystrians to deify the apostles could be interpreted in a superficial way as a naive reaction on their part. However in a Graeco-Roman context this reaction is not so out of place as it first seems. Thus the reaction of the Lystrians to deify the apostles makes it quite clear to a reader of Acts in the first century that a change to a Hellenistic context has taken place and that a familiar Graeco-Roman belief is mooted. Ferguson says of the Greek gods that they were amongst the most anthropomorphic of the gods of any people.¹⁴⁷ It is to the modern reader, who is unfamiliar with the Graeco-Roman thought world, that the reaction of the Lystrians appears strange.

The close relationship between gods and humans is further illustrated by the discussion of Greek religion and Olympian gods in Stambaugh and Balch, where they refer to the susceptibility of the gods to human passions. This meant "that they sometimes visited the towns and cities of human beings. In myths, gods often came to visit human lovers in the forms of humans (or sometimes animals)." If this was believed of the Olympian gods, it is clear that this belief was both ancient and widespread. In addition, Stambaugh and Balch refer to the stories of special epiphanies, in which a god appeared to one or more people. Myths told how gods appeared in disguise to Lycaon and

¹⁴⁴ Where the forbearance of God is worked out thematically.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. the discussion below in section 8.2.2, which will reveal that the tearing is not indicative of condemnation, but of distress.

¹⁴⁶ Ovid *Metamorphoses* 8.724: "qui coluere, colantur."

¹⁴⁷ E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 19879), 114.

he had fed them human flesh and been gruesomely punished..."¹⁴⁸

As in Ovid's legend, not only could the gods take on human forms, but people could also become gods or divine in Graeco-Roman religious and philosophical thought. This reciprocal relationship depended heavily on the assumption that there is no absolute difference between gods and humans. There is only a gradual difference, or a difference of degree. Examples of this can be found in the writings of the philosophers. Malherbe explains how this was understood when he states that "(T)he sage, again through his knowledge and the attainment of virtue, associates with the gods and rises to their level as he lives in keeping with the divine scheme of things."¹⁴⁹ The Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in particular, are important to this discussion not only because they were current at the time of the birth and spread of Christianity, but because these philosophers are specifically named as disputing with Paul in the Areopagus speech (Acts 17:18). Thus their teachings, reflecting contemporary Graeco-Roman thought, sometimes (directly or indirectly) influenced the form of the Christian message - particularly in this Lystra speech.

Seneca, the Roman Stoic writer and contemporary to the New Testament, refers to the two aspects of human and divine interchangeability. Firstly, that of gods identifying closely with humans, when he writes about the blessings of an upright soul. "What else could you call such a soul than a god dwelling as a guest in a human body."¹⁵⁰ Secondly, that of men being able to rise to the level of the gods when people strive for virtue. "If you seize this good, you begin to be the associate of the gods, and not their suppliant."¹⁵¹ In similar vein the Epicureans are known to have preserved the teachings of their founder, Epicurus, in a virtually unmodified form because they regarded him as divine.¹⁵²

This relative distinction and the possibility that the borders between the divine and the mundane could be crossed, can be seen in examples relating not only to the religious and philosophical areas of Graeco-Roman life, but also in the political sphere in the form of emperor worship and in the society's mind as reflected through legends.

7.3.4.2.1 Wandering-magicians

Having discussed the manifestation of the gods as an ever present possibility in the Hellenistic mind, I turn now to the phenomenon of wonder-workers whose ability to bring about such events as healing, fame, wealth or power, were often associated with the manifestation of a deity.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ J. Stambaugh and D. Balch, The social world of the first Christians, (London: SPCK, 1986), 128. Legends and myths have a special place in the Lystra episode and will be discussed in greater detail below.

¹⁴⁹ A.J. Malherbe, Pseudo Heraclitus, Epistle 4: The Divination of the Wise Man, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum 21 (1978): 46.

¹⁵⁰ Seneca Epistulae Morales 31.11: "Quid aliud voces hunc quam in servum potest cadere?"

¹⁵¹ Seneca Epistulae Morales 31.8: "Quod si occupas, incipis deorum socius esse, non supplex."

¹⁵² F. Copleston, A History of Philosophy, vol. 1 (Garden City, New York: Image Book, 1962), 145.

¹⁵³ E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 180.

Trémel indicates that the "signs and wonders" performed by the apostles were open to two possible interpretations, one of which clearly relates to the Graeco-Roman world.¹⁵⁴ Since the assumption by the Lystrians that the apostles were divine was sparked off by the healing of the cripple, one needs to look at the rôle of the wonder-worker as healer in the Graeco-Roman society in more detail. This may shed some light on the Graeco-Roman presuppositions in Acts 14.

While the true art of medicine arises from the sixth century B.C. in areas such as Asia Minor, Greece and Africa, superstition and religion flourished alongside it.¹⁵⁵ The growth of medicine did not stem superstitious practices. Of particular importance to this is the observation by Oepke that "from around the first century A.D. the scientific enlightenment was checked by a new growth of religion and also of superstition."¹⁵⁶ Grant states that "The border line between religion and magic was often difficult to draw in the Hellenistic age, and especially perhaps in the Hellenistic-Roman age that followed."¹⁵⁷

One finds that this kind of perception was in fact encouraged by some physicians and travelling philosophers/wonder-workers of the day. For example, the physician Menecrates of Syracuse, who was successful in curing epilepsy, portrayed himself as Zeus.¹⁵⁸ Here one finds that medical insight is combined with religious language and especially with the divinisation of the one who performs the miracle.

Wandering teachers and wonder-workers are common phenomena in the Graeco-Roman world. Stambaugh and Balch¹⁵⁹ describe them as "professional holy men... wandering from place to place and introducing new cults", adding though, that healing miracles were characteristic of only certain types of holy men. These men must have been a fairly common sight to the Lystrians for Ephesus was considered a centre for the practice of magic.¹⁶⁰ The Via Sebaste, the arterial route used by many travellers on their way to Ephesus, passed through the neighbouring cities of Antioch and Iconium. Wonder workers, like Apollonius, were widely travelled. Apollonius' home town was Tyana, about 210 kilometres east of Lystra, as the crow flies. Philostratus records the frequent

¹⁵⁴ "Deux orientations majeurs se partagent l'exégèse plus récente. L'une met l'accent sur le milieu religieux hellénistique qui considérait ces prodiges comme manifestations divines (cf Ac.14:4-18)." B. Trémel, *A Propos D'Actes 20,7-12. Puissance du Thaumaturge ou du Témoin?* Revue Théologie et de Philosophie 112 (1980): 359.

¹⁵⁵ A. Oepke, *ἰάομαι*, TDNT 1965 ed. 196.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁵⁷ F.C. Grant, Hellenistic Religions. The Age of Syncretism, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1953), 45.

¹⁵⁸ O. Weinreich, Menekrates, Zeus und Salmoneus, Tübinger Beiträger zur Altertumswissenschaft 18 (1933). Cit. ap. A. Oepke, *ἰάομαι*, TDNT 1965 ed. 198.

¹⁵⁹ J. Stambaugh and D. Balch, The Social World of the First Christians, (London: SPCK, 1986), 42-43.

¹⁶⁰ E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 180.

travels of visitors, and especially of Apollonius to Alexandria¹⁶¹: "For owing to the fact that so many come hither and mix with us from Egypt, while an equal number pass hence to visit Egypt, Apollonius was already celebrated among them and the ears of the Egyptians were literally pricked up to hear him".¹⁶² In the light of such extensive travels, Lystra must have been either visited by him or reports about his activities were well known to the Lystrians.

The stories about the healings performed by wonder-workers soon took on a typical form. Weinreich has made a study of wonder-healings of antiquity. He shows that the healing stories of antiquity had a distinctive structure, which included five points.¹⁶³ They are:

- 1 Medical skill is unavailing.
- 2 The miracle often takes place on an encounter.
- 3 It takes place suddenly, swiftly and surely.
- 4 The miracle is paradoxical (causes consternation).
- 5 The miracles are more numerous than can be recounted.

The outline indicated by Weinreich is closely paralleled by Luke in the healing of the cripple in Lystra. The first four of the five points are clearly visible in Acts 14:8-11.

1 The chronically sick state of the cripple is reaffirmed in three ways. He is "crippled in his feet", "lame from birth" and "had never walked".

2 The miracle took place as a result of the man being present when Paul preached.

3 The man is cured the moment Paul called out "Stand up on your feet."

4 The crowd is so amazed that they believe Paul and Barnabas to be gods and they wish to sacrifice to them.

Thus Luke records the healing that took place in Lystra in typical Hellenistic fashion.¹⁶⁴ His reader is once again given access to the proclamation in terms and descriptions typical of the Graeco-Roman society in which he lived.

The Graeco-Roman society's familiarity with wonder-workers is an important backdrop to understand the Lystrians' reaction to the healing and to perceive these men as having divine qualities.

In order to expand on the reaction of the Lystrians in attributing divine qualities to the apostles, I wish to examine two contemporary wonder-workers of Luke, in order to point out how they were

¹⁶¹ Philostratus Life of Apollonius 24.

¹⁶² C.K. Barrett, The New Testament Background: Selected Documents, 6th ed. (London: S.P.C.K., 1956), 78.

¹⁶³ O. Weinreich, Antike Heilungswunder, (n.p.,1909) 171ff & 195ff. Cit. ap. A. Oepke, ἰάματα, TDNT 1965 ed. 206.

¹⁶⁴ One finds this structure also in Philostratus Life of Apollonius 4.20.

1. A young man has behaved so badly for so long that he is the subject of coarse street-corner songs.

2. Apollonius is discussing libations when he is interrupted by the loud laughter of the youth. Apollonius then looks at the youth.

3. Apollonius simply "gazes" at the youth and the demons in him begin to utter cries of fear. They leave him.

4. The miracle caused such consternation that people "clapped their hands in wonder."

In the case of Luke, Acts 15:12 provides the evidence for the fifth point about the numerous miracles.

associated with gods in the eyes of the general public. The two are Apollonius of Tyana and Alexander of Abouoteichos.¹⁶⁵

7.3.4.2.1.1 Apollonius of Tyana

One of the most famous wandering teachers in the Gracco-Roman world, and someone of particular importance to the study of the New Testament, was Apollonius of Tyana who lived through most of the first Christian century in Cappadocia.¹⁶⁶ His biography was written by Philostratus.¹⁶⁷ Apollonius was famous not only for his wisdom, but also for his miracles.

Accounts of the activities of such miracle workers illustrate how their audiences were convinced that they were gods in human form. Philostratus¹⁶⁸ records how on a visit to Alexandria people were so in awe of Apollonius that "they gazed upon him as if he was a god".¹⁶⁹ It was said of Apollonius that "he was the god in person..." and further "(t)he Pythagoreans¹⁷⁰ honoured him as an emissary from Zeus".¹⁷¹

This special status of the wonder workers is confirmed by a report that emperor Alexander Severus had statues of Apollonius of Tyana, Abraham, Orpheus and Christ in his private chapel.¹⁷² The conferring of divine status on wonder workers was a well established practice and illustrates

¹⁶⁵ Hanson is one of the few commentators who refers to wandering-magicians as an example to be taken seriously. He refers to Apollonius of Tyana and Alexander of Abouoteichos. In both of these cases, these wandering-magicians were taken as gods. R.P.C. Hanson, The Acts in the R.S.V., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 148. Haenchen rather unconvincingly objects to this view. He states that even if the Lystrians viewed Paul and Barnabas as wandering-magicians, their reaction, as portrayed by Luke "is going too far." E. Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 432.

¹⁶⁶ C.K. Barrett, The New Testament Background: Selected Documents, reprint 1974 (London: S.P.C.K. 1956), 76.

¹⁶⁷ Flavius Philostratus lived from A.D. 170-249, and wrote the Life of Apollonius to defend him against charges of magic.

¹⁶⁸ Philostratus wrote the "Life of Apollonius of Tyana" which was published some time after A.D. 217. Although it contains legendary material it should not be viewed as conveying an altogether false image of Apollonius. C.K. Barrett, The New Testament Background: Selected Documents, reprint 1974 (London: S.P.C.K. 1956), 77.

¹⁶⁹ Philostratus Life of Apollonius of Tyana 5.24. Cit. ap. C.K. Barrett, The New Testament Background: Selected Documents, reprint 1974 (London: S.P.C.K. 1956), 78.

¹⁷⁰ Apollonius of Tyana was Neopythagorean. For a discussion of this, cf. E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1987), 306-307.

¹⁷¹ Philostratus The Life of Apollonius of Tyana, trans. F.C. Conybeare, Loeb Classical Library, (London: Heinemann, 1948), 5.

¹⁷² H. Chadwick, The Early Church, (London: Penguin, 1967), 110. The Augustan History which was the source of this information was written c.400, unfortunately by an unreliable source.

their important place in Graeco-Roman society. Few people, if any, would be unaware of their work and existence.

7.3.4.2.1.2 Alexander of Abounotheichos

The other famous wonder worker from this period is Alexander who worked mostly in the province of Pamphlagonia during the years 150-170 A.D. He claimed to work within the healer cult of Asclepius.¹⁷³ The satirist, Lucian who wrote about him roughly ten years after his death, describes the reception given to Alexander by the rural people of Abounoteichos. He describes him as "tall and handsome in appearance, and really godlike" (θεοπρεπής).¹⁷⁴ When Alexander arrived, the people of Abounoteichos "were all agog over him on the instant and stared at him as if he were a god from heaven".¹⁷⁵ After Alexander presented himself "he congratulated the city because it was at once to receive the god in visible presence".¹⁷⁶ After he had performed a trick, "they at once raised a shout, welcomed the god, congratulated their city...".¹⁷⁷ Alexander presented himself as the prophet of the healing god Asclepius and combined healing instructions with his oracles.¹⁷⁸

The above quotes illustrate how wonder workers like Apollonius and Alexander in association with their reputation for healings could be received by people as gods. When seen in this context the deification of the apostles in Lystra, after the healing the cripple is not an isolated incident or the response of backward people, but quite characteristic of Graeco-Roman society.

In the light of this overwhelming phenomenon in Graeco-Roman society, it becomes clear why Luke incorporated this particular incident in his narrative and why he engaged in a theological debate on it. The focus on wonder workers is not simply of academic interest. The implications for Christians was something that needed to be taken seriously. Luke realized the religious implications and importance of these famous men, knew how they dominated the lives and religions of the audiences who were also listening to the Christian missionaries, and had to spell out some response to it. We are therefore moving into the heart of the Graeco-Roman world with this speech. How important it really was to Luke, is clear when we consider the fact that this debate is taken up in the very first speech to a truly gentile audience.

7.3.4.2.2 Wonder workers in early Christianity

It is, however, necessary to point out that wonder workers were not always accepted with reverence. Even in the case of such a famous person as Apollonius one finds that there is a

¹⁷³ E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1987), 170.

¹⁷⁴ This reference and the following concerning Alexander are all taken from: Lucian Alexander trans. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 4 (London: Heinemann, 1925), 177.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁷⁸ E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 170-171.

tradition which saw him in a negative light and regarded him as a magician and charlatan.¹⁷⁹ In this connection Stambaugh and Balch write: "The sources usually portray them (i.e. the holy men) as charlatans, hucksters of religion, working on the susceptibilities of their audiences to bilk them of money and food".¹⁸⁰ Delling, in his analysis of the word *μάγος*, states that "(i)n a derogatory sense it may also be used for the missionary of a new religion whose success can then be explained in terms of the use of magical compulsion."¹⁸¹ It is reported that Apollonius was charged with magical practices. This would be in line with the general fact that magic was strictly prohibited in the Graeco-Roman world,¹⁸² although people used it widely. This also explains the fact that wonder workers had to defend themselves against these accusations and often had to justify their actions.¹⁸³ It is therefore necessary to distinguish between miracle workers who were accepted as genuine, and those who were regarded with suspicion and accused of magic. One should also keep in mind that despite the censorship of the authorities and the educated, the masses were more open and uncritical about these workers.

In this regard the remarks at the end of the previous section about the importance Luke allocated to the phenomenon of miracle workers need further elaboration. The belief in the power of magic and the presence of wonder workers was to prove a long term problem for Christian missionaries. There were those who wished to emulate this phenomenon. The incident, reported in Acts 20:9, involving Eutychus falling from the window and being healed by Paul was being echoed in Apocryphal literature. Noting the changes made in this later account, Trémel says: "Malgré les traits assez similaires, on peut d'èjà percevoir une tendance à magnifier le thaumaturge lui-même."¹⁸⁴ This must have been attempted in order to show that Christianity also had its miracle workers.

That this image of miracle working was not always appreciated, is clear from the fact that Christians were accused of magic. This happened to such an extent that the Christian practice of singing hymns was confused with the reciting of spells.¹⁸⁵ There is also the letter allegedly written by Hadrian during the first half of the second century in which he comments that, "(t)here is no chief of the Jewish synagogue, no Samaritan, no Christian presbyter, who is not an astrologer, a

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 306.

¹⁸⁰ J. Stambaugh and D. Balch, The Social World of the First Christians, (London: SPCK, 1986), 42.

¹⁸¹ G. Delling, *μάγος*, TDNT 1967 ed. 357: refers to Act. Thom., 101, cf.20.

¹⁸² For a discussion of the understanding of and attitude towards magic, cf. S.R. Garrett, The Demise of the Devil. Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 11ff.

¹⁸³ Cf. S.R. Garrett, The Demise of the Devil. Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 12: for a quotation from Apuleius in which he defends himself against Aemilianus.

¹⁸⁴ B. Trémel, A Propos D'Actes 20,7-12. Puissance du Thaumaturge ou du Témoin?, Revue Théologie et de Philosophie 112 (1980): 368.

¹⁸⁵ S. Benko, Pagan Criticism of Christianity During The First Two Centuries A.D., Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt 23.2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), 1081.

soothsayer, or an anointer."¹⁸⁶ As magic was illegal in the Roman Empire, such an accusation would be disastrous.

Apologists had to defend Christian missionaries against the accusation that they were magicians seeking admiration and a following through the use of magic.¹⁸⁷ The Christian apologist, Justin Martyr, writing in about 151 A.D., refutes all such accusations. He argues that Jesus and His followers were not using magic to gain influence over people and create the impression that they were gods.¹⁸⁸ In chapter 30 Justin rejects the accusation that Christ made himself appear divine by works of magic, that He "performed what we call his mighty works by magical art, and by this appeared to be the Son of God." Nearly a century later Origen¹⁸⁹ still had to defend the Christians against similar attacks. In his work "Contra Celsum" Origen refutes the accusation that the Jews, under the instruction of Moses, practised sorcery and that Jesus likewise "deceived" people.¹⁹⁰ In addition, Celsus is quoted as saying of Jesus that He was "an illegitimate child, who having hired himself out as a servant in Egypt on account of his poverty, and there having acquired some miraculous powers, on which the Egyptians greatly pride themselves, returned to his own country, highly elated on account of them, and by means of these proclaimed himself a God."¹⁹¹

It seems as if the first traces of this debate and the first apologetic motifs can be found in the writings of Luke. It is often accepted that Luke is answering some of the criticisms levelled against Christianity in his writings. Luke would then have reported the Lystra event to illustrate to his reader that Christian missionaries should not be mistaken for magicians.

The presence of magicians whose work is in direct contrast to that of the apostles is not only described in Acts 14, but is found on a number of occasions throughout the Book of Acts. The conflict with a magician of one kind or other manifests itself every time the gospel breaks new ground. Acts 8:9ff. describes the encounter of Paul with Simon Magus in Samaria. Simon was

¹⁸⁶ D. Magie, The Scriptorum Historiae Augustae, vol. 3 (LCL, Oxford, 1961), 397-401. Cit.ap. S. Benko, Pagan Criticism of Christianity During the First Two Centuries A.D., Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt 23.2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), 1081.

¹⁸⁷ The Jews were also accused of magic. Cf. E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 181; discusses the prominent rôle of Jewish elements in magical papyri and then notes that the Jews "enjoyed considerable notoriety as magicians in the ancient world". He sees this fact reflected in such New Testament texts as Matthew 12:27; Acts 13:6 and 19:13-14.

¹⁸⁸ Justin Martyr First Apology to the Greeks 26, Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of The Writings of The Fathers down to A.d. 325, vol. 2 Justin Martyr and Athenagoras, ed. A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867): In this chapter, Justin argues that pagans, not Christians, used magic for personal gain. In speaking to pagans Justin refers to Simon the magician and says of him, "he did mighty acts of magic, by virtue of the art of the devils operating in him. He was considered a god, and as a god was honoured by you..." Chap. 56 has a further reference to Simon the Samaritan who by his magic was considered a god.

¹⁸⁹ Date of A.D. 248 given by: H. Chadwick, The Early Church, (London: Penguin, 1967), 111.

¹⁹⁰ Origen Contra Celsum 26. Cf. S.R. Garrett, The Demise of the Devil. Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 13ff.

¹⁹¹ Origen Contra Celsus 28.

perceived by the society in which he operated as having divine qualities. Acts 8:9-10 states that "he boasted that he was someone great" and that the people perceived him as "the divine power known as the Great Power".¹⁹² The fact that he had a sizeable following and that he was worshipped, is borne out by the observation that a cultus of Simon developed.¹⁹³ The rejection that he suffers at the hands of the apostles indicates how Luke wished to distinguish the apostles' witness to the power of God from the attempts of their magician counterparts in pagan society to enhance their own reputation.

