Mission and Meaning
Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell

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Mission and Misunderstanding: Paul and Barnabas in Lystra (Acts 14:8-20)

Conrad Gempf

1. Introduction

Modern studies of the speeches in Acts have been relentless in their (often single-minded) pursuit of the literary or theological reasons for their inclusion.[1] Now, the ancient writers *did* use speeches as literary devices to suit the needs and flow of their particular compositions.[2] This, however, was only half of their method; they also had historical plausibility, if not historical accuracy, as part of

1 Most recently, perhaps, see M. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts* (Louisville: W/JKP, 1994), *passim*. On p. 1 he writes that the focus of his work is 'the function of these portions of Acts in the construction and operation of the total narrative', which he elaborates in a later footnote (16-17, n. 53) to mean 'the present study does not address, for example, questions of source, methods of composition, and the issue of historicity'. In this decision about focus Soards stands in a long tradition, including perhaps most prominently, H.J. Cadbury, 'The Speeches in Acts', in F.J. Foakes-Jackson and K. Lake (eds.), *The Beginnings of Christianity Vol. V* (London: Macmillan, 1933), 402-27; and M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: SCM, 1956), esp. the essays on Athens (78-83) and on 'The Speeches in Acts and Ancient Historiography' (138-85).

2 So e.g. Diodorus, who wrote: '...history needs to be adorned with variety... whenever the situation requires either a public address... whoever does not boldly enter the contest of words would himself be blameworthy.' (Diodorus Siculus, in *Diodorus of Sicily, Vol. X*, trans. R.M. Geer, LCL [London: Heinemann, 1954], 20.1.2). Further references, both ancient and modern, may be found in C. Gempf, 'Public Speaking and Published Accounts', in B.W. Winter and A.D. Clarke (eds.), *The Book of Acts in its Ancient Literary Setting*, A1CS-1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/ Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), 259-303; and Soards, *Speeches*, 134-43.

their goal for their speeches. A set of words which advanced the flow of the literary piece was nevertheless judged a failure if it did not suit the speaking character or the audience to which the speaker is portrayed as giving the speech.[3] Yet Soards' recent book, which steadfastly refuses to close the door on the question of the historical reliability of the speeches, also refuses to discuss the relationship of the speeches and the speech-scenes to any historical referents. The matter is deemed unsolvable and to a large extent irrelevant.[4]

Quite apart from the exegetical interest in the purpose of the speeches, the stage is set for the modern appropriation of the speeches. The 'mission speeches' of Paul are sometimes seen as Luke's ideal missionary speeches, and it is not uncommon for modern missiologists to take the major speech to Gentiles, the speech at Athens, as an example of how one speaks to a pagan culture.[5] Often this does not mean stripping the speech from its ostensible connection with ancient Athens, but rather emphasising that the apostle Paul's 'engagement' with that alien (to him) culture is an example of how to do mission with cultural sensitivity.[6] It is not

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3 Note that this is not the same as saying that the speeches record what the speaker actually said on the occasion – the criteria had more to do with being 'realistic' and 'in character' than being what 'really happened'. Thus Dionysius on Thucydides' speeches wrote: 'That the historian was not present on that occasion... and did not hear these speeches... may be readily seen... So it remains to be examined whether he has made the dialogue appropriate to the circumstances and befitting the persons who came together at the conference.' Dionysius, 'On Thucydides', 41 in W.K. Pritchett, *Dionysius on Thucydides* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

4 See Soard's methodological aside: Soards, *Speeches*, 16-17, n. 53. Although, to his credit, despite these intentions, Soards does note that the extreme position of, for example, Plümacher, is difficult to maintain. See esp. Soards, *Speeches*, 142.

5 A prime example is A. Fernando, *The Christian's Attitude to World Religions* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1987), in which this story features prominently in at least 8 of the 13 chapters; see esp. 33-35 regarding 'contextualisation'. Cf. D. Zweck, 'The Exordium of the Areopagus Speech', *NTS* 35 (1989), esp. 103 regarding the Lukan Paul's adoption of culturally appropriate methods; and D.J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 233-34. All this is in marked contrast to the mood in the early part of this century, portrayed in R. Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1912), 93, who argued that Luke portrays the meagre results of the Athens speech in such a way as to be a negative commentary on the methods Paul employed in that city.