In the first missionary journey which included the visit to Lystra, the magician Bar-Jesus is met and dealt with in Cyprus (Acts 13:6-12). This sign of power on the part of Paul is enough to convince the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, to have faith in Paul's message and fill him with amazement.¹⁹⁴ Likewise, during the second missionary journey, Paul deals with a demon possessed slave-girl in Philippi. She seems to have been very successful in her fortune telling and predictions of the future, as she earned a lot of money for her owners. Paul, in the name of Jesus, delivers her (Acts 16). During the third journey the sons of Sceva try to imitate the apostles in casting out demons but receive a severe beating in the process (Acts 19:13-17). This causes a great fear to seize the people of Ephesus and they hold the name of Jesus in high honour. Finally, during Paul's journey to Rome, he is bitten by a viper. When he fails to fall down, people assume that he is a god (Acts 28:6). This assumption that Paul is a god, together with the above mentioned examples of the presence of wonder workers points to the widespread experience that society had of them. It also points to the fact that Luke was very aware of their presence and influence and in alluding to them wishes to make it quite clear that the apostles are not to be confused with such people. All these incidents therefore illustrate the close link between Lukan thought and the Graeco-Roman world.

¹⁹² E. Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 303: using the reference from Justin Apol. 26.3, Dial. 120.6, shows that the title "The Great Power" (*μεγάλη*) was a Samaritan designation for the highest divinity, and not merely for a power of God. Thus the association of the apostles with Zeus in Lystra is not an isolated incident.

¹⁹³ F. Jackson and K. Lake, The Beginnings of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles, vol. 5 (London: MacMillan, 1933), 154: "The cultus of Simon was regularly performed before statues of Zeus..." In addition to this it is known that during the second century the Simonian sect had a religion of its own which had borrowed some elements from Christianity. *Ibid.*, 152. For a very thorough review of recent research of Simonianism and for the history of interpretation of this matter, cf. W. Meeks, Simon Magus in Recent Research, Religious Studies Review 3 (1977): 137-142.

¹⁹⁴ In his description of Bar-Jesus, Luke uses the Greek word *μάγος*. Cf. S.R. Garrett, The Demise of the Devil. Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 78ff: "In portraying Paul's curse of Bar Jesus, Luke reveals that he shared with ancient magicians ... the presupposition that words backed up with sufficient authority could wreak terrible damage. To borrow D. Bidney's formulation... here Luke exhibits certain elements of the 'magical world view,' but contends on grounds admissible within that world view (namely, on the grounds that Paul exercised divine and not demonic authority) that what Paul did was not 'magic as practised and institutionalized.' Indeed, Luke viewed Paul's action as the opposite of magic: 'magic' was satanic, and the authority behind Paul's words as the antithesis of satanic authority". *Ibid.*, 86.

Garrett¹⁹⁵ is certainly correct when she remarks that Luke portrayed Christian leaders as staunch opponents of magicians. Luke refutes any notion that they were practitioners of magic. There are vast differences between the apostles and magicians: "Magicians exalt themselves, try to misappropriate authority (8:18-19; 19:13-14), and seek to turn people away from the Word of God. Christian miracle workers, by contrast, bring glory not to themselves but to God, thereby leading people to believe the word that they have preached and thereby to gain release from Satan's authority. Enhancing Luke's anti-magic apology is his insistence that it is ultimately God who is active in all Jesus' and the Christians' signs and wonders..." Although she does not refer to Acts 14, her remarks about the differences between magicians and apostles applies to that passage as well. Paul and Barnabas refuse the adoration that is offered to them and instead insist that it is God who is at work. Thus the distinction between the human and divine are clearly demarcated in the events and speech at Lystra.

7.3.4.3 God and sacrifice

The dominance of the sacrificial theme in the Lystra narrative, is in line with the dominant position of sacrifice in Graeco-Roman religious life. The word "θύειν" (Ac. 14:13a and 18) was used "in the NT only of pagan sacrifices."¹⁹⁶ The reference is without doubt ascribed to a normal Graeco-Roman religious custom.

After Luke describes the healing of the cripple and the involvement of the gods in the lives of people, the Lystrians respond by preparing to offer a sacrifice. This desire is expressed both before and after the speech in Acts 14, illustrating how important this motif is. A discussion of sacrifice in Graeco-Roman society will allow a better understanding of this prominent theme in the Lystra narrative.

7.3.4.3.1 The meaning of sacrifice in Graeco-Roman religion

Sacrificing in the Hellenistic society was believed to be the way that people could relate to the gods. According to Young¹⁹⁷ the origins of sacrifice is found in the sacred meal. It was assumed in the ancient societies that the life of the object eaten was transferred to the one who is eating, thus ensuring or prolonging life. By eating a deer one would attain its swiftness; a bull would give strength and fertility. It was believed that there were invisible and intangible powers at work. There were two types of powers; firstly, the good powers (aurontic) were the ones someone would wish to attract. These were the powers that dwelt in the sky above and ensured rain, crops, health etc. Secondly, the evil powers (chthonic) which dwelt in the underworld and were feared.

These powers were conceived of in anthropomorphic terms. Thus as one offers a meal to welcome a friend, so too the powers or gods would be pleased to receive food and gifts. In the light of the above mentioned conviction about the life force of the victim being transferred to the eater and prolonging the life of the eater, sacrificing was envisaged as the way that the life of the plant or animal could be transferred to the gods. Since the gods did not come down to eat, the rising

¹⁹⁵ S.R. Garrett, The Demise of the Devil. Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 103.

¹⁹⁶ J. Behm, Θύω, Θυσία and Θυσιαστήριον, TDNT 1965 ed., 181.

¹⁹⁷ R.K. Yerkes, Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religion and Early Judaism, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1953), 20ff.



smoke¹⁹⁸, carrying with it the life forces, was envisaged as reaching the gods and strengthening them.

Strong aurontic gods were a prerequisite for benevolence to reign. "Sacrifice was thought of as increasing their supply of numen, which would be used up in helping people."¹⁹⁹ Ferguson gives the illustration of the need to sacrifice a cow with calf to Tellus Mater during the growing season. "The dominant sentiment in sacrifice was 'I give in order that you may give to me'".²⁰⁰ The failure to sacrifice was seen as an invitation to problems, either by incurring the anger of the gods or by the fact that the gods, being deprived of numen, were no longer able to help.

The Lystrians therefore acted in a normal way, consistent with the general understanding of sacrifice in Graeco-Roman religions when they responded to the miracle with sacrifices. They were expressing what Young stated, when he wrote that, "(s)acrifice was the only known means of expressing thanksgiving."²⁰¹ Of the commentators on the sacrifice of the Lystrians in Acts, Rackham is one who comes close to stating this.²⁰² Thus generally speaking the sacrifice was an expected response which was believed to gratify the gods and fulfil some of their needs.

This is but a general description of sacrifice. It is, however, possible to be more specific about the particular type of sacrifice the Lystrians intended offering.

7.3.4.3.2 The type of sacrifice envisaged by the Lystrians

In terms of the two types of sacrifice outlined by Young, the sacrifice of the Lystrians in Acts 14 can be identified as of the aurontic type rather than the chthonic type.²⁰³ There are three reasons for this. Firstly, the gods Zeus and Hermes were sky gods. Secondly, the verb "θυειν" (14:13 and 18) describes aurontic sacrifices (in contrast to the verb *σφαγιαζεσθαι* which describes chthonic

¹⁹⁸ The root "θυ" means "smoke". This becomes the word "θυειν" (to sacrifice) and "θεοι" (the gods or the receivers of smoke). Since the chthonic powers dwelt below the ground, sacrifices to them were buried in the ground or thrown into the sea.

¹⁹⁹ E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 129.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

²⁰¹ F.M. Young, Sacrifice and the Death of Christ, (London: Westminster Press, 1975), 24.

²⁰² R.B. Rackham, The Acts of the Apostles, (London: Methuen & Co., 1910), 232.

²⁰³ E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 145: who distinguishes the above mentioned sacrifices to the heavenly deities and to the chthonic powers.

sacrifices).²⁰⁴ Thirdly, the sacrifice took place during the day with a crowd and much shouting (Ac. 14:11, 14). The offerings to the chthonic powers were done at night and in silence.²⁰⁵

It is possible to qualify this aurontic sacrifice even further as a "votive offering". This was the most common form of sacrifice to the aurontic gods.²⁰⁶ In many cases this offering was made when a request like release from disease, safe journey or success in undertakings was granted.²⁰⁷ However votive offerings could also be "totally unpledged, but spontaneously expressed appreciation of blessings conferred".²⁰⁸ "Healing", as took place in Lystra, is also mentioned by Yerkes as one of the motives for which a votive offering is prepared.²⁰⁹ Depending on the situation, a votive offering could be made by an individual or by a city - as was the case with Lystra.²¹⁰

In votive offerings, items brought were demonstrated as signs of appreciation. This included utensils, garments and even temples. It is significant that "wreaths" were also offered.²¹¹ Luke states that the Lystrians brought bulls and "wreaths" to the city gates (Ac. 14:13 ταύρους καὶ στέμματα).²¹²

²⁰⁴ R.K. Yerkes, Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religion and Early Judaism, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1953), 54: Yerkes adds that by the second century A. D. the distinction between the two words seems to have diminished. This implies that the distinction is a valid one as we are dealing with the first century.

²⁰⁵ R.K. Yerkes, Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religion and Early Judaism, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1953), 54. Luke refers to the ὄχλοις in vs 13 and to the ὄχλον in vs. 14. The fact that Paul had to tear his clothes indicates that a visual form of communication needed to be used. It would have been useless for Paul to try to shout because the people could have assumed that he was joining in the celebrations.

²⁰⁶ F.M. Young, Sacrifice and the Death of Christ, (London: Westminster Press, 1975), 22.

²⁰⁷ E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 148.

²⁰⁸ R.K. Yerkes, Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religion and Early Judaism, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1953), 62.

²⁰⁹ R.K. Yerkes, Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religion and Early Judaism, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1953), 62.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² One should not assume that the use of wreaths was only occasioned in votive offerings. During the Taurobolium a "garlanded bull" was brought over the pit and killed with a spear. Cf. E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 228. However the Taurobolium was essentially a ceremony involving the initiation of new converts in some pagan religions, which is quite different from the situation in Lystra. Cf. R.K. Yerkes, Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religion and Early Judaism, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1953), 43.

Gifts which were set aside for the gods in votive offerings, including Roman ones²¹³, became the exclusive property of the god and thus banned from all secular use.²¹⁴ Once an object or animal had been vowed to the gods it became their possession and had to be defended at all costs. When a living thing was devoted the very act of feeding it or allowing it to roam would violate the property of the gods and incur perpetual danger.²¹⁵

Luke's account found in Acts 14:18, of how Paul, even after his speech had difficulty in preventing the Lystrians from sacrificing would correspond to this Graeco-Roman understanding of votive offerings. Once the bulls and the wreaths had been set aside for the gods, there would be great difficulty in attempting to stop the proceedings before the sacrifice had been concluded.

Thus the sacrifice plays an important role in the events at Lystra, both before the speech as well as after it. This reflects the integration of Graeco-Roman customs and perceptions into the account. These need to be taken into consideration when trying to understand the text and especially the speech.

7.3.4.4 Techniques of discussing religious notions of God

In this section I wish to point out that except for enhancing the appeal of the text, Luke used the legend in a way common to debates about deities. Legends and myths were often used in such debates about the nature of the gods. The reason for the importance of legends is that ancient Greek religion lacked creeds and codes which could provide such information²¹⁶. "To the ancients the essence of religion was the rite, which was thought of as a process for securing and maintaining correct relations with the world of uncharted forces around man, and the myth, which gave the traditional reason for the rite and the traditional (but changing) view of those forces."²¹⁷

The important role that myths and legends played in the understanding of the gods, is confirmed by the writings of Dio Chrysostom, the Cynic philosopher. In his Twelfth Discourse he gives a detailed description of the two ways in which man can know God. The foremost, is an innate awareness of God which is present in all mankind.²¹⁸ The second, which is relevant at this point, is the awareness of God which is implanted in peoples' souls from an external source. This is called the acquired notions of god. The acquired notions he states, are primarily derived from narrative

²¹³ Lystra was a Roman colony.

²¹⁴ R.K. Yerkes, Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religion and Early Judaism, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1953), 62. Yerkes states that temples were filled with such objects. These objects were referred as *ἀναθήματα* (Lk. 21:5).

²¹⁵ R.K. Yerkes, Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religion and Early Judaism, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1953), 63.

²¹⁶ H.J. Rose, Religion in Greece and Rome, (New York, 1959), 9. Cit. ap. E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 112.

²¹⁷ A.D. Nock, Conversion, (Oxford, 1933), 161. Cit. ap. E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 112.

²¹⁸ This will be dealt with in section 8.5.

accounts, myths and customs.²¹⁹ In the conception of Dio, therefore, one of the ways in which the knowledge of the gods can be determined, is by analysing legends about them.

These concepts are contemporary to Luke, as Dio wrote his Twelfth Discourse in 97 A.D.²²⁰ There is evidence to indicate that the use of myths to argue the qualities of God was a fairly widely used practice and technique. Colish points out that the Stoics used a method of allegorizing myths for this purpose.²²¹ Malherbe, in his discussion of the Cynics' attitude toward popular religion, refers to the work of Gomperz who identified the exegesis of myths as a technique to scorning popular religion.²²²

To the educated reader of Luke it would come as no surprise that he would relate to well known legends before he starts to argue issues about them. It was a known and sound technique in Graeco-Roman philosophical circles and Luke obviously felt free to use Graeco-Roman concepts and techniques. If he wanted to raise pagan theological issues, the way he would do this would be to debate such a popular legend. The fact that Luke alludes to a legend at this point has greater significance than simply filling in his account with "local colouring". The legend forms an integral part of the presentation of the gospel to pagans and of the apologetic practice and technique employed. Luke is therefore engaging in a debate of issues raised by "sources" for the religious experience and knowledge of gentiles. That this happens regularly in his text and is therefore not coincidental, is clear from other examples.²²³

²¹⁹ Dio Chrysostom Discourse 12.40; Plato Phaedrus 237 d, also speaks of two "ideas", the inborn desire and the acquired opinion. Dio also mentions the further acquired notion of the gods through the lawgivers: Dio Discourse 12.43. Here the awareness of the gods is characterised by the sense of compulsion and the threat of punishment for those who do not comply. Ibid. "...των δε επαναγκαζοντων και απειλοντων κολασιν τοις ου πειθομενο ,..." One recognises the characteristics described by Dio in Ovid's legend. There the threat of punishment is held over the heads of those who fail to welcome the gods. Ovid Metamorphoses 8.689: "...dique sumus, meritasque luet vicinia poenas inopia' dixerunt;..."

²²⁰ Dio Chrysostom Discourse trans. J.W. Cohoon and H. Lamar Crosby, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann), 1.

²²¹ M.L. Colish, The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 33-34.

²²² A.J. Malherbe, Pseudo Heraclitus, Epistle 4: The Divination of the Wise Man, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum 21 (1978): 47.

²²³ There are other examples indicating the use of legends by Luke. Bauckham has written an article showing how Luke uses an Egyptian story about Setme and Si-Osiris as the background to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31. This comparison is found particularly helpful in that it enables the parallels and differences between the story and the parable to highlight the message that Luke wanted to convey to his readers. R. Bauckham, The Rich Man and Lazarus: The Parable and the Parallels, New Testament Studies 37 (1991): 225-246.

O'Neill similarly points out that the designation of Paul as Hermes is a development on Artapanus's history of Moses, where Moses is designated as Hermes. O'Neill argues that Luke used this legend as an apologetic method which he copied from Hellenistic Judaism which compared Moses to Hermes in order to bring across to the audience the notion that non-Jews respected the great Jewish leaders. J.C. O'Neill, The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting, (London: S.P.C.K. 1970), 145.

It is fascinating that even in his literary techniques Luke is reflecting a Graeco-Roman situation and context. It is clear that the contextualising of the proclamation is thorough. The Graeco-Roman reader of the text of Acts would have felt very much at home.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter investigated the importance of the response of the Lystrians to the miracle performed by Paul. Their response has been presented as typically Graeco-Roman. This has been achieved by Luke with the help of the legend from that area. It was argued that apart from a literary value of adding interest and local colouring, the legend serves to introduce themes that will be dealt with in the speech. Even its technique reveals a Graeco-Roman nature.

"This Moysos was the teacher of Orpheus. As a grown man he gave men many useful things: he invented ships, stone-lifting equipment, Egyptian weapons, machines for irrigation and war and philosophy; he also divided the state into thirty six districts and assigned to each district the god who was to be worshipped in it, and he (taught) the priests hieroglyphics... moreover he assigned the priests the best land. He did all this to secure sole rule for Chenephres. For earlier, when the masses of the people had been unbridled, they had sometimes driven out kings and sometimes appointed them, mostly the same ones, but now and then also others. So for these things Moysos became beloved among the people and was thought by priests worthy of godlike honour, and called "Hermes", (the last) because of the interpretation (hermeneia) of the hieroglyphs". Eusebius *Praep. Ev.* 9.18,23,27.

Cf. The extensive and excellent discussion by J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem. Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*, (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 32-38.

CHAPTER 8

THE PRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL IN LYSTRA

In Acts 14 the healing of the cripple is followed by the proclamation of the Gospel, presented partially in an indirect form in the narrative and partially in a speech of Paul and Barnabas. The speech as a reflection of its Graeco-Roman context, especially in its rhetorical nature, forms the focus of this chapter. This will be seen in the structure of the speech which first attacks erroneous views before the proclamation of the "correct" notions. Graeco-Roman features will also be seen in the way the speech is introduced through the opening question and the tearing of clothes.

This chapter will then focus on the Graeco-Roman philosophical concept of *θεοπρεπέες* and Luke's uses of it as a basis for his description of Paul's speech. The double implementation of this concept, also reflected in the Lystrian speech, will be discussed then. The first is the description of God using the *via negationis* concept, and the second is the presentation of God using the rhetorical technique of an antithesis.

8.1 The structure of the speech

An analysis of the form of the speech is necessary before its nature can be discussed in more detail. Not only the contents of the proclamation will reveal how deeply it is embedded in a Graeco-Roman context, but it is fascinating that even in its formal presentation the speech portrays important links with the Graeco-Roman world. The presentation of the Gospel in Lystra has two distinct parts with a point of transition between them: Firstly, there is an identification of wrong perceptions through the phrases "(M)en why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you" and "these worthless things" (Ac. 14:15). Secondly, the correct belief is presented with the description of the "living God" and his providential care.

Scholars have noted that the speech concentrates initially on removing obstacles. In his discussion of this speech, Wilckens in his often quoted work on the missionary speeches in Acts, in a somewhat confusing way states that the short speech in Lystra removes the misunderstanding that the apostles were divine. But he then adds that as humans they add the short proclamation of the Gospel, thereby creating the impression that the apostles did more than simply correcting a mistake.²²⁴ Later, however, he says that, "Es soll hier lediglich um die Abwehr des Mißverständnisses der Hörer gehen."²²⁵ His combination of the two speeches in Acts 14 and 17, which makes sense from a form critical point of view, is the cause of his confusion on this page. His desire to analyse the form of the speeches causes him to overlook the differences between them. In his view, the speech in Acts 14 is merely a preparation of the speech in Acts 17, a fact which he believes explains why the Lystra speech is so short. He seems to think that the speech in Lystra ends abruptly (because of Luke's literary technique of preparing the later speech).²²⁶ This then leads to his pronouncement that only the misperceptions of the listeners are removed.

Over against Wilckens, one must accentuate, as an aside, that despite the unity between and general pattern

²²⁴ "Aber als solche (i.e. as humans) verkündigen sie ihnen...". U. Wilckens, *Die Missionsreden der Apostelgeschichte. Form- und Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, WMANT 5 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag. 1961), 86.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

²²⁶ "Daß diese kleine Rede hier abbricht, geschieht aus schriftstellerischem Grund." *Ibid.*, 86.

of the speeches, each one of them was inserted in a specific context which is important for the interpretation of the speech. The rural population in Lystra, described carefully by Luke with meticulous concentration on local colouring, is a different audience to the philosophers in Athens. One cannot underestimate the speech in the way Wilckens does, in favour of the one given in Athens.²²⁷ This is especially true in the light of the technique of Luke to link his episodes with his audiences. Johnson writes, "Luke follows the ancient rhetorical ideal of 'writing in character,' *προσώπια*, which fits style to character and occasion".²²⁸ Because of this technique, Luke would have been sensitive to the fact that the crowds in Lystra must have responded and must be described differently to the philosophers of Athens.

But there is more to this than merely applying "fitting" speech, that is, in line with the characters involved. More important here is the fact that the removal of errors is a part of a double edged argument. Although scholars like Wilckens have recognised the first part of the speech as the removal of errors, they seem to lack sensitivity for the way in which this part is firmly linked with the second part in which the positive message is presented. Luke, by removing errors, wanted to move on to presenting the truth. Once again it becomes clear how Luke employs Graeco-Roman techniques.

Luke therefore did not only remove wrong perceptions in Lystra. He proclaimed the gospel, as the speech proves, and he did so in terms of expounding the true religion. Both these aspects must be retained, and will be discussed next. But before this is done in detail, attention must be drawn to the fact that the exposure of wrong perceptions, followed by the proclamation of the "correct message", was a technique used by Graeco-Roman philosophers. Malherbe gives an example of this technique from the works of the Cynic writer Epictetus. Epictetus describes the ideal Cynic in Discourse 3.22 as follows: His first statement that "(T)he Cynic is represented as doing nothing without God" (2), is followed by the positive counterpart, namely, "but is a servant of Zeus (82; cf. 97), a messenger or herald (23; cf. 69), sent by God to show people their error."²²⁹

There are several examples which support the statement that this technique corresponds to Graeco-Roman rhetorical practices and is not intuitive, but a fixed way of thinking:

8.1.1 Pseudo Heraclitus, Epistle 4

Malherbe in his detailed study of Pseudo Heraclitus, Epistle 4 which describes the Cynic philosophy and style of argumentation,²³⁰ analysed the structure of the argument about the divination of a human: "(I)n first attacking erroneous views, the author appears to be following a theory of argumentation, also later followed by Christians, that false opinions should be eradicated before the truth can be established."²³¹ The process of first exposing the wrong views about God and then following this by establishing the correct views can be seen in his summary of the basic message of Pseudo-Heraclitus: "God is not locked up in temples, nor is he made of stone by men's hands and put on a pedestal. On the contrary, the whole ordered universe is his temple."

²²⁷ The same is true of the way in which Dibelius treats it. The Lystra speech is dealt with in a footnote. M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 71.

²²⁸ L.T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament. An interpretation*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 201.

²²⁹ Epictetus *Discourse 3.22*. Cit. ap. A.J. Malherbe, *Hellenistic Moral Philosophy and the New Testament: A Retrospective Analysis*, An unpublished address to the Society of Biblical Literature. 1991.

²³⁰ A.J. Malherbe, Pseudo Heraclitus, Epistle 4: The Divination of the Wise Man, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 21 (1978).

²³¹ A.J. Malherbe, Pseudo Heraclitus, Epistle 4: The Divination of the Wise Man, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 21 (1978): 53.

What is furthermore interesting (and meaningful to the Lystra events) is that he points out that this is not simply a tirade but functions as part of the argument against popular cults (which is also the case in Lystra).

Three parts are visible in this statement:

1. Wrong perceptions of God are first enumerated: "God is not locked up in temples, nor is he made of stone by men's hands and put on a pedestal".
2. The implication is that the error has to be corrected. "On the contrary..."
3. The enumeration of the "correct" characteristics of God follows: "the whole ordered universe is his temple."

8.1.2 Athenagoras the Athenian

Malherbe also refers to Athenagoras of Athens as a further example of an exponent of this structure. In the first chapter of his treatise *On The Resurrection of the Dead*, Athenagoras explains that his method of argumentation is going to entail precisely this structure. "Neither surely can he who wishes to teach the truth persuade any one by speaking about it, so long as there is a false opinion lurking in the mind of his hearers, and barring the entrance of his arguments. And, therefore, from regard to greater utility, I myself sometimes place arguments in defence of the truth before those concerning the truth..."²³²

In this work, chapters 2-10 are devoted to the refutation of false opinions, while chapters 12-25 are devoted to the establishment of the truth. In the centre is chapter 11, a recapitulation of his method of argumentation and he states, "(T)he discourse in defence of the truth is inferior in nature and force, for the refutation of falsehood is less important than the establishment of truth; and second in order, for it employs its strength against those who hold false opinions, and false opinions are an after growth from another sowing and from degeneration.... And yet each of them is referable to the same end, for the refutation of falsehood and the establishment of truth both have piety for their object."²³³

I have quoted from Athenagoras because he is an Apologist from the second century and represents an author well versed in Graeco-Roman philosophy. The editors say of him, "(B)oth his *apology* and his treatise on the Resurrection display a practised pen and a richly cultured mind."²³⁴ The fact that Luke uses a structure which is also employed by Athenagoras reflects the influence of Graeco-Roman cultured style and argumentation. It indicates how strongly the form of the speech is determined by the Graeco-Roman context to which it belongs.

8.1.3 Dio Chrysostom

This particular structure of first dealing with the errors before the truth, is also found on numerous occasions in the writings of the first century Cynic philosopher and contemporary of Luke, Dio Chrysostom. How conspicuous this technique and its use was in his writings, is clear from the fact that the editors of the text comment in their introduction to his Twenty-Fourth Discourse, "(T)his Discourse, like the fourteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth, begins by saying that the majority of men act wrongly in respect to something and then proceeds to set them right."²³⁵ A similar structure is also evident in *Discourses* 13.16-28, 27, 66, 68, 69, 71, 72, and 80.²³⁶ Of particular interest is *Discourse* 13.16-28, which is a short speech by Socrates using this particular

²³² Athenagoras *On The Resurrection of the Dead* 1; Cit. ap. *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of The Writings of The Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 2 *Justin Martyr and Athenagoras*, ed. A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867), 424.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 436.

²³⁴ Athenagoras, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of The Writings of The Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 2 *Justin Martyr and Athenagoras*, ed. A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867), 374.

²³⁵ Dio Chrysostom *Discourses* 12-30., trans. J.W. Cohoon, Loeb Classical Library, 317.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 175. For a fuller discussion of this see Von Arnim, *Leben und Werke*, 267ff.

structure.²³⁷ The similarity in structure between this inserted speech of Socrates, and Paul's speech in Lystra, reflects Luke's familiarity and use of Graeco-Roman literary models.²³⁸

Although Malherbe stated that this rhetorical structure was used later by Christians, he does not indicate that it is already present in the New Testament. An analysis of the Lystra speech proved that it can be found already in Acts. But there are enough other examples in Acts to prove that this is not an incidental case.

8.1.4 Other Lukan examples

Luke uses this technique in Peter's speech after the healing of the cripple at the temple (Ac. 3). Peter began by implying that an error had been made when they stared at him as if his power had resulted from his own godliness. He elaborated on their error by a short historical survey (they were the ones who killed Jesus, disowned him before Pilate, asked for a murderer in his place before finally killing the author of life, Ac. 3:12-15). Only then follows the presentation of the positive aspects of the gospel (Ac. 3:16-26). Although the audience in this particular case is Jewish (because the miracle happens in Jerusalem) Luke is communicating with his Graeco-Roman readers in a way they would understand and appreciate best.²³⁹ Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost is also structured in this way (Ac. 2:15f) where he first corrects the mistaken impression that the disciples were drunk before proclaiming the gospel.²⁴⁰

Luke's formal representation of Paul first refuting the errors of the Lystrians before presenting them with the truth, is therefore a rhetorical technique known and used in Graeco-Roman society.

8.2 Introductory stages to the speech

In a speech, such as that of Lystra, which first points out the errors of a particular group, it should be expected that the introductory stages reflect the imminent clash of ideas. But this is not done in the speech only. Luke already in his narrative prepares his reader carefully for the correction of error which is to follow in the speech. This he does in two ways; firstly, by the introductory exclamations of the apostles, and secondly, by their action of tearing their clothes. I will now examine these two aspects separately by pointing out that they too reflect Graeco-Roman perspectives.

8.2.1 Introductory exclamations

It is interesting that a formal analysis of the introduction to the speech reveals that the removal of error is once again done in a rather systematic manner by using an exclamation. The question of the apostles ("Men, why are you doing this?") at the beginning of the speech in Lystra, implies that an error has been made, but it is done in the form of an exclamation.

²³⁷ This resumé is based on either the pseudoplatonic Cleitophon or on a source common to both it and this passage in Dio. Dio Chrysostom *Discourses* 12-30. trans. J. W. Cohoon, H. Lamar Crosby, Loeb Classical Library, 100.

²³⁸ It is worth noting that Rengstorff sees the Cynic's consciousness of mission as having its prototype in Socrates. K. Rengstorff, *ἀποστολος*, TDNT 1964 ed. 411.

²³⁹ Confirmation that Luke is indeed sensitive to Graeco-Roman readers even when describing events that took place in a Jewish context, is found in Acts 1:19. The reference to Akeldama being "their language" is an explanatory verse which is only necessary for a Graeco-Roman reader who would not understand the meaning of Akeldama. A Hebrew or Aramaic speaker, as all the disciples were, would not require such an explanation. In addition, the reference to "their language" as opposed to "our language" indicates that Luke is writing from a Graeco-Roman perspective rather than from a Jewish one.

²⁴⁰ It should be noted, though, that this structure is not as clearly defined as in the speech in Lystra. After the quote from Joel, Luke returns to the error of the Jews in 3:23 before once again expounding the positive aspects of the gospel.

This is not the only instance that Luke introduces a speech using an exclamation. It is done so systematically that it does not escape the attention of scholars. In analysing the way that Luke generally structures his speeches, Conzelmann observed that, "(T)he connection between the situation and the speech follows, at times employing the technique of a misunderstanding."²⁴¹ Examples from the rest of Acts will illustrate that the technique of misunderstanding is formulated in the same way by exclamations.

8.2.1.1 Other examples from Acts

Both the similarly structured speeches of Peter in Jerusalem (Ac. 3) and on Pentecost day in Acts 2, first expose an error before presenting the truth. In both cases it is introduced in the same way, that is, by an exclamation from the apostles. The healing of the cripple by Peter is followed by an exclamatory question: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?" (Acts 3:12).²⁴² The question implies that an error has been committed and needs to be put right. The address on the day of Pentecost begins by Peter exclaiming; "Fellow Jews and all of you who are in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning. No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:..." (Acts 2:14-16).

This is of course a good literary technique, for it presents the speech that follows as a direct response to the situation with which the apostles are faced. This, therefore, links the speech to the rest of the narrative. It draws attention to what is going to be said and indicates that the apostles are not leaving the situation as it is, but are going to correct the error that has been made.

Another relevant passage is Acts 10:26. Here Peter, according to the Western text, responds to Cornelius after he had fallen on his knees with the words: *Τί ποιεῖς; κἀγὼ ἀνθρώπος εἰμι ὡς καὶ σὺ*. This question carries with it the implication that Cornelius is doing something wrong by falling down at Peter's feet. The question therefore implies disapproval.

This technique of introductory exclamations is also found in other writers of the first century.

8.2.1.2 Socrates' speech

There is evidence that this way of introducing speeches was used by contemporary writers. In the above mentioned speech of Socrates which Dio Chrysostom has inserted into the narrative of his thirteenth discourse,²⁴³ Socrates first admonishes parents for not bringing up their children correctly and then goes on to show them the correct way. Socrates, having perceived the error of his audience's ways, is portrayed in an agitated state and begins his speech with an exclamatory question which he shouts out.²⁴⁴ "Now Socrates, whenever he saw several persons assembled, would cry out most bravely and frankly with indignant rebuke and censure, "Whither are you drifting, men? Are you quite unaware that you are doing none of the things that you should do..."²⁴⁵

There are four similarities between this description of the beginning of Socrates' speech and the speech in Lystra. In both instances there is a crowd or group of assembled people; there is the realization by the main

²⁴¹ H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), vliv.

²⁴² The fact that in this speech, Peter like Paul and Barnabas, also rejects any personal glory for the miracle will be dealt with below in section 8.3.3.

²⁴³ Dio Chrysostom *Discourses* 13.16-28.

²⁴⁴ Dio uses the verb *βοᾶω* to describe the way in which Socrates shouted at the group of assembled people. Luke uses the verb *κράξω* to describe the shout of Barnabas and Paul as they rushed into the crowd to protest against the errors of the Lystrians.

²⁴⁵ Dio Chrysostom *Discourse* 13.16. trans. J.W. Cohoon, H. Lamar Crosby, Loeb Classical Library.

characters that an error has been made; the speaker shouts; and what he shouts is a question implying his disapproval that such an error could have been made. The similarity between the structure and introduction of these speeches points to influence of Graeco-Roman rhetorical structure. This is even more important because Dio's insertion of this speech by Socrates is not fortuitous. This particular speech was well known, as is clear from literary sources from this time.²⁴⁶ In this case one therefore has a well known literary technique used by a respected author of one of the most famous philosophers.

One may even go so far as to say that Luke consciously simulated the style of Socrates' speech in the Lystra event. In Cynic circles Socrates was seen as the prototype of their missionary consciousness.²⁴⁷ For Luke, Paul is the missionary apostle par excellence. To make a literary allusion to Socrates in a description of Paul's speech can only serve to enhance Paul's stature in the eyes of the reader and to make his message worth listening to.

That this suggestion is not totally far fetched, is clear from other possible references to the figure of Socrates in Acts. The idea that Luke may be making allusions to Socrates and his history when he emulates his literary technique, is supported by a possible reference to Socrates in the Athens speech. Grant, in examining the setting of the speech in Athens, states that Luke "thinks of the trial of Socrates as he sets Paul before the court of the Areopagus."²⁴⁸ The reason for this suggestion is the comment of some of the philosophers that Paul "seems to be advocating foreign gods(ξένα δαιμονία)" (Ac. 17:18), a comment which reminds one forcefully of the charge made against Socrates that he preached "new gods"(καινα δαιμονία).²⁴⁹ Grant concluded that, "Luke clearly is thinking of popular philosophy - and thinking favourably of its hero" (Socrates).²⁵⁰

In putting forward a speech technique which was well known generally and used by Socrates, Luke is referring to a form of address also employed in Graeco-Roman philosophical circles.

The beginning of the speech with an exclamatory question forms an integral part of the speech, as it prepares the reader for the exposure of the errors.

8.2.2 The Tearing of Clothes

The previous section on the form and structure of the speech indicated its correction of a misconception. The exclamatory question also drew attention to the error and its correction. The symbolic act of tearing clothes similarly functions to prepare the reader for the speech.

It is interesting to note how Luke dramatically prefigures the speech of the apostles with the description of the tearing of clothes. Barnabas and Paul are already acting strongly when they rush out to the crowd and cry out to them. One asks why the tearing of clothes is necessary, since the action of Paul and Barnabas, as well as their speech makes the point clearly enough that the Lystrians are acting incorrectly. To understand this, one needs to go back to contextual information about the tearing of clothes.

The act of tearing one's clothes, is a well known symbolic act. Despite a statement of Rackham's that: "(T)he symbolism was familiar among Gentiles as well as Jews"²⁵¹, commentators are not agreed on the significance

²⁴⁶ According to Plato, Socrates never ceased making this appeal. Cf. Plato *Apology of Socrates* 29d. Cit. ap. Dio Chrysostom *Discourses* trans. J.W. Cohoon, H. Lamar Crosby, Loeb Classical Library, 101, note 2.

²⁴⁷ K. Rengstorff, ἀποστολος, TDNT 1964 ed. 411. He also makes the observation that this view of Socrates is depicted by Plato in the *Apology*.

²⁴⁸ R.M. Grant, *Gods and The One God*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 50.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 181, note 9. Plato *Apology* 24B; Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.1.2; Favorinus *Diogenes Laërtius* 2.40.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 50.

²⁵¹ R.B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Methuen, 1910), 232, note 4.

attached to the act. The popular belief that the tearing of clothes is "an oriental sign of grief"²⁵², is more true as it can convey different meanings in different situations and cultures. This is aptly illustrated by differing comments about it, not only in the Acts of the Apostles, but also in other literature. Some scholars interpret it as an indication of extreme anger, such as to indicate that a blasphemy has taken place, while others see it as an indication of distress at what has taken place.

A discussion of references to the tearing of clothes will be useful for an evaluation of the significance of this act in Acts 14:14.

8.2.2.1 The tearing of clothes as an expression of horror

Most commentators, refer to Mark 14:63 and to Matthew 26:65 which present the high priest as tearing his clothes at the confirmation by Jesus that he is the Son of God.²⁵³ This was taken by the high priest as blasphemy and sufficient evidence to proceed with His death sentence. This incident is often quoted by commentators who understand the tearing of clothes in Acts 14:14, as the response of the apostles to a perceived blasphemy. It is then explicitly seen as indicating primarily a Jewish response of horror. A recent example can be found in the statement of Newman and Nida that, "(I)n Jewish rabbinic literature, the tearing of one's clothes is given as the proper reaction towards blasphemy..."²⁵⁴ Commentators seem to come to this interpretation because of the Jewish setting of the incident.

8.2.2.2 The tearing of clothes as an indication of anger

The crowd's action of tearing clothes (in Ac. 14) is sometimes linked to Acts 22:23.²⁵⁵ In Acts 22 the Jews are said to have thrown off (torn off²⁵⁶) their garments, thrown dust into the air and called for his death after Paul stated (in Ac.22:23) that God had sent him to the Gentiles. Here the word $\rho\acute{\iota}\pi\tau\omega$ is used. The word is in this case often translated as throw about, shake or toss. Schille, explains the action of the crowd in Acts 22 as an indication of their anger. He refers to Gregory of Nyssa (Orati. in laudem Basilii 15, MPG 36, 513f.) who describes a similar behaviour of a crowd at a chariot race. But Schille then relates this action to a rite: "Die Gestik mag aus einem apotropäischen Ritus entstanden sein". Here he refers to Job 2:12²⁵⁷ and Josephus,²⁵⁸

²⁵² E.W. Grant, *Notes on the Acts of the Apostles*, (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 1955), 78.

²⁵³ E. Haenchen, *The Acts of The Apostles*, trans. Noble & Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 428; R.P.C. Hanson, *The Acts in The Revised Standard Version*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 149; R.R. Williams, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: SCM Press LTD, 1953), 108; F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Tyndale, 1953), 282.

²⁵⁴ B.M. Newman, E.A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles*, (New York: UBS, 1972), 280.

²⁵⁵ G. Lüdemann, *Early Christianity According to The Traditions in Acts, A Commentary*, trans. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1987), 162.

²⁵⁶ In Acts 22:23 the verb used for "throw off" is $\rho\acute{\iota}\pi\tau\epsilon\omega$ which Marshall interestingly enough translates as "tear". A. Marshall, *The New International Version, Interlinear Greek-English New Testament. The Nestle Greek Text with a Literal English Translation*. (Grands Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 529. This is different from Acts 14:14, where $\delta\iota\alpha\rho\eta\eta\gamma\upsilon\sigma\mu\iota$ is used. Nevertheless in a Jewish context the same interpretation would be put on both.

²⁵⁷ Job 1:20 also appears to be a rite. "Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head."

both relating to a Jewish context.

8.2.2.3 The tearing of clothes as a sign of distress

Yet another meaning of the symbolic act of tearing clothes is to be found in the Old Testament where it represents an act of distress and a sense of frustration. In 2 Kings 5, Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aram is struck down with leprosy. At the suggestion of the young servant girl, Naaman, who is a pagan, writes to the king of Israel asking for help from God. "As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God?..."

One therefore finds that there is a variation of meaning attached to the act in the Jewish context. It varies from an act indicating a blasphemy to one indicating anger and finally distress and frustration.

8.2.2.4 The tearing of clothes in the Old Testament

Commentators use the Old Testament to explain that the tearing of clothes in Lystra is an indication that the will of God had been transgressed. What is unusual is that they do not refer to the same passages in the Old Testament without also analysing the possible meanings of this act. Schmithals, for example, refers to Ezra 9:3 where the sin of the exiles is described. Ezra is said to rent his clothes and pull hair from his head. In the following verses it is clear that these actions indicated that he was appalled at the unfaithfulness of the Israelites. Wendt, again, refers to Numbers 14:6²⁵⁹ where Joshua rents his clothes after the Israelites indicated that they want to return to Egypt.²⁶⁰ Again this is an indication by Joshua that he is appalled at what the Israelites want to do.

8.2.2.5 The tearing of clothes in Apocryphal literature

In some cases commentators use sources which are chronologically closer to Acts to explain the tearing of clothes in Lystra. Bruce, Williams and Jackson and Lake draw attention to the act of tearing ones clothes found in Judith 14:16-19.²⁶¹ The Apocryphal books, to which Judith belongs, originated in a period after the Old Testament and brings one nearer to the New Testament times. They also represent Judaism in greater contact with the Hellenistic world.

In Judith, the tearing of clothes is an indication of mourning. Bagoas, the eunuch, discovered that his master, Holofernes had been decapitated. "He gave a great shout, wept, sobbed, shrieked and rent his clothes..."²⁶² The

²⁵⁸ Bell, 2:322; G. Schille, *Die Apostel Geschichte des Lukas*, (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 422. Cf. also the comments of Conzelmann in his commentary: H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 189, especially p. 110, note 10 - which is very clear.

²⁵⁹ H.H. Wendt, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 475.

²⁶⁰ M. Henry, *Commentary on The Whole Bible in One Volume*, ed. L. Church (London: Morgan & Scott, 1973), 155. "They rent their clothes in a holy indignation at the sin of the people, and a holy dread of the wrath of God..."

²⁶¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Tyndale, 1953), 282; C.S.C. Williams, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), 171. The reference to Judith 14:16f, is described as a "striking parallel". F. Jackson and K. Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. 4 (London: MacMillan and Co., 1933), 167.

²⁶² Judith 14:16: "...καὶ διέρρηξεν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ."

leaders of the Assyrian army tore their tunics in consternation..."²⁶³ Here the Greek word which is used and which describes the emotions which accompany the symbolic actions is *εταραχθη...σφοδρα*. This describes a response of shock and consternation.

Because Judith belongs to the context of a Hellenistic Jewish community, it indicates that this symbolic action was known and used by them. Both this meaning as well as the Old Testament and apocryphal references to the tearing of clothes, are useful in that they show that the symbolism could vary from being a response to blasphemy to one of distress and strong disapproval. This widens the possibilities of meaning that could be conveyed in the Lystra episode and which should be kept in mind.

One has to keep in mind that on the historical level it is difficult to assume a Jewish interpretation²⁶⁴ when the apostles are in a completely Gentile situation. This Graeco-Roman situation is important to determine how the original audience understood the symbolic action.²⁶⁵

8.2.2.6 Tearing of clothes in Greek literature

Although one finds the same symbolic act in Greek literature, the dimension of blasphemy is absent. The two examples which Conzelmann notes, are to be found in Dio Cassius and Dio Chrysostom.²⁶⁶ In Dio Cassius' work, the reference is to the distress of the people who discovered the bodies of their relatives who had been killed in battle. "But when they learned the truth, they would tear their hair and rend their garments, calling on the lost by name..."²⁶⁷ The context shows that after a battle people came looking for friends and relatives, hoping to find that they had survived. There was great joy amongst those who found their loved ones but others were confronted with the evidence they were hoping would not be true, that their loved ones had been killed. Therefore in contrast to those who rejoiced, those in distress tore their clothes. It is therefore used as an indication of grief.