6 It may be that missiologists need to rethink this premise in light of B. Gärtner's work showing that most of the speech is very Jewish in its consistent and complete attack on paganism. See B. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (Uppsala: Gleerup, 1955). Similarly, and perhaps even more

surprising, perhaps, that there are rather fewer discussions of the other mission speech to pagan Gentiles, Acts 14:8-20, in which the heroes not only manifest a lack of linguistic and cultural preparation *before* their visit, but actually fail to gauge the mood and comprehension of the crowd *during* their ministry![7]

2. The Unreal Gods: Literary Appropriateness and 'Delight'

With the publication of Richard Pervo's monograph, *Profit with Delight*, scholarship has been rediscovering the entertaining and even comedic nature of at least parts of the book of Acts.[8] There are thrills and suspense galore in the exciting shipwreck account that dominates the end of the book, obviously. But it is also hard to suppress chuckles at the expense of the lovers of wisdom in Athens when Paul praises them for admitting their ignorance (17:22-23). Not that the hero himself is left without egg on his face, as on the occasion when his extended lecturing puts even the faithful to sleep (20:9).

The incident in Lystra is also full of the stuff of great comedy: misunderstanding and mistaken identity with ironic overtones. In the ancient world, Jews (and later, Christians) were frequently thought of as atheists: even those who did not actively combat polytheism refused to give honour to 'the gods'. Paul and Barnabas

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problematic, is the present author's findings that Luke's Paul appears to know just enough about Athenian culture and beliefs to use it as a weapon against them, rather than to establish 'common ground'. See C. Gempf, 'Historical and Literary Appropriateness in the Mission Speeches of Paul in Acts' (unpublished PhD thesis, Aberdeen University, 1988) and the relevant portions summarised in C. Gempf, 'Athens, Paul at', in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Leicester: IVP, 1993).

7 The exception is Hesselgrave, who deals with the passage in *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 231-32; and in D.J. Hesselgrave and E. Rommen, *Contextualization* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 8-11. See also the discussion in M. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970), 151-52, where there is little distinction made between the Athens and Lystra speeches, except for the 'backwardness' of the Lystran audience.

8 R. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). Not, of course, that Pervo is the first modern student of the book of Acts to notice this phenomenon or note its pervasiveness. See e.g. E.J. Goodspeed, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), esp. 187; G. Nuttal, *The Moment of Recognition: Luke as Story-Teller* (London: Athlone Press, 1978); or S.P. and M.J. Schierling, 'The Influence of the Ancient Romances on the Acts of the Apostles', *Classical Bulletin* 54 (1978), 81-88.

were certainly to be counted among those who campaigned *against* the gods.[9] Yet here in Lystra, these atheists were taken to be themselves two of the main deities. And the man that God had chosen to carry his message safely to the Gentiles was taken for the messenger god.

The author of Acts seems, if anything, to play *up* the comedic angle: Barnabas and Paul are pictured gesticulating wildly in the face of a determined country priest and his lumbering ox-offering (14:14).

Pervo himself spends little time on this story. Under the heading of daring escapes and conflicts he comments upon the repeated theme throughout chapter 14 – the opponents of Paul seem to chase him from town to town.[10] Later in the book, the humorous nature of this story is addressed, but Pervo sees Luke as characterising the local people as simple-minded, uneducated (and eventually fickle).[11] Oddly, he does not seem to notice the irony in the *nature* of the mistaken identity (atheists for gods). Further, his view of Luke's attitude, summarised by 'how awesome the particular heroes appeared to lesser breeds'[12] prevents him from noticing the funny side of the self-humiliation on the parts of Paul and Barnabas.

Is Pervo's view even more correct than he's realised? Should our old notion of 'Luke: Historian and Theologian' give way to 'Luke: Entertainer and Theologian'?