The passage from Dio Chrysostom illustrates that the tearing of clothes was also used to show strong disapproval with public opinion. "If someone is reputed to be a philosopher, and he is not yet ready for that vocation, he should tear off his garments and leap forth naked upon the public highways, proving to all the world

²⁶³ Judith 14:19: οἱ ἄρχοντες τῆς δυνάμεως Ἀσσοῦρ, τοὺς χιτῶνας αὐτῶν διέρρηξαν... G. Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, vol. 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), calls this "ein enge Sachparallele" and quotes only this passage as a co-text for the tearing of the clothes.

²⁶⁴ It is, of course, not all this easy when it comes to the final level of the text. Luke's Jewish readers would have understood the action and this insertion may relate to them, or to his readers who knew Old Testament scriptures. I question the many attempts to describe Luke as someone who wrote exclusively to gentile readers. Cf. how J. Jervell, *Luke and the people of God. A new look at Luke-Acts*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 147: points out the importance of Jewish material and motifs in Luke-Acts. He, for example, writes that, "the Jewish element in the church is still a decisive factor, if not numerically at least theologically". But this possibility should not prevent one from investigating the way in which the Graeco-Roman world understood this symbolic action.

²⁶⁵ This need not indicate that all the Old Testament material is useless for interpreting Acts 14. Some interpretations of this action in the Old Testament material may indicate that the tearing of clothes was a symbolic action which spanned cultures and which was common in several societies of biblical times. But the Old Testament clearly indicates that tearing of clothes was understood as a symbolical act.

²⁶⁶ H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 111.

²⁶⁷ "μαθόντες δὲ τὴν ἀλήθειαν τὰς τε τρίχας ἐσπαράττοντο καὶ τὰς ἐσθῆτας περιερρήγνυντο, ὄνομασί τε αὐτοῦ ἀνεκάλουν..." Dio Cassius *Roman History* 48.37.7.

that he is no better than any other man."²⁶⁸ Thus the tearing of clothes by the apostles in Lystra, if interpreted in the same way, becomes an act indicating strong disapproval.²⁶⁹

But another fascinating insight into the meaning of the Lystra events is suggested by the last quotation from Dio Chrysostom, where the strong disapproval is directed against public acclaim. It has been said above, and the later parts of this thesis will argue, that the apostles are rejecting a religious error in Lystra relating to the divinisation of humans. Closely connected with this is another aspect, that is, the fact that public acclaim for human beings is frowned upon, that is if one reads the symbolic action of tearing of clothes in the same light as Dio Chrysostom does. As in Acts 14:14, the tearing of clothes is part of an attempt to stop public acclaim. That this interpretation as a secondary facet of the narrative, is not farfetched, is clear from the fact that the seeking of public acclaim was an accusation levelled against Christians.²⁷⁰ The Christians were sensitive about this charge and defended themselves against it. Justin Martyr, for example, answered the attack of Crescens who was stating that, "Christians are atheists and impious, and doing so to win favour with the deluded mob, and to please them." It is tantalizing to link this thought to Acts 12:23, where the destruction of Herod, who failed to give honour to God and accepted public acclaim for himself, is described.

8.2.2.7 Summary

As discussed above, Luke is careful in blending local colouring into his narrative. In section 7.3.4.1, I indicated that an important theme introduced from the religious aspects of the legend was the enthusiasm of the Gentiles concerning religious matters. I also indicated that this theme would be dealt with when the speech was considered. The response of the apostles in tearing their clothes needs to be carefully considered as its symbolism can be interpreted to imply various attitudes towards Gentiles.

It is incorrect to interpret the tearing of clothes by the apostles as an indication that they consider the actions of the Lystrians as blasphemous. It would be uncharacteristic of Luke to portray the actions of Paul and Barnabas in a Jewish way in a totally Gentile environment. Furthermore the theme of blasphemy is totally lacking in the speech. One would at least expect some verbal attack as a refutation of blasphemy. The contrary is in fact true when, in Acts 14:16, Paul states that God has been lenient by allowing all nations to go their own way. Rackham illustrates the clumsiness that results when trying to merge the symbolism of blasphemy with the speech when he says; "The apostles were horror-struck... But notice their great tact. They address the people with

²⁶⁸ Dio Chrys. *Or.* 35.9. Cit. ap. H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 111: "...δει περιρρηξάμενον ἐκπηδᾶν γυμνὸν εἰς τὰς ὁδοὺς, ἐπιδεικνύοντα πᾶσιν ὅτι μηδενὸς ἐστὶ βελτίων."

The purpose of this statement is to advise young sophists against the temptation of encouraging public admiration for themselves. The seeking of admiration appears to have been a fairly common feature amongst immature sophists. But Dio encourages them not to seek public acclaim, for in the long run it is their message and not people's opinion about them which will last. Cf. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 35.6.

²⁶⁹ The tearing of the clothes shows strong disapproval but also introduces the notion that the exposing of the body will help the audience to realize that the person is only an ordinary human being, just as they. This can be seen as Dio's purpose in the second part of the quote: "...proving to all the world that he is no better than any other man." In this sense the tearing of clothes serves also to reveal the body of the person who is being acclaimed in order that his humanity can be visually grasped. The emphasis of the humanity of the apostles is an important aspect of the speech. I believe that more examples with this particular emphasis need to be found before one can imply with greater certainty that the apostles wanted to show their humanity when they tore their clothes. This would be an area for further research.

²⁷⁰ Justin Martyr *Dialogue* 2.3. *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of The Writings of The Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 2 *Justin Martyr and Athenagoras*, ed. A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867).

politeness - *Sirs*; and instead of rebuking them, they appeal to their reason and conscience.²⁷¹ To address people politely and to appeal to their reason is not the reaction that one would expect from a person who believes he has just heard a blasphemy! If the tearing of clothes is understood in Graeco-Roman terms as disapproval, it is much more in line with the terms of the speech, relating to error and revealing an attitude of tolerance towards the Gentiles. But this needs more explaining.

8.2.2.8 Tolerance towards the Gentiles

Support for the understanding of the tearing of clothes as indicating disapproval is found in the speech which refers to God being lenient to Gentiles. Commentators are virtually unanimous in their conclusion that Acts 14:16 implies that Gentiles are excused by God for their ignorance.²⁷² In dealing with this verse, Hanson points to Acts 3:17 and 13:27 as other instances where Luke refers to the forbearance of God.²⁷³ Packer is one of the few commentators who recognises from the context that the meaning of the tearing of clothes is better understood as an indication of distress rather than blasphemy.²⁷⁴

Leniency towards the Gentiles is also found in Acts 17. Dibelius indicates that when the question of idols is discussed in the Areopagus speech, the condemnatory tone is significantly played down in comparison to the way the idols are mocked in Deutero-Isaiah. Dibelius concludes concerning Luke's purpose: "...the writer does not wish to speak in the tone of one accusing the heathen world of their sin, but as one who is enlightening them in their ignorance."²⁷⁵ In his summing up of the whole speech Dibelius states "The apostle's words signify not a judgment upon the lost state of the Gentiles, but rather a fulfilment of their unconscious longings."²⁷⁶ The indication that the Areopagus speech is non-condemnatory towards Gentiles is a good pointer to the way the Lystra speech is meant to be understood.

Perhaps the most interesting indication of tolerance towards the gentiles is to be found in the report about the mission in Ephesus, the city of Artemis, where Paul, according to Acts 19:37 is described as someone who did not blaspheme against the goddess.²⁷⁷

More remarks are needed about the gentle way in which Luke handles gentile religion and the attempt of Luke not to create the impression that he is in open revolt against the established religions.

²⁷¹ R.B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Methuen, 1910), 233.

²⁷² H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 111; E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. B. Noble and G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 428; F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Tyndale, 1953), 283; R.P.C. Hanson, *The Acts in The RSV*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 149.

²⁷³ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Acts in The RSV*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 149. There is also general consensus that the forbearance of God in this passage contrasts with Romans 1:20, where the Gentiles are said to be without excuse.

²⁷⁴ J.W. Packer, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1966), 117: "They tore their clothes, not at the blasphemy (cf. High Priest at Jesus' trial, Mark 14:63), but to draw attention to their distress...".

²⁷⁵ M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. reeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 55.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁷⁷ "Tolerance" in this section does not mean compromising the gospel. There are clear limits to a friendly, tolerant attitude of gentile religion. This is clear from the proclamation of the gospel in Lystra, but also from the fact that in Ephesus those who practised magic arts burnt their books in public. They clearly recognised that their activities were incompatible with the Gospel.

8.2.2.9 Religious tolerance in Hellenism

Religious tolerance was an important feature of the Graeco-Roman world, as the well known syncretistic trend in its religious life indicates. It was so strong that a tolerant attitude was ingrained even on such an exclusive movement as Judaism. Scholars often draw attention to the significant fact that important thinkers of Hellenistic Judaism displayed tolerance to other religions. Some scholars like O'Neill suggest that Luke was following the precedent set in Hellenistic Judaism.²⁷⁸ Such a precedent is, for example, to be found in the book of Wisdom. Instead of God punishing those in error for worshipping false gods, God is depicted in this work as being lenient towards them. In Wisdom 11-13 the author, having set the high ideals of God, explains how the Egyptians and Canaanites were treated mercifully by God until they persisted in their disobedience. Compare the following statements:

"(Y)et you are merciful to all, because you can do all things and overlook men's sins so that they can repent" (Wis. 11:24).

"Even so, since these were men, you treated them leniently,..." (Wis. 12:8).

"(Y)our sovereignty over all makes you lenient to all." (Wis. 12:16).

At the beginning of Wisdom 13 the foolishness of people in worshipping elements as gods, is described. However they are not condemned but excused as having gone astray.²⁷⁹

The statement of O'Neill seems to be even more acceptable in the light of the fact that two famous Jewish authors, Josephus and Philo, also had tolerant attitudes towards pagans. Josephus, for example, wrote, "It is our custom to refrain from criticising the customs of aliens... forbidden to deride or blaspheme the gods recognised by others, out of respect for the very word 'God'."²⁸⁰

But one also finds a tolerance towards the errors of Gentiles in the extra-canonical Christian writings of the Acts of John, which indicate that it is not a feature of Hellenistic Judaism or of Luke only. John is venerated as divine after he had performed the miracle of raising a husband and wife from death. However John is not portrayed as taking it to represent blasphemy. Rather John adopts the view that this error can be corrected gently.²⁸¹ Lycomedes, who had been raised from death by John, commissioned an artist to paint John's portrait which he hung in his room with garlands draped around it. This became an object of worship. However when John became aware that his portrait was the object of worship, he gently redirected Lycomedes to the worship of God. John's concluding remarks on this error is far from being condemnatory: "But what you have done is childish and imperfect; you have drawn a dead likeness of what is dead."

8.2.2.10 Conclusion

The symbolism of the tearing of clothes by Barnabas and Paul should be taken to signify their distress and disapproval rather than a reaction against blasphemy. This gives greater coherence to the relationship between the symbolic act and the speech which follows it. This interpretation diminishes the emphasis on the Jewish

²⁷⁸ J.C. O'Neill, *The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), 139-159.

²⁷⁹ Wisdom 13:6; "Small blame, however, attaches to these men, for perhaps they only go astray in their search for God and in their eagerness to find him."

²⁸⁰ Josephus *Contra Apionem* 2.237. Cit. ap. F.G. Downing, *Common Ground with Paganism*, *New Testament Studies* 28 (1982): 551 who notes many points of contact between Luke and Josephus. Chadwick notes that the element of tolerance towards the worshippers of pagan deities was a noticeable feature in Philo and Josephus. "Both Philo and Josephus held that, while the God of the Bible was the only true God, it was wrong to insult the religious feelings of others, and they enjoined courtesy upon their fellow Jews." H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, (London: Penguin, 1967), 69.

²⁸¹ Acts of John, 26-29. Cf. E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2, ed. W. Schneemelcher, trans. E. Best, D. Hill, G. Ogg, G.C. Stead and R.McL. Wilson (Tübingen: SCM Press, 1975).

aspect of the speech and accentuates its Graeco-Roman content.

8.3 Philosophical basis of the speech

In this section I wish to show that the presentation of the message in Lystra has been couched in a philosophical concept which was well known in Greek philosophy.

Dibelius explains that the demand for θεοπρεπές is one of the most characteristic features of the idea of God which is developed in Greek philosophy.²⁸² θεοπρεπές stresses that nothing may be said of God which is not worthy of Him, hence the anxiety not to humanize God in any way. The result of this concept was that definitions about God would be made in the negative of the human quality. This was known as the "via negationis" and became predominant in philosophical theology. Dibelius explains that this idea of God, which was developed in Greek philosophy was absorbed by Hellenistic Judaism and by the theology of the early church.²⁸³ The emphasis that God cannot be humanised in any way led to the further characteristic assertion about God, which is, that He is not in need of any kind.²⁸⁴ Dibelius states that the emphasis on God's freedom from any kind of need was one of the most characteristic of these negative qualities.²⁸⁵

The concept was further developed in the form of an antithesis; God himself does not need anything, but provides us with everything.²⁸⁶ The use of this philosophical concept in describing God is illustrated in the work of the Cynic philosopher Heraclitus (Ep.4): "God is not locked up in temples, nor is he made of stone by men's hands and put on a pedestal. On the contrary, the whole ordered universe is his temple."²⁸⁷

Luke knew and used this philosophical concept, for Dibelius shows that it is present in the Areopagus speech (Ac. 17:24,25; "God... does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.")²⁸⁸ According to him this philosophical concept "...is foreign to the whole of the New Testament, with the sole exception of the Areopagus speech."²⁸⁹

This is, however, not quite true, because this concept is also at work in the Lystra speech. The concept that God cannot be humanized and does not need anything is reflected in the speech by the emphasis on the humanity of the apostles and by the reference to "τῶν ματαίων". The antithesis of this is furthermore seen in the speech by the presentation of God as one who provides for all the needs of the people.

²⁸² M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 43.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 43, note 45: numerous examples from Philo are given.

²⁸⁴ The satirical writer Lucian reflects this philosophical principle at the beginning of his treatise "On Sacrifices" by describing stupid people who have not elevated the gods to a sufficiently high position with the resulting implication that the gods "...stand in need of men and to enjoy being flattered and to get angry when they are slighted." Lucian *On Sacrifices* 1, trans. A.M. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library.

²⁸⁵ M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 43.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁸⁷ A.J. Malherbe, Pseudo Heraclitus, Epistle 4: The Divination of the Wise Man, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 21 (1978): 42-43.

²⁸⁸ M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 42, 46.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

8.3.1 The apostles as men with needs

As explained above the concept of *θεοπρεπές* is applied by the insistence that the qualities of God cannot be humanised in any way. This is often portrayed in adjectives with a negative "α" as a prefix to human qualities, when portraying the nature of God.²⁹⁰ In the first part of the speech in Lystra the emphasis is however not on God but on the error of having mistaken the apostles for gods. As the focus falls on the apostles the concept of *θεοπρεπές* is still portrayed but this time from the opposite perspective. Instead of emphasising the divinity of God by showing His absence of human qualities, there is an emphasis on the human qualities of the apostles in order to prove that they are not divine.

An example of this form of argumentation is found in the Hellenistic Jewish writer, Josephus, a contemporary of Luke. In his work "*Contra Apionem*" Josephus defends Judaism by arguing that the Greeks have been ignorant of the true nature of God because their legislators failed to grasp His essence, and instead their poets "introduced what gods they chose, subject to all the passions..."²⁹¹ Josephus' argument implies that since these gods are subject to human passions they are disqualified from being truly divine. Human passions therefore qualify a non-divine being.

A similar form of argumentation is found in the Christian apologist Clement of Alexandria. Clement's contribution to the exposition of Christianity is of great value for he came with a mind steeped in Greek learning. In his "*Exhortation to the Greeks*", he ridicules the Greek gods for their human needs and passions. "But the lands they dwelt in, the arts they practised, the records of their lives, yes, and their very tombs, prove conclusively that they were men."²⁹² And further, "these amorous and passionate gods of yours are brought before us as subject to every sort of human emotion. 'For truly mortal flesh is theirs.'"²⁹³ Thus in terms of the philosophical concept of *θεοπρεπές*, the bearer of human qualities is disqualified as divine. This is why there is an emphasis in Acts 14:15 on the humanity of the apostles. When understood in terms of the concept of *θεοπρεπές*, the emphasis on the humanity of the apostles is enough to correct the error of the Lystrians in assuming the apostles to be divine. This further confirms the Graeco-Roman nature and form of the Lystra narrative.

Equally important as the philosophical concept underlying the speech in Lystra, is the form in which it is presented and the words chosen to express it. In this regard it is particularly the word "*ὁμοιοπαθής*" which needs further examination.

8.3.1.1 Luke's use of *ὁμοιοπαθής*

The importance of *ὁμοιοπαθής* is brought out not only by its uniqueness and its position at the beginning of the sentence, but also by its echo (*ὁμοιωθέντες*) in Acts 14:11, which clearly represents a word play. When one considers the meaning of *ὁμοιοπαθής* in Luke, it is therefore necessary to relate it to the exclamation of the crowd (Ac.14:11): οἱ θεοὶ ὁμοιωθέντες ἀνθρώποις κατέβησαν πρὸς ἡμᾶς.

Luke could have left this word out completely in Acts 14:15 without affecting the meaning of the sentence. His reference to the apostles being people like the Lystrians, would have been sufficient to underline their humanity. He need not have inserted *ὁμοιοπαθής*. This description is, in fact, omitted in a similar passage by the

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 43.

²⁹¹ "ἄν βούλωνται θεοὺς εἰσάγειν πάντα πάσχοντας..." Josephus *Contra Apionem* 2.250-251. trans. H.St.J. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1926).

²⁹² Clement *The Exhortation to the Greeks* 24, trans. G.W. Butterworth, Loeb Classical Library, (London: Harvard University Press, 1960): "ἀλλ' αἱ γε πατρίδες αὐτοῦς καὶ αἱ τέχναι καὶ οἱ βίοι, πρὸς δέ γε καὶ οἱ τάφοι ἀνθρώπους γεγονότας διελέγχουσιν."

²⁹³ Ibid., 31. The last phrase Clement quotes from Iliad 21.568. "...τοῦς ἐρωτικοῦς ὕμων καὶ παθητικοῦς τούτους θεοὺς ἀνθρωποπαθεῖς ἐκ παντὸς εἰσάγειν τῆδ' οὐκ. καὶ γὰρ θην κείνοις θνητὸς χρώς."

Western text of Acts 10:26, where Peter responds to Cornelius after he fell on his knees with the words: Τί ποιεῖς; κἀγὼ ἄνθρωπος εἰμι ὡς καὶ σὺ. It is a much weaker statement than the one in Acts 14.

It is only in the light of a comparison with the question of the crowds that the function of the word becomes meaningful. A rhetorical analysis of this section will confirm that the remark of Paul and Barnabas links directly with this exclamation. The crowd first remarked in Acts 14:11 that the gods (οἱ θεοὶ) ὁμοιωθέντες. This aorist passive participium means "to become like". Later, in Acts 14:14, Paul and Barnabas respond directly to this question by stating that they are not gods who became like men, but they are like other men.

The Lystrians had been saying that the apostles were gods who had come down as "ὁμοιωθέντες ἄνθρωποις". In response the apostles said that they were "ὁμοιοπαθεῖς... ἄνθρωποι". The wording is very similar and the interplay between them is evident. However they have contracting implications.

When one fails to see this link, there will be a tendency to interpret ὁμοιοπαθής by means of an etymological reading.²⁹⁴ But this would be wrong. The contrast here is not between men who have passions and God who is impassionable, as Williams suggests.²⁹⁵ The apostles do not want to describe the nature of the gods as impassionable.²⁹⁶ They want to emphasize that they themselves are human, and that they did not become divine as the crowds thought. The reader who is sensitive to the philosophical concepts described above, would know that this precludes their being divine.

The works in which the word ὁμοιοπαθής is used have strong Hellenistic ties. This adds to the realization that the speech in Lystra represents a Graeco-Roman thought world to a greater extent than previously accepted. Not only the concepts underlying the speech but also the choice of words point in that direction.

83.1.2 Men in need

The word ὁμοιοπαθής reflects a concept that portrays the apostles as men who have needs. Ὁμοιοπαθής is a striking word, not only because it is inserted at an important place in the initial position of the sentence and the speech, but also because it seems to provide a key to the understanding of the message of the speech in Lystra. It is also striking because it is used only in one other New Testament text, namely James 5:17.

According to Michaelis, it denotes "one who finds himself in the same or similar relations".²⁹⁷ He refers to the use of the word by Philo in *Conf. Ling.* 7, where ὁμοιοπαθής refers to shared emotions²⁹⁸ and Justin Martyr where the word is used to describe the incarnate Christ as being the same as human beings.²⁹⁹ In the

²⁹⁴ On this, cf. G. Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, vol. 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1982), 160, and his reference in footnote 49 to Bauer's dictionary.

²⁹⁵ C.S.C. Williams, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), 171; W. Michaelis, ὁμοιοπαθής, TDNT 1967 ed. 939; interprets the word in the same way.

²⁹⁶ Contra J.L. de Villiers, *Die Handeling van die Apostels*, deel 1 (Kaapstad: N.G.Kerk-Uitgewers, 1977), 282. I could not trace commentaries which linked the exclamation of the crowd to the first remark of the apostles.