The first thing to say is probably that Pervo is over-reacting to these elements in the narrative and their implications for genre assignment. In a modern history, such elements would indeed be out of place, but this is not the case in ancient historiography, where entertainment was one of the main goals. The conclusion of Darryl Palmer regarding the historical monograph as described by Cicero and practised by Sallust seems the wisest course to follow. As he notes, it was about *history* in particular that Polybius wrote the reader should derive 'at the same time both profit and delight'.[13]

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9 See the Lukan Paul's attitude in Athens (Acts 17:16) and Paul's own description of the effects of his efforts among the Thessalonians: '...they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned... from idols to serve the living and true God' (1 Thess. 1:9).

10 Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 26.

11 Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 64-65.

12 Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 65. This passage has what one might call a 'twin from Malta', Acts 28:4-8. In that later story, we might be more justified in seeing the characteristics that Pervo describes. My thanks to Kevin Ellis for pointing out the parallel.

13 D. Palmer, 'Acts and the Ancient Historical Monograph', in Winter and Clarke (eds.) *Acts in its Ancient Literary Setting*, esp. 26-29. Quotation taken from p. 29, a reference to Polybius 1.4.11. Pervo himself was quoting Horace's *Ars*

There clearly is a literary aspect to Luke's telling of the Lystra story, and part of his purpose in recounting it would appear to be his awareness of the entertainment value. But, for ancient writers at least, this need not imply anything about the story's faithfulness to actual events.

3. The Real Lystra: Historical Appropriateness and Legends of Gods

In his consideration of the Lystra account, Gerd Lüdemann comes to a very pessimistic conclusion concerning the relation of this chapter to real life events. He thinks that only one section a verse and a half long (14:19-20a) is likely to have good historical tradition behind it.[14] The rest he either calls 'redactional' or writes that '...these verses derive wholly from Luke'.[15] In doing so he is certainly not without precedent,[16] yet there are important counter-indications.

One clue which has long been taken as a signpost of earlier tradition faithfully followed by the author is the twice-repeated use of the word 'apostles' to describe Paul and Barnabas in verses 4 and 14 of this chapter.[17] This is not characteristic of Luke, who, somewhat surprisingly, does not typically use this term for Paul. The fact that at the beginning of the voyage, Paul is ostensibly in a supporting rôle for Barnabas[18] has also been seen as a significant pointer to earlier, if reworked, traditions.[19]

Poetica (343-44), which is *not* about history in particular: 'The one who combines profit with delight, equally pleasing and admonishing the reader, captures all the plaudits.' See also S.P. and M.J. Schierling, 'Influence of the Ancient Romances'.

14 G. Lüdemann, *Early Christianity According to the Traditions in Acts: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 158-66.

15 Lüdemann, *Traditions*, 160. By 'these verses' he here means 11-13.

16 See e.g. the literature cited in E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 429, 434. To some extent, Haenchen himself fits this profile as well, arguing that Luke 'entangled' himself in the entire sweep of chapters 13-14 in order to fit in with the tradition also preserved in 2 Timothy 3:10-11: '...persecutions, sufferings... [which] happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra...' This, Haenchen thinks, 'formed the backbone' for Luke's account (*Acts*, 433).

17 Thus e.g. J. Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1981), 211.

18 Cf. 12:25; 13:2; 13:7 and so on. It has been argued that the high profile Saul/Paul is given in the action is a redactional change, as is 13:13 – 'Paul and his companions'. In 14:14 again Barnabas is first, and this is coupled with the fact that it was Barnabas who was mistaken for the chief deity, Zeus.

19 So again Roloff, *Apostelgeschichte*, 213. Lüdemann, *Traditions*, 161

But more important is the curious misunderstanding of the Lystrans. This surprising turn of events prompts three questions: (1) Why did the crowd regard a simple healing as the work of gods-as-men rather than mere exorcists/wonder workers? (2) Why were the apostles identified with that particular pair of gods? and (3) Why was Barnabas identified with Zeus, when it is Paul who has dominated the action in the story, at least as presented by the author of Acts?

Loisy has made the reasonable point that even in Lycaonia two Jewish exorcists would not have been so easily taken for gods. The miracle was not *so* tremendous that the people should immediately be reminded of their highest gods.[20] Haenchen, among others, followed suit:

> If two Jewish exorcists heal a cripple, they may reasonably be regarded as great magicians, but no more. [It is true that celestial visitations were believed in, but]... this was still not something ordinary, of which the healing of an invalid would immediately put one in mind.[21]

The method of these commentators is to answer this first question with a denial of the likelihood of such an identification. Only after the episode's historical basis is thus dismissed, will they face the other questions. There are, as they may admit, examples to be found of people taken for gods in other ancient writings,[22] but these are beside the real point. The error is that Loisy *et al.* have looked for the reasons for the mistaken identity *only* in the character and actions of the *apostles*, divorcing the account from its alleged particular context. Thus the phrasing: 'If two Jewish exorcists heal a cripple...'.[23] Instead, the question of the possibility of the crowd's mistake must be temporarily set aside until the particulars of *this* situation and of *this* crowd have been explored.

Considered in the abstract, one would expect that if someone were to be thought of as a god because of a healing performed, he

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disagrees.

20 A. Loisy, *Les Actes des Apôtres* (Paris: Emile Nourry Editeur, 1920), 550-552. Luke himself allows a ranking of miracles: he calls the 'healings via handkerchief' in Acts 19:11-12 'extraordinary miracles' (*dunameis te ou tas tuchousas*).

21 Haenchen, *Acts*, 432. See also Roloff, *Apostelgeschichte*, 213ff.

22 See e.g. Lucian, 'Alexander the False Prophet', in *Lucian, Vol. IV*, trans. A.M. Harmon, LCL (London: Heinemann, 1925), 192, 193 (13), and Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, trans. F.C. Conybeare, LCL (London: Heinemann, 1912), 280-81 (VIII.5).

23 Haenchen, *Acts*, 432.

would be identified as the healing god, Asklepios, or in Asia Minor, Apollo. Why are Zeus and Hermes named instead? Already in dealing with this second question, there is data which may influence our understanding of the first, for there is both literary and archaeological evidence that the gods Hermes and Zeus were particularly associated with each other in this geographic region. The literary evidence is in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, in which the story is told of a visit of Zeus and Hermes (using their Latin names Jupiter and Mercury) to this very area in Asia Minor, though Ovid does not name Lystra. The gods came seeking a place to rest, but 'a thousand homes were barred against them'. Finally, an elderly couple treated them with hospitality and respect, even guessing, after feeding their guests, at their divine nature. Zeus and Hermes admitted their deity and announced that they would punish and destroy the whole neighbourhood, except for the ones who showed hospitality, whom they would honour and make priests.[24]

In addition to this, the archaeologist William Calder has found, in the Lystra valley, several inscriptions linking the two gods, including a limestone altar and a dedication of a statue of Hermes placed in a temple of Zeus![25] These inscriptions are comparatively late (c. 3rd century AD), but it does not seem possible to question seriously the tradition of close association of these two gods in local myth and ritual.[26] It must be noted that these are *local* traditions, perhaps originally concerning local gods who came, as was common, to be identified with their closest counter-parts in the Olympian pantheon. Calder writes:

> As throughout inner Anatolia, we are dealing not with an imported cult of the Hellenistic Zeus, but with a worship, under Greco-Roman disguise, of the old Anatolian god... We should therefore expect to find that the association between Zeus and Hermes indicated in Acts belonged rather to the religious system of the natives than to the educated society of the colony. And this is precisely the character of the cult illustrated in our two inscriptions. It is essentially a native cult, under a thin Greek disguise.[27]

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24 Ovid, *Metamorphoses, Vol. I*, trans. F.J. Miller (LCL, London: William Heinemann, 1916), 448-457 (VIII.624-724).