²⁹⁷ W. Michaelis, ὁμοιοπαθής, TDNT 1967 ed. 938; G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950), 317, explains it as "of like feelings or affections". This is supported by J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on semantic domains*. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 292. All these explanations can be found (some verbally similar) in H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 1224.

²⁹⁸ W. Michaelis, ὁμοιοπαθής, TDNT 1967 ed. 939; Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues* 7, trans. G.H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library, (London: W. Heinemann, 1949). "κἀκ τοῦτου τὸ ὁμοιότροπον καὶ ὁμοιοπαθὲς ἐδρίσκετο..."

²⁹⁹ Justin *Epit.* 10.8. "He was made of like passions, and taught these things..."

Dialogue with Trypho the use of the word occurs twice and identifies Jesus with mankind. "He pre-existed, and submitted to be born a man of like passions with us..."³⁰⁰ "Being born of the Virgin, became man, of like passions with all..."³⁰¹ In this sense it is a word which is used when a very close or intimate identification is being made.

8.3.1.3 Plutarch

The use of this word in Acts 14:15 can also be illuminated by investigating its application by Plutarch. Plutarch is a contemporary to the New Testament writers (ca. 50-120 A.D.). Malherbe finds that this: "makes him an extremely important person for the study of Christian background."³⁰²

In his *Adversus Colotem* he uses the word *ὁμοιοπαθής* to show a "communion of experience" between people: *μόνον οὐ καταδυντες ταις ὁμοιοπαθείαις καί ἀπαλλαγέντες ἐκ τοῦ χαμαὶ βίου εἰς τὰ Ἐπικούρου ὡς ἀληθῶς θεόψαντα ὄργια.*³⁰³ Used in this sense the similarity goes deeper than outward appearance, as *ὁμοιωθέντες* implies a common experience of life. Plutarch's use of the word which is similar to that of Philo and Justin, illustrates its consistent meaning.³⁰⁴

8.3.1.4 The use of *ὁμοιοπαθεῖς* in the Septuagint

The word *ὁμοιοπαθής* is used twice in the Septuagint. In the Book of Wisdom 7:3 the word is used to describe the earth that receives all people in the same way. According to Michaelis the correct translation of what the text means is "I (Solomon) fell (as a child) on the same earth (as all children fall on)".³⁰⁵ The context of the word here is to emphasize the humanity of Solomon. Holmes³⁰⁶ comments on the use of this word in this chapter that, "commentators point out that the affinity is not between Solomon and the earth but between Solomon and the rest of mankind." It is clear why this comment is made: In the beginning of the chapter Solomon describes him as a "mortal, like to all".³⁰⁷ Luke uses *ὁμοιοπαθής* in the same manner, to point out that the apostles not only look like humans but actually are humans.

It is interesting that this word is used in Luke and The Book of Wisdom, which shares other striking

³⁰⁰ Justin *Dial.* 48.3.

³⁰¹ Justin *Dial.* 57.3.

³⁰² A.J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation. A Greco-Roman Sourcebook*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 21: who describes him as a major source for knowledge of first- and second-century culture. Cf. also E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, reprint 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 309-310 who states that especially his *Moralia* reveals his views on philosophy, culture and religion.

³⁰³ Plutarch *Reply to Colotes in Defence of the Other Philosophers* 1117 B, trans. B. Einarson and P. De Lacy, Loeb Classical Library, (London: Harvard University Press, 1967).

³⁰⁴ See also Conzelmann's reference to Pap. Berol. 8877. H. Conzelmann, *The Acts of The Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 111, note 11.

³⁰⁵ W. Michaelis, *ὁμοιοπαθής*, TDNT 1967 ed. 938.

³⁰⁶ S. Holmes, *Wisdom of Solomon*, in R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English with Introduction and Critical and Explanatory Notes to the Several Books*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 545.

³⁰⁷ As S. Holmes, *Wisdom of Solomon*, in R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English with Introduction and Critical and Explanatory Notes to the Several Books*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 545 translates it.

similarities. The Book of Wisdom is steeped in the culture of Hellenistic Judaism of Alexandria with its philosophical schools, mystery religions and astrology. The author of that book seeks to lead people to the real God - who loves all people. This is a theme and purpose which is very close to the theme and purpose of Paul's speech in Lystra, so that there is a deeper bond between these two texts. It is also pointed out by O'Neill that the style of literature that Luke has chosen to write in, is similar to that of the Greek-speaking Jewish apologists. 'In choosing to write the history of the foundation period of the Church Luke has chosen the basic method which the Greek-speaking Jewish apologists had chosen before him.'³⁰⁸ While the writer of the Wisdom of Solomon has meditated on the significance of the Exodus, Luke has meditated on the spread of the church. The Book of Wisdom therefore illuminates the Jewish Hellenistic tradition with which Acts displays links. There are, therefore, both literary and theological similarities between Acts and Wisdom.

'Ὁμοιοπαθής also appears in 4 Maccabees 12:13.³⁰⁹ This fourth book of Maccabees also has a Hellenistic nature.³¹⁰ In this passage the tyrant ἄνθρωπος ὄν who wanted to force the Jews to act against the Law, is compared to his victims as ὁμοιοπαθεῖς.³¹¹ Through this word it is emphasised that both tyrant and subjects are human.³¹² The word usually belongs in a Hellenistic setting.

8.3.1.5 Ὁμοιοπαθής in the New Testament

The word ὁμοιοπαθής occurs in one New Testament passage apart from Acts 14. It is found in James 5:17 where Elijah is said to be a man just as we are ('Ἠλίας ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθής ἡμῖν..) although his prayer was powerful. The author of James is using the word to bridge the gap that exists between people and the one they venerate.³¹³

The use of ὁμοιοπαθής in James 5:16-18 shows Elijah as the example of a person whose prayers are powerful and effective. Reference is here being made to the incident recorded in 1 Kings 17:1 and 18:42 where Elijah announces to Ahab that there will be no rain and later announces that the drought is broken and that the rain will return.

But the incident in James 5 relies not only on Old Testament material. It bears evidence of the popular legends that had developed around the person of Elijah in later times and that portrayed him as a semi-angelic being with exceptional powers. The evidence of these legends can be seen in James' assumption that the drought and the end of the drought are a result of Elijah's prayer. In 1 Kings, however, neither the drought nor the end

³⁰⁸ O'Neill points to the similarity of Luke's purpose and style to that of the author of the Wisdom of Solomon.

J.C. O'Neill, *The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting* (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), 142. For a thorough discussion of Wisdom, cf. J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem, Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*, (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 182ff.

³⁰⁹ It probably dates from the first half of the first century.

³¹⁰ Even if the original language of the author of 4 Maccabees is probably not Greek. No ed. noted, *The Apocrypha: Greek & English*, (London: S Bagster & Sons, 1882), iii.

³¹¹ W. Michaelis, ὁμοιοπαθής, TDNT 1967 ed. 938-939.

³¹² In 4 Maccabees the similarity with Acts 14:14 is restricted to the mere use of the word. Although the two texts are both Hellenistic, they are not as close in respect of the use of ὁμοιοπαθής as the Book of Wisdom and Acts are.

³¹³ Note also the proximity of the word ἄνθρωπος to ὁμοιοπαθής in the instances above. It comes as no surprise that this Hellenistic word appears in James. Despite the Jewish Christian thought of this book, the vocabulary and literary nature of James is of a high standard. It is closer to classical Greek than any other New Testament book.

of the drought nor the 3½ year period occur. These probably come from 4 Ezra 7:109 and from the great hymn in praise of the fathers, in Sirach 48:3.³¹⁴ Jeremias traces the growth of these legends to two passages. Firstly Elijah's mysterious rapture in 2 Kings 2:11 and, secondly, the prophesy of Elijah's return on the day of the Lord as recorded in Malachi 4:5.³¹⁵ These passages enhanced the reputation of Elijah and gave him a special superhuman status on which later texts elaborated.

Dibelius notes that this tradition about the prophet's power, could well be reflected in the text of James 5:17 by the phrase "ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς" and by the antithesis in verse 18 of οὐρανός and γῆ.³¹⁶ There can be little doubt that Elijah, being on earth, is delineated as dependent on God who gives rain from heaven. There is an absolute distinction between the two, which is similar to the presentation of God in the proclamation in Lystra. The picture of Elijah in James 5 is fundamentally different from the one in the legends about him. For James, Elijah's prayer is powerful and can control the elements, not because Elijah himself is super-human, but because God is the agent who gives effect to his prayer. This is confirmed by the use of the participle "ἐνεργουμένη" in James 5:16 which implies that the prayer has power because "it reaches God and He hears it".³¹⁷ God is the One who has power and who gives effect to Elijah's prayer. Elijah himself is just an ordinary man. We have in James a correction of the way that the legend portrays Elijah as super-human and the reality of the situation that Elijah is just a man, using the same key word (ὁμοιοπαθής) as in Luke.

The use of ὁμοιοπαθής in Acts 14 relates in another special way to the remark about Elijah in James. In Acts 14 the word is in association with a legend which is at the root of making Paul and Barnabas divine. Now the similarity is extended in the attempt to correct the wrong perceptions.

This is not the end of the similarities. A further correspondence between James 5:17,18 and Paul's speech in Lystra, is also evidenced by Luke's reference to the manifestation of God's providential power in providing rain and in enabling the earth to produce crops and fruit for people to eat. In James, as a result of Elijah's prayer, God "gives rain from heaven and the earth produces its fruit."³¹⁸ The resemblance with the Lystra speech is easily seen. God manifests his power through providence.³¹⁹

"Ὁμοιοπαθής" in this context emphasizes an ordinary human being, for the word includes the root "παθος"- suffering; which is the common lot of all mankind. One may have in these thoughts of James the application of the same philosophical concept of θεοπρεπές. The fact that Elijah is just an ordinary man, emphasizes that God does not need anything from people, but that in contrast, He provides mankind with all its needs.

The divinisation of people, was such a problem in early Christianity, that traces of it are found in several texts. James confirms that Luke was not the only one who worked within such an environment.

8.3.1.6 Summary

In these examples the similarity that is being referred to goes beyond physical or outward appearances, but to a common experience of life. While the Lystrians were saying that the apostles looked like gods, the apostles

³¹⁴ M. Dibelius, *Commentary on the Epistle of James*, ed. H. Koester, trans. M.A. Williams, 1976 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 256.

³¹⁵ J. Jeremias, 'Ἡλ(ε)τός, TDNT 1964 ed. 929-930.

³¹⁶ M. Dibelius, *Commentary on the Epistle of James*, ed. H. Koester, trans. M.A. Williams, 1976 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 257.

³¹⁷ P.H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1982), 196.

³¹⁸ James 5:18b, "ὁ οὐρανός ἐτεδόν ἔδωκεν καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐβλάστησεν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῆς".

³¹⁹ Acts 14:17b, "οὐρανὸθεν ὑμῖν ἕτερος διδοὺς καὶ καιρὸς καρποφόρους."

replied that they themselves not only looked like men but shared all the human characteristics as well. Once this is the case, there is not the slightest possibility of them being divine. It is clear that the verbal description used in the speech, refers to an important discussion and understanding of the nature of God in Graeco-Roman society, and, in a more technical sense in moral philosophical circles.

8.3.2 The humanity of the apostles

The subtle nuances of *ὁμοιοπαθής*, uncovered in the previous section, are confirmed by its accompanying word (*ἄνθρωπος*). This word cannot be glossed over in the discussion of the humanity of the apostles.

In the three other biblical references to *ὁμοιοπαθής*, all have the word *ἄνθρωπος* in close proximity to it.³²⁰ This word refers to "man" in a basic, down to earth way. With this use of *ἄνθρωπος* comes the "transitoriness and sinfulness of human nature".³²¹ It is used in Greek literature in a context where people refuse to be venerated as gods. Pseudo-Callisthenes, a historical novel on Alexander, uses this word as a contrast to God: "I decline the honours equal to God for I was born a mortal man..." (*ἄνθρωπος*).³²²

In Acts 14:15 the word expresses the strong rejection of attempts to venerate Paul and Barnabas. But it is also striking for another reason. It fits in well with a general understanding of Luke that Christianity has not spread through the power of the apostles, who were mere men. Their powerful actions are the results of God's activity through His Holy Spirit. Luke seems to have rejected any focus on divine powers of the apostles in more than one place and stresses their humanity. A synchronic analysis of aspects of this theme will indicate more fully how important it is in Luke-Acts.

8.3.3.1 Falling at the feet of a person

The stress on humanity can, for example, be traced in Luke's work by examining the texts that refer to the instances where people fall down at the feet of a person. There are many examples of falling at the feet of a person as an indication of veneration. The Greek word *προσκύνω* which is used to express this action, became a terminus technicus for the veneration of a god³²³ at an early stage. The word *προσκύνω* implies a relationship with deities which were worshipped by prostrating oneself before them, perhaps to kiss their feet. It is, for example found in the *Odyssey*, and appears often in the works of the Greek tragedians.³²⁴ A good example of this action in a context similar to the one in Lystra, is found in the legend of Sosipatra, reported by

³²⁰ James 5:17: "ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθής..."; 4 Macc. 12:13: "Ὁὐκ ἠδεσθης ἄνθρωπος ὢν, θηριοδεστατε, τοὺς ὁμοιοπαθεῖς." Wis. 7:3. Wis. 7:1 begins with the words "εἶμι μὲν κατὰ θνητὸς ἄνθρωπος..." and 7:3 goes on to describe his birth "καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ὁμοιοπαθὴν κατεπεσοῦ γην..."

³²¹ J. Jeremias, *ἄνθρωπος*, TDNT 1964 ed. 364. The examples given are James 5:17 and Hebrews 9:27, two books with a good use of the Greek language.

³²² Ps.-Callisth. 2.22.12 (Alexander). Cit.ap. H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 110-111. Other examples are: Plut. *Mor.* 341b; Arrian *Anab.* 4.9.6; Tacit. *Ann.* 4.38; Ps.Clem. *Recog.* 10.70. The rejection of veneration as god will be dealt with further in section 8.3.4.

³²³ H. Greeven, *προσκυνέω*, κτλ. TDNT 1968 ed. 759-760 for a full discussion of this word in its Greek context.

³²⁴ One example of this is to be found in Sophocles' *Phil.*, 656f. "ἄρ' ἔστιν ὥστε κάγγυθεν θεῶν λαμῖν, καὶ βαστάσαι με προσκύσαι θ' ὥσπερ θεῶν." H. Greeven, *προσκυνέω*, κτλ. TDNT 1968 ed. 760.

Eunapius in his *Lives of the philosophers*.³²⁵ The legend he recounts deals with the visit by two gods to a farm. They are well received and as a token of their gratitude they care for Sosipatra, the daughter of the farm owner, in such a way that she is transformed into a wonderful maiden. Sosipatra's father was so amazed by what the two visitors had done with his daughter that he realized the true identity of the two guests. He threw himself down before the men and implored them to tell him who they were.³²⁶ In this way the gods know they are being worshipped.³²⁷

Luke describes this action both in his gospel and in Acts. Its significance is made abundantly clear in the fact that when people fall before Jesus, it is acceptable.³²⁸ Luke explicitly states that it is unacceptable when people fall at the feet of the apostles or wish to venerate them as divine. When Cornelius, for example, falls at Peter's feet, he is immediately made to stand up, with the words "I am only a man myself" (ἐγὼ αὐτὸς ἄνθρωπος εἶμι, Ac. 10:25-26). Jackson and Lake, in their note on this passage indicate that the Western text reads "I also am a man even as you".³²⁹ This is a phrase which is reminiscent to that in Acts 14:15. The emphasis is not only on the humanity of the apostles with the use of ἄνθρωπος, but also on their identification with those who are being evangelised.

The point is thus driven home to the reader of Luke-Acts that Jesus is divine and He must remain the focus of their veneration but the apostles are human and therefore cannot accept this form of veneration.

Luke, for theological reasons stuck closely to the purely Hellenistic understanding of the word προσκυνέω. It is reserved for the worship of a deity.³³⁰

8.3.3.2 The humanity of the apostles in other passages

The emphasis on the humanity of the apostles is dealt with on other occasions. This is seen in the passage that

³²⁵ Eunapius *Lives of the Philosophers* ed. and trans. W.C. Wright, Loeb Classical Library, 400ff. Eunapius lived in Sardis during the 4th century A.D.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ The use of προσκυνέω also occurs in the Septuagint to signify the worship of God or gods. It is, however, used as being appropriate not only for God, but also His elect: The Egyptians are to fall at Moses' feet to ask for pardon (Ex. 11:8).

³²⁸ This happens three times: 1. Luke 8:28, the healed Gerasene demoniac falls at Jesus' feet; 2. Luke 8:41, Jairus falls at Jesus' feet; The similarity between this passage and Acts 10:25 is especially obvious in the Greek. Compare Luke 8:41: Ἰάτρος... καὶ πεσὼν παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τοῦ Ἰησοῦ with Acts 10:25: ὁ Κορνήλιος πεσὼν ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας προσεκύνησεν. 3. Luke 8:47, the woman with the bleeding problem "came trembling and fell at his feet."

Jackson and Lake note that the passage in Rev. 22:8 is very similar except for the curious refusal by the angel to accept veneration F. Jackson, K. Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity; The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 4 (London: MacMillan, 1933), 117.

³²⁹ F. Jackson and K. Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity; The Acts of the Apostles*, vol 4 (London: MacMillan, 1933), 117.

³³⁰ H. Greeven, προσκυνέω, TDNT 1968 ed. 759-764.

has been referred to on many occasions in Acts 3. There Luke uses the three words "power" (*δυνάμις*), "godliness" (*εὐσεβεία*) and "boldness" (*παρρησία*).

After the healing of the cripple in Acts 3, people stared at Peter and John. Peter then exclaims that the healing did not take place through any "power" or "godliness" of their own, Acts 3:12.³³¹

According to Acts 4:17, Peter and John are warned not to speak about Jesus after their release. They nevertheless meet the other disciples and pray with them. Part of the prayer is that they be granted "boldness" to speak, Acts 4:29. The word "*παρρησία*" indicates that the boldness they were given was not a boldness that increases a person's status, but a boldness which allowed them to serve God more effectively.³³²

Another significant phrase is found in Acts 4:13. As a sequence to the healing of the cripple, Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin where they are questioned about the source of their power (Ac. 4:7). Peter's reply was so powerful that the Sanhedrin was astonished because they knew the disciples to be "unschooled ordinary men" (*ὅτι ἀνθρώποι ἀγράμματοι εἰσιν καὶ ἰδιῶται*; Acts 4:13). Bruce agrees with

³³¹ For Luke, *δυνάμις* is a manifestation of the presence and activity of God through Jesus Christ or His Holy Spirit. W. Grundmann, *δύναμις*, TDNT 1964 ed. 301. This is portrayed in the birth narrative, where, according to Lk. 1:35, Mary is "overshadowed by the power of God". Jesus' ministry is one equipped with "power" (Lk. 4:14: "Jesus returned from Galilee in the power of the Spirit"). Jesus is also the bearer of power: Lk. 4:36: "With authority and power he gives orders...".

Luke wants to stress that the disciples operate in the power of Jesus, not their own (Lk. 9:1). The key grand commission in Lk. 24:47-49 indicates that must wait in Jerusalem "until they have been clothed in power" before they can pursue the mission. This is repeated in a programmatic way at the beginning of Acts as it forms the basis of the spread of Christianity. According to Acts 1:8 they receive power before the mission to the ends of the earth.

When Peter denies that he performed the healing with his own power, Acts 3:12, he brushes aside any suggestion that he is anything other than an ordinary human being. The power comes from Jesus Christ as Acts 4:10 confirms. Stephen, too, is presented as a man "full of God's grace and power", Acts 6:8.

Thus the achievements of the disciples and apostles is the result of God's power. In themselves they are powerless ordinary men. Cf. W. Foerster, *εὐσεβεία*, TDNT 1971 ed. 175-182.

³³² The presentation of the apostles as having "boldness" (*παρρησία*) would be understood by a purely Hellenistic society as an indication of superior qualities. Thus the apostles would not be ordinary men but people who have a special ability to speak publicly (with political overtones). It was the mark of a philosopher. Cf. e.g. Marcus Aurelius *Antonius* 11.6. Cf. H. Schlier, *παρρησία*, TDNT 1967 ed. 875.

In Hellenistic Judaism the understanding of the word is slightly different from the purely Hellenistic meaning in that it is seen as a boldness which enables one to stand before God without fear. Cf. Job 27:9; 22:23-27. It is also used in Wis. 5:1 in this sense.

This closer relationship with God in the use of the word *παρρησία* is also reflected in the Johannine corpus in 1 Jn. 3:21; 5:14. The disciple or believer, because he/she has faith, can stand before God boldly.

Luke's use of the word does not imply that the person with *παρρησία* is able to express a closer relationship with God. Luke sees it as a gift from God which enables preaching, to which they have been commissioned to be done more effectively. For example:

Acts 9:27 (used of Paul's preaching in Damascus), Acts 14:3 (Paul and Barnabas' preaching in Iconium), Acts 18:26 (Apollos' preaching) and Acts 28:31 (Paul preaching boldly in Rome).

The passage in Acts 4:29 has the interesting juxtaposition of *δοῦλος* and *παρρησία*. In Hellenistic society servants do not have boldness or the right to speak publicly. Cf. e.g. Euripides of Salamis, the tragic dramatist (480-406 B.C.) who writes in ION 673H, *ξένος κἄν τοῖς λόγοισιν ἀστὸς ἢ τὸ στόμα δοῦλον πέπαται κούκ ἔγει παρρησίαν* (H. Schlier, *παρρησία*, TDNT 1967 ed. 872). In Acts 4:29 they possess *παρρησία* although they see themselves as *δούλοι*. This indicates that it is not an inherent quality in them but a gift from God. Thus they are not superior to others while exhibiting *παρρησία*.

the assessment of Jackson and Lake³³³ that the word ἀγρόματοις is probably derived from the Hebrew "ame ha-ares" (the people of the land) thus being men who are rather low even on the human scale. Technically it would mean "unlettered" but Bruce believes it rather points to the apostles being "unversed in the learning of the Jewish schools", not illiterate.³³⁴ The word ἰδιώτης refers to the mundane dimension of man, that is, a "lay person" as opposed to an "expert". It refers to a man without charismatic gifts as opposed to a mantis (diviner/soothsayer). In Rabbinic literature it can be used to denote a man as distinct from the deity.³³⁵ This Rabbinic link is not out of place in this context as Peter and John were standing before the Sanhedrin. Nor is the distinction from the deity out of place when one bears in mind that the initial response to the healing was to view the two as possessing some special powers. Peter says to the crowd "Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk" (Acts 3:12).

The similarity between the healings of the cripple in Acts 3 and Acts 14 has already been noted. One finds that the initial response in both cases is to elevate the apostles to such an extent that they have to object and stress their humanity in contrast to God who is powerful. The verse that has been looked at in Acts 4:13 concludes with the Sanhedrin taking note "that these men had been with Jesus". This illustrates the tension that Luke builds up in his narrative. The apostles do display signs of having God's power, but this is God's power working in them. The apostles themselves remain just as human as all other people.

8.3.4 Punishment for claiming divinity

The humanity of the apostles is also emphasised when their humility is contrasted with the punishment meted out to those who claim equality with God. Luke carefully spells out the consequences that await those who attempt to elevate themselves. In Acts 8:9ff Simon Magus boasted that he was someone with great power and known as "μεγάλη".³³⁶ Haenchen indicates that this title was a Samaritan designation for the supreme deity, so that this may reflect an attempt on his side to claim divine honours. Simon's attempts are exposed as pathetic when confronted by the truth of the Gospel. Similarly as with Bar-Jesus in Acts 13, Paul consigns him to a period of blindness. The most severe condemnation is, however, reserved for Herod (cf. Ac.12:22-23) when he allowed himself to be acclaimed as a god. For this reason God struck him down. He faced the humiliating death of being eaten up by worms.³³⁷

A brief look at a non-biblical example will show that this motif was not only a biblical concept. Lucian, in writing about Alexander the False Prophet, stated on a number of occasions that Alexander succeeded in confusing the people into believing that he was a god. As a climax to his attempts to make himself great, Alexander petitioned the Emperor to change the name of his home town from Abonoteichus to Ionopolis and to strike a new coin bearing his image on one side and that of the god Glycon on the other.³³⁸ Lucian then

³³³ F. Jackson and K. Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 4 (London: MacMillan, 1933), 44.

³³⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Tyndale Press, 1953), 122.

³³⁵ H. Schleier, ἰδιώτης, TDNT 1965 ed. 215-216.

³³⁶ E. Haenchen, *The Acts of The Apostles*, trans. B. Noble & G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 303.

³³⁷ Acts 12:21-23. Being eaten up by worms appears to have been associated with complete condemnation. The imagery is also used in Mark 9:48, where Jesus describes people who will be consigned to hell "where their worm does not die ..."

³³⁸ Lucian *Alexander The False Prophet* 18, trans. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1925). Glycon is described as the grandson of Zeus. "Εἰμὶ γλύκων, τρίτον αἶμα Διός..."

reports that Alexander's death was brought about by his leg being infested with maggots.³³⁹ Although Lucian was a satirist and his description could well be a caricature, his tone implies that such arrogance was justly rewarded by the humiliating death that Alexander experienced. Such a death conveyed disgrace and failure for the person concerned.

From these remarks it is clear that the focus on the humanity of the apostles is part of a whole complex of ideas about the nature of God in Graeco-Roman religious thought. The reader of Luke would have related this remark to other parts of his text which also contains references to this complex of ideas. Most important is that several perspectives reinforce the philosophical method of argumentation used in presenting a doctrine about God. As discussed above the demand for *θεοπρεπές* stressed that God could not be humanised in any way. Thus by the simple emphasis on the humanity of the apostles it already becomes self evident that the assumption of the Lystrians that Paul and Barnabas were gods, is an error. This error exposes their ignorance about the true nature of God. It also confirms the reasons for Luke adopting the structure of the speech which first exposes the error before presenting the truth.

83.5 *ματαιός* and *θεοπρεπές*

In considering Luke's use of the *via negationis* one needs to consider also the use and function of the word *ματαιός* in Acts 14:15. Once again new perspectives on its meaning are gained if it is related to a Graeco-Roman context.

The traditional explanation of the reference to *τὰ μάταια* is that it is a reference to heathen idols³⁴⁰ made from a Jewish (Christian) perspective.³⁴¹ Dibelius agrees with this by stating that the speech in Lystra is "preached completely in Old Testament style... The gods are described as *οἱ μάταιοι* as in III Kg. 16:2, 13, 26; IV Kg. 17:15; Esth. 4:17p; Jer. 2:5, 8:19; III Mac. 6:11."³⁴² Many scholars consistently deny any Graeco-Roman links or nuances. Even Dibelius contends that the condemnation of idols in the Lystra speech is too harsh for anything but an Old Testament understanding, although he interprets the reference to images in the Areopagus speech differently. That reference is, in comparison to Deutero-Isaiah's condemnation of idols, "mild

³³⁹ Lucian *Alexander the False Prophet* 59, trans. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1925), 251. "...καὶ σκοληκῶν ζέσας"

³⁴⁰ Commentators usually assume that the use of the phrase *τὰ μάταια* is based on the Septuagint usage and that it refers to "idols", and that this interpretation is supported by 1 Thess. 1:9, which reads: "They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." In this quote the word for idols is *εἰδωλον* and not *μάταιος* as in Acts 14:15. Although the passage from Thessalonians has similarities with Acts 14:15, it should not be used to conclude that *μάταιος* refers to idols. Cf. also F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Tyndale, 1953), 283; H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 111, note 16; E. Haenchen, *The Acts of The Apostles*, trans. B. Noble & G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 428; R.P.C. Hanson, *The Acts in The RSV*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 149; R.B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Methuen, 1910), 233, note 3; R.R. Williams, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: SCM Press, 1953), 108.

³⁴¹ Haenchen gives the example of Jer. 2:5. E. Haenchen, *The Acts of The Apostles*, trans. B. Noble & G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 428; Hanson refers to I Thess. 1:9 "You turned to God from idols." R.P.C. Hanson, *The Acts in The RSV*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 149; Conzelmann refers the reader to Rom. 1:20ff. where pagans are condemned for not having recognised God and worshipped images. H. Conzelmann, *Acts of The Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 111.

³⁴² M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 71.

polemic".³⁴³ In Lystra, though, the reference to τὰ μάταια is a harsh attack on idols which, according to him, is uncharacteristic of Graeco-Roman philosophy. Against this, one should bear in mind that, even if the attack on idols is harsh, severe polemic against popular cults and their practices was also characteristic of Cynics. Malherbe in discussing *Pseudo Heraclitus, Epistle 4* draws attention to this when he states, "Bernays was correct in drawing attention to the severe tone of this polemic, but he erred in thinking that such severity could only be thought of as coming from a Jew or a Christian."³⁴⁴ Thus the condemnation of idols in Acts 14, is not an automatic exclusion of the possibility that it also represents Graeco-Roman polemic against wrong perceptions about God.³⁴⁵ In a previous section the tolerance of Luke and his gentle handling of gentiles were discussed. This may seem to be contradictory to his description of the vanities here. It is a fact that Luke uses strong language here in a speech which is otherwise as mild as the Areopagus one. But even there Luke did not hesitate to refer in strong terms to the judgement which will be directed against the unbelievers (17:31). The point is that this language cannot be regarded as Old Testament in nature simply because it is so strong, as the philosophical references and sources reveal.

In addition to τὰ μάταια referring to idols, it also has a wider application, which considerably increases the Graeco-Roman contents of the speech. Rackham supports this wider interpretation when he states, "The gods of the Lycaonians, their Zeus and Hermes, with all their paraphernalia of temples and sacrifices, were vanities."³⁴⁶ Serious consideration should be given to the idea that τὰ μάταια is also a reference to the sacrifice that was being prepared. This is supported by Simon's investigation of Stephen's speech (Acts 7), in which he finds a close relationship between the condemnation of idols and that of sacrifices. "This condemnation of the temple includes condemnation of the sacrificial cult. Sacrifices are mentioned by Stephen, not in connection with the Temple, but in relation to the calf."³⁴⁷ By the "calf", he is referring to the idol made by the Israelites in the desert. This wider reference needs further discussion.

8.3.5.1 τὰ μάταια and sacrifice

The application of the philosophical concept of θεοπρεπέες to τὰ μάταια will not only clarify the speech but will also further substantiate the evidence of Graeco-Roman characteristics in the Lystra speech.³⁴⁸ In this regard it is important to remark that the *via negationis* which emphasises God's freedom from need, includes the thought that God is free from the need of having to be appeased by sacrifices.

³⁴³ Ibid., 55.

³⁴⁴ A.J. Malherbe, *Pseudo Heraclitus, Epistle 4: The Divination of the Wise Man* *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 21 (1978): 52-53.

³⁴⁵ One finds the condemnation of idols in the work of Pseudo Heraclitus, Ep.4, "God is not locked up in temples, nor is he made out of stone by men's hands and put on a pedestal." Cit. ap. A.J. Malherbe, *Pseudo Heraclitus, Epistle 4: The Divination of the Wise Man* *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 21 (1978): 42-43. This represents a Cynic philosophy dating from the first century A.D. and which is therefore close to the New Testament.

³⁴⁶ R.B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Methuen, 1910), 233.

³⁴⁷ M. Simon, *Saint Stephen and the Jerusalem Temple*, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 2 (1951): 134.

³⁴⁸ I am aware that Gärtner, in discussing Acts 17:25 disagrees with the concept of θεοπρεπέες being applied to the rejection of temple worship and sacrifice. He believes that temple worship and sacrifice is being contrasted with idols. But he also does admit that what he is saying and θεοπρεπέες are related, so that his argument appears rather unconvincing. B. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, (Uppsala: C.W.K. Gleerup, Lund, 1955), 216.

As the background to this discussion on sacrifice in Acts 14, one should keep in mind the importance of sacrifice in the legend recorded by Ovid. Once the elderly couple had realized that they were in the company of gods they immediately wished to sacrifice their goose.³⁴⁹ This "source material" enhances the concept of sacrifice in Acts 14 and enables one to determine more precisely what the dominating concerns of Luke were in his description of the events.

Before focussing on the word "sacrifice" in its particular context in Acts 14:13, it will be helpful to look at it in its broader Graeco-Roman context and especially at the way in which Graeco-Roman philosophers criticized sacrifices.

8.3.5.2 Graeco-Roman views of sacrifice

In order to understand some of the philosophical condemnation of sacrifice, a brief examination of contemporary views towards sacrifice will be helpful. The Graeco-Roman society had a dualistic view about sacrifice. The one view comprised the affirming and maintenance of the practice, while the other view was critical of it and called for its re-evaluation.

Sacrifice played an important part in Graeco-Roman religion and society. Even though some people may no longer have believed in the efficacy of sacrifice,³⁵⁰ they were still prepared to go along with the practice. Young explains that, "for political reasons, in order to maintain social stability, all philosophers of this period were prepared to practice the traditional rites, and even endorse sacrifice to the divine emperor."³⁵¹ That society valued sacrifices greatly is proven by the fact that Christians faced persecution if they failed to fulfil the requirements concerning sacrifices. In this regard there is the interesting correspondence by Pliny to the emperor Trajan in which he asks for clarification on how to deal with Christians. The problem was not simply being a Christian. To the Roman mentality, it was Christianity's connection with Judaism's rejection of worship and sacrifice to Roman deities. This was seen as not serving the interests of the state, the *utilitas publica*, and as a result automatically classified Christianity as a *superstitio externa*, a religion foreign to Roman mentality.³⁵² Luke seems to be well aware of this accusation against Christians for in the Areopagus speech, one of the comments that is made about Paul is that he was advocating "foreign gods", thereby promoting superstitions which were considered as politically dangerous.³⁵³

One of the things that Pliny required Christians to do in order to prove their innocence, was to offer a sacrifice of frankincense and wine before the images of the gods and that of the emperor.³⁵⁴ Thus the practice of sacrifice continued to play an important rôle in Graeco-Roman society and neglect of and hostility towards it had serious repercussions for Christians in some cases.

³⁴⁹ Ovid *Metamorphoses* 8.685, trans. F.J. Miller, Loeb Classical Library. As discussed previously, I believe that the Loeb translation is not accurate in translating "mactare" as "kill". It would have been more accurate to translate it as "sacrifice". See: Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, founded on Freund's Latin Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), s.v. "macto".

³⁵⁰ On pagan criticism of traditional forms of worship: cf. P. Decharme, *La critique des traditions religieuses chez les Grecs* (Paris: n.p., n.d.).

³⁵¹ F.M. Young, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ*, (London: Westminster Press, 1975), 39.

³⁵² S. Benko, *Pagan Criticism of Christianity During the First Two Centuries A.D.* Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II.23.2, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), 1076.

³⁵³ Acts 17:18: "ξένων δαιμονίων".

³⁵⁴ S. Benko, *Pagan Criticism of Christianity During the First Two Centuries A.D.* Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II.23.2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), 1073.

However, there was also a process of moving away from the original religious practice of sacrifice. The philosophical schools were mainly responsible for this in their criticism of it. "The philosophical criticism of sacrifice... continues in Hellenism alongside an unreflecting sacrificial practice at the official level"³⁵⁵ (e.g., Ps-Plat.Alc.,11,149e).³⁵⁶ One sees the contemporary Epicurean ethic of seeking virtue as the real source of tranquility, *αταραξια*. "For it is not the continued drinkings and revels... that make life pleasant, but sober contemplations..." (Diog. Laert., 10,129 and 131-132).³⁵⁷ In a similar vein the Stoic philosopher Seneca (first century A.D.) argued that the responsibility lay with each person to take the path of virtue. "Satis natura dedit roboris si illo utamur."³⁵⁸ Apollonius, the first century wandering magician and philosopher set himself high and rigid pythagorean rules. He refused to eat meat of a bull and especially denounced the sacrifice of animals to the gods.³⁵⁹ Eusebius in his "On the Preparation of the Gospel" refers to some of the points raised above. He then adds an interesting argument to explain his position: God needs nothing from men except that which comes from the highest faculty, the intelligence. There is therefore no need to sacrifice to Him.³⁶⁰

The influence of this criticism can be detected clearly in Hellenistic Judaism which also reflected the tension between a positive and a negative view of sacrifice. On the one hand there was the view that the observance of the sacrifice was an act commanded by God (cf. e.g. Jub. 50:11). However, on the other hand there were voices arguing that the sacrificial demands were fulfilled by the obedience to the Law in other respects: "To keep the commandments, to shun evil, to exercise benevolence, is just as good a proof of fidelity to the Law as sacrifice."³⁶¹ Thus the need for a sacrificial ritual was played down significantly.

Dibelius indicates that Hellenistic Judaism completely adopted this concept of presenting God.³⁶² He names

³⁵⁵ J. Behm, *Θ6ω*, TDNT 1965 ed. 188.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁵⁷ Cit. ap. F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Vol 1 Greece and Rome, Part 2*, (Garden City, New York: Image Book, 1962), 152. Diogenes Laertius was an author concerning the history of Greek philosophy. He lived during the third century A.D.

³⁵⁸ *Ep.*, 116,7. Cit. ap. F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Vol 1 Greece and Rome, Part 2*, (Garden City, New York: Image Book, 1962), 174.

³⁵⁹ Philostratus *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, trans. F. Conybeare, Loeb Classical Library, p. ix.

³⁶⁰ Eusebius *On the Preparation of the Gospel* 4.13; Cit. ap. Philostratus *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* trans. F. Conybeare, Loeb Classical Library, p. xiv. "In no other manner, I believe, can one exhibit a fitting respect for the divine being, beyond any other men make sure of being singled out as an object of his favour and good-will, than by refusing to offer to God whom we termed First, is One and separate from all, as subordinate to whom we must recognise all the rest, any victim at all; to Him we must not kindle fire or make promise unto him of any sensible object whatsoever. For He needs nothing even from beings higher than ourselves. Nor is there any plant or animal which earth sends up or nourishes, to which some pollution is not incident. We should make use in relation to him solely of the higher speech, I mean of that which issues not by the lips; and from the noblest of beings we must ask for blessings by the noblest faculty we possess, and that faculty is intelligence which needs no organ. On these principles then we ought not on any account to sacrifice victims to the mighty and supreme God."

³⁶¹ *Sir.* 34:18-35:13. Cit. op., J. Behm, *Θ6ω*, TDNT 1965 ed. 186.

³⁶² M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 43.

Philo as one who was particularly aware of it.³⁶³ Josephus can be added, because he also criticizes sacrifices when he exposes the way in which the Greek gods have been drawn out from myths and given human characteristics. To that criticism he also adds that the act of sacrificing is something that people have been induced to do. In Josephus' words: "They have even deified Terror and Fear, nay, Frenzy and Deceit... and have induced cities to offer sacrifices to the more respectable members of this pantheon."³⁶⁴

These remarks therefore help to make the point that a phrase like τὰ μάταια which at first appears to be exclusively Old Testament and was related strongly to it by commentators of the Lystra narrative, can in fact represent Graeco-Roman concepts that were acceptable and used by Hellenistic Judaism. These strong philosophical reservations illustrate the existence of a critical view of sacrifice as far as Christians were concerned. This could explain more of the Lystra narrative. Luke took this opportunity in his description of the Lystra events to argue a matter which was actively debated in Graeco-Roman society.³⁶⁵ To him the action of sacrifice in itself was part of the vain things which is out of step with the correct view and understanding of God.

There is, however, further support that Luke was not the first person to make a formal connection between οἱ μάταιοι and sacrifice. Lucian, the first century satirist, and contemporary of Luke's, also combined the two. He wrote a treatise entitled "On Sacrifice"³⁶⁶ in which he pokes fun at the whole concept of sacrifice. It is significant in the light of what was said above that Lucian uses the concept of the *via negationis* as the philosophical basis on which to build his satire. He makes this clear in his opening paragraph when he declares that it is only fools who could think "that the gods are so low and mean as to stand in need of man..."³⁶⁷ The important point about Lucian's discussion on sacrifice is that he describes the people who perform sacrifices as "οἱ μάταιοι".³⁶⁸ In his work there is a clear link between οἱ μάταιοι and θύειν, although οἱ μάταιοι refers to the people who sacrifice as "worthless" and not directly to the activity of sacrificing itself. Nevertheless it is clear that since he considers the people who sacrifice as worthless an association is being made with the whole concept of sacrifice as being worthless.

An exegetical analysis of the Lystra speech will indicate that there is a clear link between sacrifice and the vain things mentioned in Acts. Three remarks confirm this link:

a. The sacrificial setting of the speech

A strong indication that τὰ μάταια refers to sacrifice is to be seen in the way the speech is framed by references to the sacrifice. Before the beginning and immediately after the end of the speech there are direct

³⁶³ Ibid., 43, note 45.

³⁶⁴ Josephus *The Life Against Apion* 2.248, trans. H.St.J. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library, (London: William Heinemann, 1926). "...τοὺς δ' εὐφημοτέροις τούτων καὶ θύειν τὰς πόλεις ἔπεισαν."

³⁶⁵ Simon, in examining the criticism of the temple and its associated worship in Stephen's speech and the Areopagus speech, concludes that behind these speeches lies not only biblical condemnation of idolatry but also philosophical argumentation. He says that this "faithfully echoes that which some heathen thinkers uttered against the traditional religion of the Gentiles, its cult, temples, idols and sacrifices." M. Simon, *St Stephen and the Hellenists in the primitive church*, (London: Longmans and Green, 1958), 86.

³⁶⁶ Lucian's *On Sacrifices* is described by Jackson and Lake as "most striking" when they consider the wreaths that were hung on the bulls. F. Jackson and K. Lake. *The Beginnings of Christianity; The Acts of the Apostles, vol. 4* (London: MacMillan, 1933), 165. Nevertheless they fail to see the connection between τὰ μάταια and θύσειν in both Lucian and Luke.

³⁶⁷ Lucian *On Sacrifices* 1, trans. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library. "...καὶ ἀγεννῆς τὸ θεῖον ὑπειλήφασιν ὥστε εἶναι ἀνθρώπων ἐνδεῆς..."

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 1: "ἃ μὲν γὰρ ἐν ταῖς θύσεσιν οἱ μάταιοι πράττουσι..."

references to sacrifice.

b. The sacrifice as contents of the speech

The Greek of Acts 14:18 implies that the speech was meant to stop the sacrifice.³⁶⁹ The implication of this is that the speech should at least contain indirect references to sacrifice and its undesirability. This reference is given in the use of οἱ μάταιοι.

c. The opening question

The opening question of the speech is also an important indicator of the subject to be treated. The speech is introduced with the question: "What are you doing?" The use of ποιέω points to an act of the Lystrians. Paul could have been represented as exclaiming "What are you saying?" to indicate that it was only the comparison to the Graeco-Roman gods that they were objecting against. This can only mean that the preparations for the sacrifice was an important reason for their disapproval.