25 W.M. Calder, 'Zeus and Hermes at Lystra', *The Expositor* 10, VII (1910), 1ff., and W.M. Calder, 'Acts 14:12', *ExpT* 37 (1925-26), 528.

26 Schneider, having dismissed the identity mistake as improbable, feels free to regard this literary and archaeological evidence as possible sources of inspiration for Luke's imagination, rather than as having any real bearing on the natives themselves! G. Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Freiburg: Herder, 1981), 158.

27 Calder, 'Zeus and Hermes at Lystra', 4, 6.

It is more likely that the Lycaonians had syncretised their gods with the closest Greek counterparts than that Luke, for the sake of his readers, has substituted Greek gods into an account originally dealing with local deities. There would have been nothing unusual or surprising about this.[28]

This knowledge of local religion is also of great help in answering the third question: Why is Paul called Hermes and Barnabas Zeus? Some commentators, like Roloff and Bauernfeind, have taken this part of the narrative as evidence that in the original setting of the story, Barnabas, not Paul, was the main actor and centre of the legend. Hermes, according to Roloff, is not equal in rank to the Olympian gods – he has a lower, serving status, caring for the messages of others. Since, Roloff reasons further, Luke did not wish to present Paul as the lesser, he substituted an alternative explanation, albeit a strained one, namely that Paul was the chief speaker.[29] If this theory is correct, the author of Acts has already tampered with the tradition in making Paul the healer in the first segment. Why could he not also have reversed the assignment of gods, had he been troubled by the implication of superiority? Or, Luke could easily have edited the now-passive Barnabas out of the story completely, even identifying Paul with Apollo the healer, which would have made better sense to readers unfamiliar with the Lystran religion.

The story, presented as it is, leads us to believe that Luke does not intend to rank the 'apostles'.[30] Verse 12b is *not* intended to rationalise for the readers why Paul is given the subordinate position, but rather to clarify the thinking of the natives. And, since these two gods were closely associated in Lystra, if Paul was identified as one of this pair, it followed that Barnabas was the other. The 'identity' of Barnabas would be assumed once the 'identity' of Paul as Hermes was established. But the reason given, that Paul was the spokesman, is seen by Haenchen as a misrepresentation of the Olympian Hermes. 'That Zeus quietly sits by and Hermes speaks for him is a conception alien to Hellenistic mythology. The identification of Paul with Hermes (and hence of Barnabas with Zeus) is thus strictly speaking not justified by the reference to this particular trait of Hermes.'[31] Were

28 I.H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Leicester: IVP, 1980), 237.

29 Roloff, *Apostelgeschichte*, 217. See also O. Bauernfeind, *Kommentar und Studien zur Apostelgeschichte*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchung zum Neuen Testament 22 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1980), 181ff.

30 Schneider, *Apostelgeschichte*, 158.

31 Haenchen, *Acts*, 432.

Haenchen's point about the usual understanding of Hermes and his rôle to be granted, it would still be questionable that this rigid understanding should be carried over to a culture whose conception of Hermes was not pure, but syncretised. The archaeologist Calder does not have much trouble with this matter: '...this is an adaptation of the ordinary Greek view of Hermes as messenger and interpreter of Zeus.'[32] Apart from this, however, a passage from the Neo-Platonist Iamblichus makes clear that Luke's description of Hermes is not so far from usual practice. Iamblichus calls him *theos ho tōn logōn hēgemōn*; while *ho hēgoumenos tou logou* is Luke's phrase.[33]

In fact, if Hermes is generally thought of as speaking *in the name of* another god, one is tempted to wonder if there might not have been phrases here and there in Paul's first speech (unreported by Luke) that could have brought to mind either Hermes' rôle as *sent messenger* or the divine judgment of the inhospitable ones from the story we know through Ovid. Haenchen has argued that Luke is deliberately silent about the first message in order to avoid an allegedly insurmountable contradiction: 'a preacher who proclaims a new faith, inveighing against the old gods could not be mistaken by his hearers for one of those very gods!'[34] But once again, an attempt to focus on the situation puts the argument in perspective: Paul was not speaking to native Greek speakers,[35] nor was he speaking about a

32 Calder, 'Zeus and Hermes at Lystra', 5; see also J. Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 132.

33 Iamblichus, 'On the Egyptian Mysteries' (i), cited by F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 3rd edn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 322. Cf. Acts 14:12.