In comparing this opening question to the other speeches in Luke's work, one finds that Luke is careful to use the question as a link between the people and the speech which follows. Luke takes care to relate to the reader how the information has come to the one who is asking the question. In the parable of the shrewd manager, Lk.16:2, the master calls the manager in and puts the question to him: "What is this I *hear* about you?"³⁷⁰ The question centres on what the master heard. In Acts 2:15, in reaction to the comments that the apostles were drunk Peter begins his speech by saying: "These man are not drunk as you *suppose*." The use of ἀπολαμβάνω reflects that the speech is an answer to the error of what the people were thinking. In Acts 3:12, Peter asks why they *stare* at him. With this question is the link between the miracle and the speech which follows. The use of ἀτενίζω is a description of what the crowds were doing.

Support for extending the meaning of τὰ μάταια from referring only to idols to a wider view which includes sacrifice is found in Bauernfeind's general analysis of its New Testament usage. He finds that apart from referring to the gods of pagans, it can also refer to the "conduct controlled by them".³⁷¹ This is how Luke uses the word in this instance.

No commentators applied this wider view of τὰ μάταια to the Lystra speech, with the exception of Rackham. He comes close to it when he linked τὰ μάταια with the practice of sacrifice. "The gods of the Lycaonians, their Zeus and Hermes, with all their paraphernalia of temples and sacrifices, were *vanities*, i.e. no-gods, no-things; they had no real existence."³⁷² Rackham however relates this to the Hebrew doctrine about God,³⁷³ but does not see the added dimension of the Graeco-Roman concept in this speech.

8.3.5.3 Christian apologists

The Graeco-Roman nature of the references to sacrifice and vain things in Luke's narrative, is confirmed by the later writings of Justin Martyr. The criticism of sacrifice played an important rôle in the long term defense of Christianity. In chapter 9 of his *First Apology*, Justin writes; "And neither do we honour with many sacrifices and garlands of flowers such deities as men have formed and set in shrines and called gods; since we see that these

³⁶⁹ E. Haenchen, *The Acts of The Apostles*, trans. B. Noble & G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 429, note 1. "Loisy was wrong to suggest that this speech was a waste of breath (556), for it achieves the immediate end of preventing the sacrifice."

³⁷⁰ Lk. 16:2: "τί τοῦτο ἀκούω περὶ σοῦ;"

³⁷¹ O. Bauernfeind, *μάταιος*, TDNT 1967 ed. 522.

³⁷² R.B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Methuen, 1910), 233.

³⁷³ R.B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Methuen, 1910), 233.

are soulless and dead...³⁷⁴ Justin is using the concept of *θεοπρεπές* for he goes on to explain that these things make God to have His name attached to corruptible things, "and require constant service."³⁷⁵

From these last remarks it is clear that Luke, in his description of the sacrifices as vain things, was exposing to the Lystrians in a rather sharply formulated phrase, the error of their actions. This, in a fitting manner, brings to an end the first part of the speech which deals with the exposing of the errors of the Lystrians. It is impressive that this finely structured and nuanced narrative can present this exposure with so much economy of words. It is indicative of the powerful literary skills of Luke. But it even more impressively reveals that his contextualization represents a powerful transformation of the gospel to and in a Graeco-Roman context. Not a single word or phrase remains unaffected by that context.

8.4 The Positive Dimension of the Speech

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the speech can be divided into two recognised parts. The first, highlights the errors of the Lystrians. The second, focuses on the positive exposition of the gospel. In this part the qualities of God are enunciated and affirmed. This too, is achieved by the continued application of the concept of *θεοπρεπές*, but this time in the form of an antithesis to what has preceded it.

Dibelius has shown that the concept of *θεοπρεπές* which is most characteristically expressed through God's freedom from any kind of need,³⁷⁶ is also characterised in the form of an antithesis. He portrays it in the words: "God sends us all that we need, but does not himself need the things He gives us."³⁷⁷ Thus, God's providence is the antithesis of His not being in need of anything.

8.4.1 The antithesis in the Lystra speech

In focusing on the Lystra speech one finds that the concept that God needs nothing, which is introduced with the emphasis on the humanity of the apostles and the call to turn away from worthless things, is continued in the form of an antithesis. Although God needs nothing He provides everything. The worthless things He has no need of (14:15), is contrasted with His providence (14:17):³⁷⁸ "He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their season; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

Commentators' opinions on this verse vary considerably. Firstly, there are those like Jackson and Lake, Packer and Hanson who do not recognise the concept of providence in the Lystra speech. Secondly, the phrase "*ἐμπιπλῶν τροφῆς καὶ εὐφροσύνης τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν*" is open to different interpretations depending on the way it is translated. It can be translated as "our hearts are filled with food and joy". Bruce simply says of it: "Filling your hearts with

³⁷⁴ Justin *Apol.* 1.9. Cit. ap. *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of The Writings of The Fathers down to A.d. 325*, vol. 2 *Justin Martyr and Athenagoras*, ed. A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867), 13.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ M. Dibelius, *Studies in The Acts of The Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 43.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 46. Dibelius gives the example from St. Clement's *Ep. ad Diognetum* 3.4: "ὁ γὰρ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς, καὶ πᾶσιν ἡμῖν χορηγῶν ὧν προσδενημεθα, οὐδενὸς ἂν αὐτὸς προσδλοῖτο τούτων ὧν τοῖς οἰομένοις διδόναι παρέχει αὐτός."

³⁷⁸ Dibelius regards Acts 14:17 as the most original element of the speech in Lystra. M. Dibelius, *Studies in The Acts of The Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 71, note 23.

food' is a curious expression."³⁷⁹ The meaning of this phrase is determined to a large extent by the context in which it is placed. Dibelius recognises possible Graeco-Roman characteristics, but is influenced by Cadbury's comments that the phrase "filled with food and gladness" is a typical example of a Lukan doublet, and is completely in harmony with Old Testament thought.³⁸⁰

On the problem of the translation, Haenchen does not share Dibelius' conclusions. Haenchen points to the remarks of Lagercrantz who states that Luke prefers "co-ordination to subordination". The construction is one which is determined by considerations of sound and rhythm. It avoids a string of mutually dependent genitives.³⁸¹ Lagercrantz's translation interprets the phrase to mean; "the rain makes the καρποὶ fruitful, and gladness over the nourishment thus brought to men fills their hearts."³⁸² This translation does not imply a doublet in Cadbury's terms and is therefore open to the Graeco-Roman concept of providence. Conzelmann and Williams see some Graeco-Roman connection for they both indicate the passage in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* as a commentary on this section.³⁸³

The clearest call to consider the speeches in Acts in terms of Graeco-Roman rhetorical models comes from Grant when he indicates how fundamental the question of providence was in the presentation of God to a Gentile audience. He points out that in rhetorical schools pupils would be trained in the exercise entitled "Whether the gods exercise providential care for the cosmos."³⁸⁴ The notion of providence is so central that "(D)enying its existence means destroying our idea of the gods and of their very existence."³⁸⁵

The theme of providence comes up time and again in Graeco-Roman literature. Seneca, who is a representative of the Stoic school argued for the appreciation of the providence of God by asking the following question: "Whence all the trees yielding their varied fruit, all the healing plants, all the different sorts of foods distributed throughout the whole year, so that even the slothful find sustenance from the chance produce of the earth."³⁸⁶

³⁷⁹ F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Tyndale, 1953), 284.

³⁸⁰ H.J. Cadbury, *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1925): 219ff. Cit. ap. M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 71, note 23.

³⁸¹ O. Lagercrantz, *ZNW* 31 (1932): 86f. Cit. ap. E. Haenchen, *The Acts of The Apostles*, trans. B. Noble & G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 428, note 11.

³⁸² E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. B. Noble and G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 428, note 11.

³⁸³ H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 111; C.S.C. Williams, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), 172; Xenophon *Memorabilia* 4.3.5-6, trans. E.C. Marchant, Loeb Classical Library: "Now, seeing that we need food, think how they make the earth to yield it, and provide to that end appropriate seasons which furnish in abundance the diverse things that minister not only to our wants but to our enjoyment."

³⁸⁴ R.M. Grant, *Gods and The One God*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 49.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Seneca *On Benefits* 4.5.2. Loeb Classical Library, (London: Heinemann): "Tot arbustra non uno modo frugifera, tot herbae salutare, tot varietates ciborum per totum annum digestae, ut inerti quoque fortuita terrae alimenta praebent?"

The motif of providence was so dominant, that it was also felt in Hellenistic Judaism. Josephus, in his work, *Against Apion*, argues for the greatness of Moses who revealed the sovereignty and authority of God, by saying about God: "To Him he persuaded all to look, as the author of all blessings, both those which are common to all mankind..."³⁸⁷

This contextual evidence contributes to the probability of Lagercrantz's translation of the phrase as being the better one. In this translation the aspect of providence comes out more clearly. This is further supported by the fact that Luke used the legend in which providence played an important rôle: It was only when the elderly couple noticed that their mixing bowl was being continually filled that they suspected divine activity. Thus in the legend, providence is the key to unveiling the true identity of the two visitors. In this way the Graeco-Roman themes which have been identified in the descriptive narrative which precedes the speech, continues to be relevant in the speech.

8.4.2 Examples of the antithesis

Having shown that the theme of providence is an important one in Graeco-Roman philosophy and that it is present in the Lystra speech, I now wish to show that providence is presented as an antithesis to God being in need of nothing. This is the continued application of the Graeco-Roman concept of *θεοπρεπές*.

Examples of this antithesis are numerous,³⁸⁸ but what is of particular interest is the number of examples of the antithesis being between sacrifice and the providence of God. This is especially important in the light of my previous argument that the words *τῶν ματαίων* refer to sacrifice. Seneca provides a good example of this particular antithesis when he speaks of the gods who need no sacrifices but give men benefits through providence. "Yet in all their acts, what inducement have the gods other than the very principle of action? Unless perchance you suppose that they obtain a reward for their deeds from the smoke of burnt offerings and the odour of incense! (W)ith what wealth of crops they fill the land, ...with what mighty rains, suddenly hurled down, they soften the soil, renew dried sources of springs, and, flooding them with secret nourishment, give them new life."³⁸⁹ The antithesis is also found in Hellenistic Judaism where Josephus uses it to describe the greatness of God. This parallel is pointed out by Downing. Although he does not recognise this as an example of *θεοπρεπές*, he nevertheless appreciates the similar concept.³⁹⁰ "We behold His works: the light, the heaven, the earth, the sun, the waters, the reproductive creatures, the sprouting crops. These God created, not with hands, not with toil, not with assistance of whom He had no need;"³⁹¹ The antithesis does not involve the criticism of sacrifice.

The antithesis is more clearly seen and a contrast created between the sacrifice and God's providence in the works of Christian Apologists. Conzelmann gives two references to Justin Martyr's work³⁹² but seems to be unaware of the antithesis between sacrifice and providence in Justin's work. He refers to it simply to indicate that these passages deal with providence in a similar way to the Lystra speech. "He has no need of streams of

³⁸⁷ Josephus *The Life Against Apion* 2.166, trans. H.St.J. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library, (London: William Heinemann, 1926): "καὶ πείσας εἰς ἐκείνον ἀπαντας ἀφορᾶν ὡς αἰτίου μὲν ἀπάντων ὄντα τῶν ἀγαθῶν, ἃ κοινῇ τε πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ὑπάρχει..."

³⁸⁸ M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 42, note 44: *Quod deterius pot. insid. soleat* 55; *Ibid.*, 43, note 47: Apuleius, *De Platone* 1.5; Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 6.39.3 and *Ep. ad Diognetum* 3.4.

³⁸⁹ Seneca *On Benefits* 25.1.2, trans. R.M. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann).

³⁹⁰ F.G. Downing, Common Ground with Paganism. *New Testament Studies* 28 551. "...φῶς, οὐρανόν, γῆν, ἥλιον, ὕδατα, ζῶων γενέσεις, καρπῶν ἀναδόσεις. ταῦτα θεὸς ἐποίησεν οὐ χερσίν, οὐ πόνοις, οὐ τινῶν συνεργασομένων ἐπιδηθεῖς..."

³⁹¹ Josephus *The Life Against Apion* 2.192, trans. H.St.J. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1926). "Ἔργα βλέπομεν αὐτοῦ φῶς, οὐρανόν, γῆν, ἥλιον, ὕδατα, ζῶων γενέσεις, καρπῶν ἀναδόσεις. ταῦτα θεὸς ἐποίησεν οὐ χερσίν, οὐ πόνοις, οὐ τινῶν συνεργασομένων ἐπιδηθεῖς..."

³⁹² H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 111.

blood and libations and incense; whom we praise... for all the things wherewith we are supplied, as we have been taught that the only honour that is worthy of Him is not to consume by fire what He has brought into being for our sustenance," but in gratitude to offer Him thanks for "our creation, and for all the means of health, and for the various qualities of the different kinds of things, and for the changes of the seasons."³⁹³ Again in his *Second Apology*, when Justin explains that wrong forms of religion were introduced by angels who had transgressed, the antithesis is between sacrifice and providence. "God, He had made the whole world, and subjected things earthly to man, and arranged the heavenly elements for the increase of fruits and rotation of seasons..." it was the angels, not God, who taught people "...to offer sacrifices and incense, and libations, of which things they stood in need after they were enslaved by lustful passions;"³⁹⁴

A clear use of the concept of *θεοπρεπεία* with the antithesis described above is by Athenagoras, the philosopher turned apologist. In his defense of Christianity he explains why Christians are opposed to the offering of sacrifices. "And first, as to our not sacrificing: the Framer and Father of this universe does not need blood, nor the odour of burnt-offerings, nor the fragrance of flowers and incense, forasmuch as He is Himself perfect fragrance, needing nothing either within or without; but the noblest sacrifice to Him is for us to know who stretched out and vaulted the heavens, and fixed the earth in its place like a centre, and gathered the water into seas and divided the light from the darkness, who adorned the sky with stars and made the earth to bring forth seed of every kind, who made animals and fashioned man."³⁹⁵

These examples show that Christians not only used the antithesis made possible by the application of *θεοπρεπεία*, but also applied it by contrasting sacrifice and providence. The example of this particular contrast which is found in the Lystra speech shows that Luke is applying this Graeco-Roman philosophical concept in his contextualization of the gospel. This gives the Lystra speech a Graeco-Roman foundation and nature which, with the occasional exception, appears to have gone unrecognised among scholars thus far.

³⁹³ Justin Martyr *The First Apology of Justin 13*, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of The Writings of The Fathers down to A.d. 325*, vol. 2 *Justin Martyr and Athenagoras*, ed. A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867).

³⁹⁴ Justin Martyr *The Second Apology of Justin 5*, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of The Writings of The Fathers down to A.d. 325*, vol. 2 *Justin Martyr and Athenagoras*, ed. A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867).

³⁹⁵ Athenagoras *A Plea for the Christians 13*, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of The Writings of The Fathers down to A.d. 325*, vol. 2 *Justin Martyr and Athenagoras*, ed. A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867).

8.5 Innate Awareness of God

In the previous section I have argued that the philosophical concept of *θεοπροπέε* was used by Luke as the basis for the presentation of God. In section 7.3.4.4 it was indicated that the legend raised the issue that the faith of the Lystrians was based on acquired notions of God. This meant that their religion was based on myths, legends and customs. It was then mentioned that the related concept of innate notions would be discussed later. In this chapter the innate awareness of God in the Lystra speech will be discussed as a concept which is found in Graeco-Roman philosophy and which is more fundamental than the acquired notions of God. This will be done by first investigating the existing interpretations of Acts 14:17a, and then examples from Greek authors, Hellenistic Judaism and Christian Apologists, will be given showing that this was a widespread and well used form of argumentation. This will also show that Paul directs the attention of the Lystrians to the more fundamental innate awareness of God rather than base their belief on secondary, acquired notions.

8.5.1 Existing research

The reference to the way in which people become aware of God is critical to the understanding of this concept of innate awareness. Acts 14:17a implies that it is not Paul who is revealing God to the Gentiles, but that his rôle is simply to point out how God has revealed Himself. The Greek is quite clear on this point when it states that "God has not left himself without witness", the key word being "αὐτὸν".³⁹⁶ A number of commentators, amongst whom are Haenchen and Conzelmann, do not even mention the aspect of God's self manifestation.³⁹⁷ Others mention it in passing without elaborating on it. Arrington, for example, states that the Gentiles had experienced the goodness of God but that this revelation does not lead to salvation.³⁹⁸ Williams implies that there is a Graeco-Roman concept present as he refers to Socrates and Xenophon as showing similar forms of argument, but he does not consider how God's providence is to be discerned.³⁹⁹ Rackham recognises the concept of revelation from nature and calls it an "argument from design".⁴⁰⁰ R.R. Williams and Packer are

³⁹⁶ Acts 14:17a; "καίτοι οὐκ ἀμάρτυρον αὐτὸν ἀφήκεν..."

³⁹⁷ H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 111: He dwells on the concept of providence but not on the self-revelation of God; E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. B. Noble and G. Shinn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 428: Haenchen concentrates on the classical origin of *καίτοι*. G. Krodel, ed. *Acts, Proclamation Commentaries* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 55: notes only that this is the first sermon to Gentiles and that it is a preview of the Areopagus speech. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Acts in The RSV*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 149 notes that this is a passage for the biblical justification of Harvest Thanksgiving, but he does not discuss the process of realization that all comes from God.

³⁹⁸ F.L. Arrington, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1988), 145.

³⁹⁹ C.S.C. Williams, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), 172.

⁴⁰⁰ R.B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Methuen, 1910), 234.

among the few who emphasise the revelatory aspect of providence as being available to all men.⁴⁰¹

What is common to virtually all commentators is that they point out the similar concept that Paul uses in Romans 1:18-23. In the Romans passage Paul argues that since the time of creation, God's invisible qualities have been clearly seen, and understood from what has been created. It is interesting that commentators of the Lystra speech who have referred the reader to the Romans 1 passage, often note the Graeco-Roman characteristics of Paul's argument in Romans 1:18-21, yet overlook the Graeco-Roman characteristics of the argument in the Lystra speech. Barrett for example, states concerning the Romans passage: "His line of argument so far can be paralleled without difficulty; it appears in the Stoic literature, and, more significantly perhaps, in that of Hellenistic Judaism."⁴⁰² Barrett gives the reference of Plato's *Republic* 6.507b., where perception of the mind is contrasted to perception of the eye as signifying a parallel to what Paul is referring to. Lagrange enlarges on the same point by stating: "On lisait la même idée dans le livre de la Sagesse... ou chez un Stoïcien péripatéticien du 1er siècle de notre ère dont l'oeuvre a été longtemps attribuée à Aristote...(De Mundo, 6)".⁴⁰³ Lagrange adds further that on this point: "tous les exégètes sont d'accord."⁴⁰⁴ Therefore, if the Romans 1:20 passage is openly accepted as paralleling a philosophical argument, then the argument in Acts 14:17a which is accepted as being similar to it, should also be seen as representing a Graeco-Roman philosophical concept. This is precisely what is taking place. Luke represents Paul as using the philosophical concept of innate awareness of God, which his audience would have recognised. In stating that God has not left Himself without witness, Luke is implying that there is sufficient evidence for all people to draw the correct conclusion on their own, concerning God's existence. What Barrett explains concerning the Romans passage, is also applicable here, that "...the being of God is inwardly perceived."⁴⁰⁵ In order to appreciate this Graeco-Roman aspect of the speech, a number of first century authors who use the same concept will now be referred to.

8.5.2 Dio Chrysostom

Dio, the Cynic philosopher of the first century, gives a fascinating explanation that the nature and conception of the gods, especially the highest one, is innate in all mankind. He does this in *Discourse* 12.39 where he begins a classification of notions about god and he places a person's innate notions of god as primary in importance. "Of man's belief in the deity and his assumption that there is a god we were maintaining that the fountain-head, as we may say, or source, was that idea which is innate in all mankind..."⁴⁰⁶ He goes on in section 40 to speak of the secondary notions which are in a subordinate position because they are acquired notions. By acquired he means that people have learned them through "narrative accounts, myths, and customs..."⁴⁰⁷ Cicero and Plato

⁴⁰¹ R.R. Williams, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: SCM Press LTD., 1953), 108: "...the beneficent aspects of nature were a witness to His power and goodness."; J.W. Packer, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1966), 117: "God's revelation through nature has been available to all men 'ever since the world began'".

⁴⁰² C.K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, reprint 1975 (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1957), 36.

⁴⁰³ M.-J. Lagrange, *Saint Paul, Épitre aux Romains*, (Paris: J. Gabalda et Fils, 1931), 24.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ C.K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, first published 1957, reprint 1975 (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1971), 36.

⁴⁰⁶ Dio Chrysostom *Discourse* 12.39, trans. J. W. Cohoon, H. Lamar Crosby, Loeb Classical Library. "ἐλέγομεν τὴν ἐμφυτον ἀπασιν ἀνθρώποις ἐπίνοιαν".

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid. "...ἡ λόγοις τε καὶ μύθοις καὶ ἔθεισι..." Here one recalls that the legend which Luke has used to typify the reaction of the Lystrians, falls into this category of secondary importance.

express similar thoughts.⁴⁰⁸ As can be seen by the references to this concept, it was prevalent at the time. Since these notions were innate they could only be grasped by the inward process of reasoning. Dio goes a step further and speaks of how this innate awareness of God can only be grasped after a process of reasoning has taken place. The line of thought that is being followed is that a person who applies his powers of reasoning to the observations he makes about creation and providence is able to deduce on his own that God exists. In the following quotes one can see the link between the ability to reason and the innate awareness of God. Dio speaks of this link when he says that: "a conception that is inevitable and innate in every creature endowed with reason,..."⁴⁰⁹; He says further: "...especially since they had received from him intelligence and the capacity for reason, illumined as they were on every side by the divine and magnificent glories of heaven and the stars of sun and, moon, by night and by day ..."⁴¹⁰ Concerning providence: "I say, that even these voluntarily and willingly yield each its own proper fruit; so very clear and evident is the will and power of yonder god."⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁸ Cicero *Laws* 1.8.4; Plato *Phaedrus* 237 d, speaks of two ideas, the inborn desire (ἐμφυτος ἐπιθυμία) and the acquired opinion (ἐπίκτητος δόξα). Cit.ap. Dio Chrysostom *Discourses*, trans. J. W. Cohoon, H. Lamar Crosby, Loeb Classical Library, 42 note 2, 43 note 3. The editors also state that it is believed that both Cicero and Dio got the idea about the innate conception of God from the stoic philosopher Poseidonius, born about B.C. 135 who gave instruction to Cicero. Ibid., 30 note 2.