34 Haenchen, *Acts*, 431.

35 *Contra* Haenchen, *Acts*, 425. There would have been three languages spoken in this little community: Latin, as the official language of the Roman administration in the colony; Greek as the *lingua franca* of Asia Minor at this point in time; and of course the native vernacular. Presumably the crowds mentioned would have been able to speak and understand their local language and some Greek at least, since the lame man seems to have comprehended enough of Paul's first message to make a response of some sort. However, the report that (a) the people reverted to their native Lycaonian when excited, and (b) that their ensuing actions are difficult to reconcile with a properly understood message from Paul leads to the obvious conclusion that Luke intends us to doubt their fluency in Greek. That the author skilfully uses this linguistic confusion to create literary interest and tension need not be a mere literary 'trick' (Kunstgriff) as Plümacher maintained, however. E. Plümacher, 'Die Apostelgeschichte als historische Monographie', in J. Kremer, *Actes des Apôtres* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979), 92ff. See further now C.K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Acts I-XIV*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 676, who argues that the persistence of Latin in the local epigraphy

religious system that was easily understood by pagans. *Even at Athens* the hearers appear to have been confused, mistaking Jesus and the Resurrection for two gods![36] In a culture in which syncretism was a way of life, it should only be expected that the Lystrans initially misunderstand Christianity's exclusivity and attempt to incorporate new religious data (and persons) into their obviously flexible system.

Lüdemann and Pervo are two writers who are well aware of the Ovid story about the visiting gods and rightly focus their discussion upon it.[37] They both assume, however, that the author of Acts is familiar with Ovid, rather than seriously contemplating that it is the Lystran people who are familiar with local legend. Thus Pervo writes: 'The problems of this story appear to require the presumption that Luke has reference to a Hellenistic legend, preserved in Ovid... Appreciation of the humour requires familiarity with the myth.'[38] This is not, strictly speaking, true. The story is funny whichever gods the anti-polytheists Paul and Barnabas might have been mistaken for – funnier than Pervo seems to recognise, as we have argued above. The background of the story is only necessary for making the Lystran choice of gods and their extreme and immediate reaction to these apparent gods more readily understandable – for explanation rather than for appreciation.[39] There is no reason why Luke and his readers *need* to have themselves known Ovid's account in order for it to function as an interesting and humorous story.

Similarly, Lüdemann writes: 'in Acts 14, Luke was especially stimulated by literary models, on the basis of which he composed

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suggests that Greek language and culture never truly took hold in the area.

36 K.L. McKay has recently argued that the plural is not necessarily indicated here: K.L. McKay, 'Foreign Gods Identified in Acts 17:18?', *TynB* 45.2 (1994), 411-12. The conclusion of the speech, v. 31, however, seems to support the plural, since it looks as though Paul is clarifying both who Jesus is and what he meant by 'resurrection'. Luke's drama works best if the Athenians have not grasped Paul's meaning until this point.

37 Lüdemann, *Traditions*, 160-62.

38 Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 65.

39 See now the further explanatory detail from Luther Martin, who sheds new light on the rôle of Zeus and Hermes as guarantors of the veracity of the messages of ambassadors. Martin's work provokes further questions about the social dimension of the offer and refusal of hospitality and the possibility that Paul and Barnabas have themselves misunderstood the motive behind the offer. L.H. Martin, 'Gods or Ambassadors of God? Barnabas and Paul in Lystra', *NTS* 41 (1995), 152-56 and the literature there cited.

this stirring story.'[40] This is certainly how a modern historian and a modern writer would come up with 'local colour'. It is far less typical of ancient historians and writers who valued the experiential and harboured a deep mistrust for information gained solely from literary sources.[41]

Breytenbach's recent study points us away from purely literary influences. He finds local colour in the early verses of the episode which for him clearly reflect the local colour of this geographical area, not explicable from a simple reliance on Ovid's writings. He also finds in v. 17 a direct confrontation with local superstition linking Zeus to weather and vegetation.[42]

Further, if it is the composer of the scene who has this particular literary parallel in mind, it is peculiar that he does not insert a theme that we know he likes. The 'but now you are culpable' theme is manifested, for instance, in Acts 17:30-31, but left unsaid in Acts 14 despite the fact that the context allows an opening for it (14:16). Clearly, the theme of judgment fits the story of the hospitality of the elderly couple and the destruction of the nearby city very well. On the whole it seems more likely that it is the Lystran locals who are put in mind of a local legend about a nearby village, than that Luke has manufactured a story because he found himself reminded of and wanting to mimic (in a limited way) a story from the middle of Ovid which neither mentions Lystra specifically nor deals with a healing nor any public gathering at all (the gods went door to door on that occasion) nor puts the apostles' ability to communicate in a good light. This is especially true since the author would then be seen as failing to follow up the only parallel that he might have used to his advantage.[43]

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40 Lüdemann, *Traditions*, 162.

41 The most graphic illustration of this is probably Polybius' criticism of the would-be historian Timaeus: '...to believe, as Timaeus did, that by relying upon the mastery of material alone one can write well the history of subsequent events is absolutely foolish, and is much as if a man who had seen the works of ancient painters fancied himself to be a capable painter...' Polybius, XII.25e.7. See also G. Schepens, 'Some Aspects of Source Theory in Greek Historiography', *Ancient Society* 6 (1975) 257-74, and B. Gentili and G. Cerri, 'Written and Oral Communication in Greek Historiographical Thought', in E.A. Haverstock and J.P. Hershbell (eds.) *Communication Arts in the Ancient World* (New York: Hastings, 1978).

42 C. Breytenbach, 'Zeus und der lebendige Gott: Anmerkungen zu Apostelgeschichte 14.11-17', *NTS* 39 (1993), 396-413. See also G.W. Hansen, 'Galatia', in D.W.J. Gill and C. Gempf (eds.), *The Book of Acts in its Graeco-Roman Setting*, A1CS-2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), 293-94.

43 I have been unable to obtain a copy of the unpublished Princeton PhD

4. The Hoped-For Readers: Literary Appropriateness and 'Profit'

But it is not likely that the author of Acts has included stories merely because they are amusing nor merely because they happened. His purpose was *not* to emphasise that, as in the Ovid story, a failure to make room for the Deity leads to judgment. But what *was* Luke's purpose in including and singling this unusual story out for retelling at length?

One popular answer to this question concerns the literary parallels with another story in Acts itself. It is not difficult to believe that the author of the Acts of the Apostles intends the readers to think highly of two apostles in particular: Peter and Paul. The Paul of Acts 14 is remarkably like the Peter of Acts 3-4. Thus both healed men are lame from birth (*chōlos ek koilias mētros autou*, 3:2 and 14:8). In both cases mention is made of an exchange of looks (3:4; 14:9). The apostle then performs the miracle in each case, which event is followed by the astonishment of the crowds and the attentions of the respective temple officials, although these have contrasting attitudes (hostility in the case of Peter, abject worship in the case of Paul).

In fact, the further we venture into the stories, the less alike they are. All the true likenesses concern the healing and are perhaps due to the stereotypical nature of such accounts.[44] The two stories also form a remarkably poor vehicle if one wants to compare the two apostles favourably. The Gate Called Beautiful episode resulted in 5000 new believers (4:4). Paul was slightly less successful – there is only one convert, as far as we know (14:9; although 'many' were converted in nearby Derbe, 14:21). Similarly, in Peter's case, although the episode resulted in a confrontation with the top people in Judaism, these important people found their purposes thwarted by Peter and John because of the crowds. The opponents of Paul and Barnabas were more ordinary people from nearby towns who succeeded in winning over the multitudes and then ran Luke's heroes out of town!