⁴⁰⁹ Dio Chrysostom *Discourse* 12.27, trans. J. W. Cohoon, H. Lamar Crosby, Loeb Classical Library.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 28.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 35.

8.5.3 Greek philosophers

Further comments from other Greek philosophers about this concept contribute to the awareness that it was well established and needs to be seriously considered. Heraclitus concludes his fourth epistle by stating that his opponents show their ignorance in that they make God's existence depend on the erection of altars, when in fact: "God's works, such as the sun, night and day, the seasons, the fruitful earth, the moon, are his witnesses."⁴¹² As in the Lystra speech, the awareness of God is an inward perception that comes from an intelligent observation of creation and providence. Heraclitus also implies that this awareness of God is superior to the acquired notions which are dependent on customs, such as building altars for sacrifice. This once again reflects the concept of the innate perception of God.

This innate awareness is related to the Stoic's concept of *λόγοι σπερματικοί*, whereby God the *Λόγος* presents himself to the world in "seed" form.⁴¹³ In the Stoic view man is free to decide whether he chooses to recognise God in the world, or not.⁴¹⁴ The fact that a decision has to be made implies a reasoning process. Seneca, another representative of Stoic philosophy, is also able to speak of the innate awareness of the divine. "(S)ee how great is the audacity of our minds, how they alone either know, or seek, the gods, and, by directing their thoughts on high, commune with powers divine."⁴¹⁵ "Or if a cave, made by the deep crumbling of rocks, holds up a mountain on its arch, a place not built with hands but hallowed out into such spaciousness by natural causes, your soul will be deeply moved by a certain intimation of the existence of God."⁴¹⁶

Thus in the Lystra speech there is the similar appeal to creation and providence as being the evidence on which an innate awareness of God can be supported. Here, the phrase that God has not left Himself without testimony, is in line with the innate notion of God which is arrived at by a process of reflection. Paul's rôle is one of facilitating this process by his drawing attention to it. This concept of the testimony of God in the world is not only found in the Lystra speech but is also echoed in Acts 17:27 "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him..."

In this respect another facet should be taken into consideration. The question of "ignorance" which is raised in both the Lystra and Areopagus speech is the consequence of a faulty reasoning process. It is raised in Acts 14 and 17 and also in the fourth epistle of Heraclitus. Ignorance of God does not imply that He does not exist. Rather it is the fault of people who have not reasoned clearly. The Greeks are portrayed by Luke as being in ignorance about the true God. This ignorance comes out clearly in the speech at Athens where it is referred to on three occasions (Ac.17:23 - twice - and Ac.17:30).⁴¹⁷ For the Epicureans, this ignorance was damning. They held the view that "ignorance" prevented people from making the required decision to improve themselves. As

⁴¹² A.J. Malherbe, Pseudo Heraclitus, Epistle 4: The Divination of the Wise Man, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 21 (1978): 62.

⁴¹³ F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Vol 1 Greece and Rome, Part 2*, (Garden City, New York: Image Book 1962), 133.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴¹⁵ Seneca *Epistulae Morales; On Benefits* 6.23.6. trans. R.M. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann). "Vide, animi quantum audeant, quemadmodum soli aut noverint deos aut quaerant et mente in altum elata divina comitentur:"

⁴¹⁶ Seneca *Epistle* 41.3, trans. R.M. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann). "Si quis specus saxi penitus exesis montem suspenderit, non manu factus, sed naturalibus causis in tantam laxitatem excavatus, animum tuum quadam religionis suspitione percutiet."

⁴¹⁷ Acts 17:23, "To an unknown God" and "What you worship as something unknown"; Acts 17:30, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance".

a result nature takes vengeance on them and punishes them.⁴¹⁸

In the discussion of these examples as indicative of the Graeco-Roman understanding of God within which Luke's narrative about Lystra should be understood, it should be remembered that the intention is not to show that Luke took over or affirmed this concept but that he does refer to it in order to convey a message. Luke does not wish to present God as conforming to the philosophies of the day. This is already evident in the simple fact that for Luke, God is proclaimed by his witnesses who are appointed by Jesus and empowered by the Pentecost events. The proclamation of the apostles brings salvation to people and informs them about God. For Luke, God is unique, and he presents Him in contrast to philosophical concepts. But Luke does refer to Graeco-Roman concepts in order to explain the Christian message. Thus where ignorance is expected to be punished by the Epicureans, Luke in contrast reveals the kindness of God in overlooking this ignorance. This is then presented as a sign of God's care. Acts 14:17 deals with the kindness that God has shown, despite their ignorance, and Acts 17:30 states that God "overlooked" such ignorance. In this way Luke presents some of the content of the "good news" that Paul is preaching. This passage also shows that the purpose of Luke is to contrast Christianity with the philosophies of his day. It seems clear that had Luke reported Paul's speech verbatim, he could not have included this thought. In his letter to the Romans, Paul argues rather differently and stresses a point which is much closer to the Epicurean view, when he states that the wrath of God is being revealed against all who have not recognised Him. People are without excuse (Rom.1:18-20).

8.5.4 Hellenistic Judaism

The Graeco-Roman understanding of innate awareness of God is not only evident in Christian texts, but can also be detected in the works of Hellenistic Jews who made use of Graeco-Roman concepts in their writings. There are, for example, interesting parallels between Josephus' work and the two addresses to Gentiles in Acts 14 and 17. On the need to observe creation and providence with the eye of reason, Downing gives the example from Josephus: "By His works and bounties He is plainly seen, indeed more manifest than ought else."⁴¹⁹ The same thought is present in the well known Hellenistic Jewish text of Wisdom 13:5: "ἐξ γὰρ μεγέθους καὶ καλλονῆς κτισμάτων ἀναλόγως ὁ γενεσιουργὸς αὐτῶν θεωρεῖται".⁴²⁰ It is also expressed a few verses earlier in Wisdom 13:1 in a negative form: "Yes, naturally stupid are all men who have not known God and who, from the good things that are seen, have not been able to discover Him-who-is, or, by studying the works, have failed to recognise the Artificer."⁴²¹

It is a moot point to what extent Luke was introduced to this concept by Hellenistic Jewish texts. Someone like O'Neill has argued that Luke's use of the Septuagint is evidence that he used Hellenistic Judaism's apologetic methods. Whatever the sources for Luke's knowledge of this Graeco-Roman concept of God, the point is that Jewish and Christian authors, in different times and places within the Hellenistic world, knew and responded to it. This is confirmation that the need to proclaim God effectively in a Greek environment was not important to

⁴¹⁸ Diog. Epp.28;29. Cf. Heraclitus Epp. 2;4;5;7;9; Hippocrates Ep.17. Cit. ap. B.F. Meyer and E.P. Sanders, *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 3 (London: Fortress Press, 1980), 53.

⁴¹⁹ Josephus *Contra Apionem* 2.190: "ἔργοις μὲν καὶ χάρισιν ἐναργῆς καὶ παντὸς οὐτινοσοῦν φανερώτερος,..." Downing also gives the example from the *Jewish Antiquities* I.19: "first to study the nature of God, and then, having contemplated his works with the eye of reason, ..."

⁴²⁰ Cit. ap. M.-J. Lagrange, *Saint Paul, Épitre aux Romains*, (Paris: J. Gabalda et Fils, 1931), 24.

⁴²¹ It is worth noting that the word "μάταιοι" is used for those who have remained ignorant of God. It refers here primarily to a thought process that has gone wrong. In a previous section I have argued that the word "μάταιος" used in Acts 14:15, should have its meaning broadened and not restricted to idols. This supports that statement.

Luke or Paul only, but was a major concern to other Jewish religious thinkers of their time.⁴²²

8.5.5 Christian Apologists

The question about people being ignorant of God, was important to later Christian apologists and shows that Luke is not unique when he embraces this concept of innate awareness. He is an early Christian exponent of a tradition which was to have a long history. The concept is raised by Justin Martyr when he argues that the false accusations against the Christians arise because people are "ignorant" about the true facts concerning Christianity.⁴²³ This confirms the argument for the innate perception of God being a valuable and sound argument for Christians. Justin Martyr argues that the philosophers and poets who were able to make use of the "seed of reason" are to be admired.⁴²⁴ On the same basis, Justin goes on to single out Socrates for special praise. Referring to Socrates' trial for introducing new divinities, Justin defends him by saying, "he exhorted them to become acquainted with the God who was to them unknown, by means of the investigation of reason..."⁴²⁵ Justin is appealing to the accepted concept that a person has the innate ability to perceive God. Just how important this concept was even in Christian circles, can be seen by the apparently extraordinary claim by Justin that Socrates knew Christ partially by reason.⁴²⁶

Making use of the same concept is Clement of Alexandria. He argues against false worship by claiming: "But there was of old implanted in man a certain fellowship with heaven, which, though darkened through ignorance, yet at times leaps suddenly out of the darkness and shines forth."⁴²⁷ The concept that the world bears testimony to God, which Luke portrays Paul as employing in the Lystra speech, should not be underestimated. It continued to be important in Christian doctrine in later centuries, and was used by Augustine, under the name of "rationes seminales".⁴²⁸

8.5.6 Reasoned thinking

The statement in the Lystra speech that God has not left Himself without witness also implies that a reasoning process has to take place. As shown above, the innate awareness of God is the result of a process of reasoning. Luke clearly appeals in his Lystra narrative to the ability of the Lystrians to come to a proper understanding of God which will prove that their attempts to sacrifice is foolish and a sign of ignorance. By using their reasoning powers they themselves would realize who the living God is. Dibelius has argued that in the Areopagus speech the process of knowing God is the result of reasoned thinking. In his examination of that speech he concludes that the search for God is not in terms of the Old Testament, where it is a matter of the will and of subjection to what God commands. In the Old Testament God is sought in order to serve Him, He is trusted and men do not enquire after Him. God is simply obeyed.

⁴²² J.C. O'Neill, *The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting*, (London: S.P.C.K, 1970), 139-140.

⁴²³ Justin Martyr *First Apology* 6.

⁴²⁴ Justin Martyr *The Second Apology* 8. Cit.ap. *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of The Writings of The Fathers down to A.d. 325*, vol.2 *Justin Martyr and Athenagoras*, eds. A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867).

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁴²⁷ Clement *The Exhortation to the Greeks* 2.21. trans. G.W. Butterworth, Loeb Classical Library (London: Harvard University Press, 1960). "ἦν δὲ τις ἐμφυτος ἀρχαία πρὸς οὐρανὸν ἀνθρώποις κοινωνία, ἀγνοία μὲν ἐσκοτισμένη, ἀφνω δὲ που διεκθρόσκουσα τοῦ σκότους καὶ ἀναλάμπουσα,..."

⁴²⁸ F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Vol 1 Greece and Rome, Part 2*, (Garden City, New York: Image Book, 1962), 133.

On the other hand "the search for God in the Areopagus speech is a matter of thinking."⁴²⁹ God has given manifestations of life so that men who observe them, can conclude that He exists. If one thinks about the world, it is possible to apprehend God. Dibelius makes a careful examination of the word "ζητεῖν" and says; "ζητεῖν is the word used by the Greeks for the seeking out and examining of what is true and so, also, of what is divine:..."⁴³⁰ It is clear that this argument is also valid for the Lystra speech, where it is proclaimed that man can discover for himself who God is if he reflects on God as the One who created heaven, earth, sea and so forth and did not leave Himself without witness.

8.5.6.1 Reasoning and μάταιος

Further support that the concept of the innate awareness of God is at work in the Lystra speech and that God can be grasped as a result of reasoning, is found in the use of the word μάταιος. The idea that μάταιος refers to sacrifice has already been discussed above. Without negating what has been said about μάταιος in that section one needs to consider another aspect of the word.

Bauernfeind has pointed out that the tragic poets used this word quite extensively in a religious context.⁴³¹ The way they use it puts to the reader the necessity for deep reflection on one's life. This word demands and leads to something more than can be found in superficial values. It is in these terms of deep inward reflection that the appeal to the innate awareness of the living God can be grasped. It may well be that in the Lystra speech the call to turn from vanities points to the need to reason about the innate awareness of God.

Reference has been made to this word being used in this special way by the poets. Jackson and Lake, together with Bruce point out that there are some poetic nuances in the Lystra speech through the use of such words as οὐρανόθεν and παρῳχημέναις.⁴³² These words give the Lystra speech a poetic flavour which is in support of a poetic quality in the connotations of μάταιος. Luke's reference to poets also comes out clearly in the Athens speech as another example of his allusion to them, (Acts 17:28). The reference to poets in the Athens speech is quite direct and plays an important rôle in the presentation of God. Thus this poetic connotation of the word μάταιος adds to the Graeco-Roman dimension to the Lystra speech in that deep inward reflection is needed in order to grasp the truth about God. This deep reflection is something that the Lystrians have so far lacked as they have based their beliefs about God on notions they have acquired from others, in the form of legends and customs.

Thus the process of inward reflection and reasoning which is needed to grasp the innate awareness of God is reflected in the Lystra speech and therefore extends Dibelius' Graeco-Roman observations about the Areopagus speech to that in Lystra.

8.5.7 Innate awareness in contrast to legends

In order to obtain an overall appreciation of the impact that results from the application of innate awareness in the Lystra speech as being a source of notions about God, one needs to contrast it to the legend and its function in this regard. It has been shown that in Dio Chrysostom's categorising of the two basic ways in which an awareness of God is created, the primary notion is the innate awareness of God which is achieved as a result of deep reflection. This awareness is supplemented in a subordinate way by acquired notions which are supplied by legends, narrative accounts and customs.⁴³³

⁴²⁹ M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 32.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ O. Bauernfeind, *μάταιος κτλ*, TDNT, vol. 4, 520.

⁴³² F. Jackson, K. Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity: The Acts of The Apostles*, vol. 4 (London: MacMillan, 1933), 166; F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of The Apostles*, (London: Tyndale, 1953), 283-284.

⁴³³ Dio Chrysostom *Discourse* 12.39, 40. This has been discussed in section 8.5.2.

In the narrative about the events in Lystra, it is clear that Luke is critical about the beliefs of the Lystrians. His criticism is directed against their wrong notions of God which they have acquired through believing in secondary, and as a result inferior sources. Sources such as popular legends which blur the distinction between God and people and which emphasise the reliance on customs such as the need to offer sacrifices. In opposition to this Luke represents Paul as redirecting them to a radical reassessment of their beliefs. In the affirmative aspect of the speech, Paul complements this rejection of secondary, wrong notions by focusing in a positive way on the innate awareness of God. In contrast to the secondary notions, the proclamation of the apostles direct the Lystrians to a primary source for notions of God. The impact of these implications would not escape Luke's reader, who was aware of the Graeco-Roman philosophical concepts of the day. The appeal of the apostles is therefore all the more compelling for it is based on well recognised Graeco-Roman philosophical principles.

As a confirmation of this distinction one finds that Heraclitus makes a similar differentiation when he contrasts his own piety which is based on primary notions of God and on the observation and appreciation of providence with the ignorance of his opponents who base themselves on such secondary notions as altars. "They make God's existence dependent on the erection of altars, so that stones are witnesses to him. In fact, God's works, such as the sun, night and day, the seasons, the fruitful earth, the moon, are his witnesses."⁴³⁴ One finds a similar contrast being made in Hellenistic Judaism. Barnard points out that "Trypho, a representative of Greek speaking Judaism, distinguishes between the inferior type of Jerusalem worship, associated with sacrifices and the cultus, and the worship 'in spirit and in truth' which is practised in the synagogues of the Diaspora."⁴³⁵ One also detects this two level assessment of religion in the Christian apologist, Justin Martyr. In his *Dialogue* 19.6, he rejects sacrifice in favour of a deeper relationship with God. He condescendingly says about sacrifice: "God had to accept Jewish sacrifices in order to prevent the Jews from continuing in idolatry." I am not saying that Justin is having Dio's categories in mind, but his thinking is not very different in that he accepts that there is an inferior and a superior basis for religious beliefs. Hence the apostles' appeal to consider the primary revelations of God, over and against their secondary notions, is a legitimate challenge to Gentiles to take the apostles' message seriously. This is in line with Graeco-Roman concepts.

⁴³⁴ A.J. Malherbe, Pseudo Heraclitus, Epistle 4: The Divination of The Wise Man, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 21 (1978): 62.

⁴³⁵ L.W. Barnard, St. Stephen and Early Alexandrian Christianity, *New Testament Studies* 7 (1960): 32-33.

CHAPTER 9

SUMMARY

This thesis has brought to light the extensive Graeco-Roman characteristics of the Lystra speech and in so doing has attempted to bring some clarity in the otherwise widely differing opinions held about it. While many, including Dibelius, have taken this speech as representing a Jewish speech, or at best a speech with a few Graeco-Roman concepts, I have argued that this speech is largely to be understood in terms of Graeco-Roman tradition by investigating how quite different concepts, themes and events in the narrative reveal Graeco-Roman features and presuppose a Graeco-Roman situation.

This has been achieved by first showing that although Lystra was somewhat rural in its location it nevertheless was a Hellenistic city of some importance. As a result of its status as a Roman colony its population was varied and reflected a rich mixture of language and religious beliefs. The absence of an organized Jewish community also enhanced Lystra as a city in which a speech, delivered in Graeco-Roman rhetorical fashion would be more appropriate.

This thesis has then also emphasised that the initial reaction of the Lystrians to the miraculous healing of the cripple is to be understood as representing typical Graeco-Roman notions. Luke, in presenting this reaction and in order to add local colouring, has made use of a legend which originated in that area. The legend not only explains the deification of the two apostles but also introduces the themes of the interchangeability between gods and humans and the theme of sacrifice. This contextualization immediately sets the Graeco-Roman tone to the behaviour and attitudes of the Lystrians. In addition to these themes it has been argued that the focus on the legend which supplies an explanation for the Lystrians' behaviour and the importance they attach to the custom of sacrifice, exposes the Lystrians as being reliant on secondary notions of God, which will be shown by the apostles to be inadequate.

It is with this Graeco-Roman background that the thesis goes on to investigate, how the proclamation by the apostles is reported by Luke. Since the Lystrians are in need of correction, the speech is structured in a typically Graeco-Roman rhetorical form, whereby the errors are first exposed before the truth can be presented. In conjunction with this structure it has also been shown that the symbolic act of tearing ones clothes is better understood when seen as representing a Graeco-Roman notion of disapproval rather than the purely Jewish interpretation of signifying blasphemy.

Furthermore, it has also been argued, that the philosophical concept of *θεοπρεπές*, which Dibelius has shown to be clearly presupposed in the Areopagus speech, is not only present in the Lystra speech but forms the philosophical basis on which the speech is structured. In the first part of the speech the application of *θεοπρεπές* is manifested by the insistence of the apostles that they are human and that God has no need of such worthless things as sacrifices. It has also been argued that the second part of the speech sees the continued application of *θεοπρεπές* through the presentation of God's activity in creation and providence as an antithesis to a god who is need. The Graeco-Roman aspects are brought to a close with the discussion of the idea that an awareness of God does not depend on secondary notions acquired from legends or customs but that the truth could have been grasped by the Lystrians through a process of inward reflection on creation and providence. This is an important notion for it exposes the Lystrians as needing to reorientate their notions of God, away from those which are secondary to those primary notions, compatible with the truth.

Dibelius' conclusion about the Areopagus speech, that it represents Graeco-Roman concepts, has therefore been extended and developed in the speech in Lystra. This analysis not only relates this speech to that in Acts 17 but also shows that it stands in its own right as a Graeco-Roman speech and contains certain facets absent in the Areopagus speech. Concepts such as the primary and secondary notions of God as well as the symbolic act of tearing ones clothes which are present in this speech but absent in the Areopagus speech. The linking of *τῶν ματαίων* with sacrifice is offered as a correction to a widespread misconception that it is a direct reference to idols, and goes as far as to imply that certain translations of the bible (Jerusalem Bible) are inaccurate on this point. In this way the concept of *τῶν ματαίων* also proved to be very Graeco-Roman in its link with sacrifice, rather than with idols as in Jewish literature.

A deeper dimension which came out often in the thesis related to how the Gospel was contextualized on a historical level by Paul and Barnabas as missionaries to the Lystrians as well as to how Luke elaborated on this event in his own literary communication to his Graeco-Roman audience.

In conclusion one should not view Luke's Graeco-Roman contextualization of the gospel as an attempt by him to make everything about the gospel compatible with Graeco-Roman philosophy. There are certain non-negotiables in the gospel which cannot be changed or modified. This is particularly true as far as faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ is concerned. This is the foundation on which all who profess to be Christian must take their stand. This is implied in the speech, for although the leniency of God towards the errors of Gentiles has been emphasised, it is presented as something which was applicable to the past. The understanding is there that since the Gentiles have now heard the gospel they will no longer be excused if they persist in error. In this sense the proclamation by the apostles is a seminal event.

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