The outcome of the Lystra episode would also seem to tell against the theory that this scene, along with the other speech scenes, are meant to be a sort of Missionary Primer with Paul and the other

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thesis of Amy Wordelman, 'The Gods Have Come Down: Images of Historical Lycaonia and the Literary Construction of Acts 14' (submitted 1994), which may occasion a fresh look at this line of reasoning. My thanks to Vernon Robbins and David Gowler for mentioning this work to me.

44 See K. Lake and H.J. Cadbury, *Beginnings of Christianity, Vol. IV*, 163; Barrett, *Acts I-XIV*, 664-65; *contra* C.S.C. Williams, *The Acts of the Apostles*, BNTC (London: A&C Black, 1964), 170 and W. Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles*, NCBC (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1973), 163.

apostles presented to a later generation as rôle models demonstrating how to speak the word in a variety of situations. Just as one might be tempted to argue the absurd position that Luke means to show Peter as superior to Paul, so one might be tempted to argue that Acts is a Missionary Primer and Lystra is an example of 'How Not To Do It'. The obvious and oft-cited alternative for evangelising pagans correctly is the Athens episode in chapter 17.

In fact, however, both scenes suffer the same drawbacks when considered as rôle models. The results of the Athens speech are scarcely more encouraging than those in Lystra (17:34). In both cases, the speech recorded by Luke appears to be occasioned by a misunderstanding among the audience – in Lystra, the audience thought the speakers were old gods; in Athens, the audience appears to have thought that the speaker was trying to introduce new gods (17:18). In fact, perhaps the hardest thing to reconcile with the Missionary Primer theory is that there is no case in Acts in which we have an evangelistic 'first contact' sermon to pagan Gentiles. In both Lystra and Athens, as presumably elsewhere, Luke knows that the apostles gave such a message, but he only repeats the follow-up talk intended to clarify misunderstandings.

What 'profit', then, does Luke intend his readers to take away from such stories as the strange episode at Lystra? It is true that any Lukan purpose need not be present in full form in every story. But considered as a test case for the two theories explored above, the Lystra passage fits only superficially and a deeper look causes problems. I have asserted elsewhere that the purpose behind Luke-Acts is to answer a complex set of questions in the minds of those who have heard of Christianity generally and of Paul specifically, but have heard conflicting reports. These questions, I suggest, would include such basic matters as 'What is Christianity? Is it a Jewish sect, and if so why are the Jews apparently against it and so many Gentiles in it?' as well as questions about Paul's specific rôle as an innovator or a bearer of tradition.[45] The Lystra story would fit such a setting well and contribute in a small way toward answering such questions – Christianity integrates into paganism no better and no more easily than it integrates into Judaism.[46]

5. Implications

Even if such features as the fact of the missing initial evangelistic

45 C. Gempf, 'Acts: Introduction and Commentary', in D.A. Carson *et al.* (eds.), *New Bible Commentary* (Leicester: IVP, 1994 4th edn), 1068.

46 Or, one might well say, into 'paganisms' and 'Judaisms'.

message lead us to the conclusion that Luke does not intend this story to be a chapter in a 'How to Evangelise' primer, there *are* some missiological implications, if not lessons, that can be drawn from the account of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra. We can be sure that Luke fully believes in the supernatural abilities of the missionaries. Further, he fully believes in the gift of 'speaking in tongues'. Yet even for Luke, language and culture are evidently still barriers that need to be overcome. Despite the happenings at Pentecost, it is not the case that 'Babel has been undone', neither for the world at large nor for the Christian missionary. The message will not be instantly and universally comprehensible merely because it is God's message.

Second, the business at Lystra makes clear that the communication of the gospel is not merely a matter of preaching the good news to one's own satisfaction. Even addressing the physical needs of the locals added to a presentation of the word was insufficient. The people did not understand; the word was not communicated. The would-be missionary has an important responsibility to follow up and make sure the message is not only spoken, but spoken in such a way that it is also heard.

In a world full of alternative presupposition pools, mission may often be followed by misunderstanding. Addressing that is part of the job of evangelisation.