PAUL’S ATHENS ADDRESS AS A CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONS PARADIGM
CONTAINING BOTH BRIDGE-BUILDING AND CRITIQUE

by

AARON JOHNSTONE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of Luke’s account of Paul in Athens (Acts 17:16-34), as well as a comparative analysis of this text against three other key missions speeches in Acts (Pisidian Antioch; 13:13-41, Lystra; 14:8-20, Miletus; 20:17-38). The two key theses being argued are firstly that Paul uses a combination of bridge-building and critiquing in Athens, and secondly that this approach should be seen as paradigmatic for all cross-cultural mission. The first point is supported with an exegesis of Acts 17:16-34, the second with the comparative analysis.

Historical studies concerning Paul’s missions approach in Athens are placed on a ‘contextualization spectrum’, containing ‘capitulation’ at the one end, and ‘pure critique’ at the other. While most commentators tend towards one side of the spectrum, the majority holds a middle ground called ‘contextualization’. It is found that the views at either end of the spectrum are untenable if a proper interpretative balance is sought between the narrative context and speech content of the Athens account.

Exegesis of both the narrative context (Luke’s record of Paul’s activity in Athens while not speaking, except to introduce himself) and speech content of the Athens account demonstrate a combined missions approach including both bridge-building and critique. Commentators who emphasize one of these aspects over the other tend to emphasize an exegesis of either narrative context or speech content.

A comparative analysis of the Athens account against exegesis of Paul’s missions speeches in Pisidian Antioch, Lystra and Miletus reveals a number of points of continuity and discontinuity, from which patterns regarding Paul’s missions approach are drawn. These points include Paul's knowledge of his audiences worldview, a misunderstanding/ignorance
on the part of Paul’s audiences regarding the Christian worldview, Paul's use of his audience's sources (as both bridge-building and self-critique), Paul’s Christian worldview proclamation, and Paul’s audience’s polarized response to his proclamation.

Further argument to support the paradigmatic nature of Paul’s combined missions approach is provided by comparing these points of continuity with a systematic view of missions, suggesting that Paul’s use of both bridge-building and critique in Athens represents a biblical view of cross-cultural mission in general.
I would like to dedicate this work to my wife Laura and the people of the Presbyterian Church of Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. Laura, whose patience and understanding during the writing of this thesis has been much appreciated.

The people of PCKS have been a tremendous support during my time studying for this degree, and will always be warmly remembered.
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Chapter 1.

Introduction

A. Cross-Cultural Mission, Bridge-building and Critique

Much study has been devoted to exegesis and interpretation of Paul’s speech in Athens. Acts 17:16-34 has been championed by scholars, apologists, missiologists, and evangelists with competing views regarding the relationship of Paul’s address to the Athenian culture. On the one hand, scholars such as Dibelius view Paul’s Athens speech as a capitulation to culture, that Paul conceded to his audience, telling what they wanted to hear.¹ On the other hand, scholars such as Yarnell reject this view, saying instead that Paul sought simply to proclaim the word evangelistically and critique their worldview.² There are however a number of scholars who attempt to chart a middle path between those of Dibelius and Yarnell, such as Flemming and representatives of an emergent missiology who uphold Paul’s expertise in ‘contextualizing’ the gospel,³ and his ‘building bridges’ to accommodate his audience.

Research articulating the integration of Paul’s method of bridge-building and critiquing has tended to fall on one side or the other, whereas less has been said regarding the necessity for the two approaches to occur simultaneously. This thesis will argue that a false dichotomy


exists between the ‘bridge-building’ and ‘critiquing’ views of the passage, and that one necessitates the other. The argument will be made that Paul sought to faithfully proclaim God’s word through his attempt to build apologetic bridges with his audience, and that such an approach should be seen as paradigmatic for cross-cultural missional engagement. The argument will be demonstrated through a cumulative comparative study of Paul’s Athens speech with respect to other significant missions speeches in Acts.4

B. Definitions

Terminology surrounding the interpretation and application of concepts in the passage are used in different ways. The term cross-cultural often has a particular connotation that will not be the emphasis in this study. Instead of the term being used to mean specifically international missions among different ethnicities, here it will be taken to mean Christian interactions with any persons holding a non-Christian worldview. The rationale for defining the term this way is to provide a broader understanding of Christian mission, not limited to national borders but including across the fence or over the office desk interactions as well.

Other terms to define include bridge-building and contextualization. Both are common among missiologists and apologists and refer to methods of communicating gospel content to various audiences. According to Alister Mcgrath, bridge-building involves finding a ‘point of contact,’5 with non-Christians from which to encourage Christ-ward growth.


Contextualization is a term first coined in the 1970s, typically referring to the adaptation of the Christian gospel presentation to various contexts. Both terms have a diverse usage. One purpose of this study is to clarify and qualify the meaning of both terms according to the biblical account of Paul’s Athenian address. One subordinate goal of this thesis, then, is to helpfully re-ground these terms in biblical content so as to assure readers of their legitimacy in vocabulary and usefulness in practice. Skeptics might suggest these terms have little biblical legitimacy, that they represent simply an accommodation to worldly culture. The hope is instead that by more clearly defining these terms, taking from them any unhelpful usage and ‘filling’ them with biblical content, they will have a renewed legitimacy and usefulness, even for such skeptics.

C. Assumptions

The authority of Scripture will be assumed throughout this study. Specifically, the Bible’s self-attesting claim to be the words of God will be upheld, namely that ‘all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness’ (2 Tim 3:16). As such, the Bible will be considered the sole infallible authority on topics considered, with all other commentary to be assessed against it. It is the author’s conviction and the philosophy of this paper that meaning should be found foremost through exposition of Scripture and subsequently applied, rather than vice versa. Hence the methodology of the thesis begins with biblical theology and concludes with systematic

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6 According to evangelical missiologists Hesslegrave and Rommen, the term ‘contextualization’ was born in 1971 out of a disregard for Scripture’s authority and a preference for the contemporary historical scene in doing theology. Many have since adopted and redefined the term to demonstrate the need for contextual sensitivity in theologizing. There is no consensus on how contextualization must be done, and much tension exists between both objective and subjective assertions of proponents on either side. David J. Hesslegrave and Edward R. Rommen, Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2000), 48-51.
theology. The English Standard Version Bible translation will be used unless otherwise stated.

D. Literature Review, Including Historical Study

Secondary literature related to the Areopagus passage in Acts is said to be almost endless;’ Bruce comments, ‘probably no ten verses in the Acts of the Apostles have...such an abundance of commentary’.8 This statement alone demonstrates the perceived historical importance of the text. Adolph Deissmann claimed that Paul’s Areopagus address was ‘the greatest missionary document in the New Testament.’9 One reason for this perception includes the passage’s supposed uniqueness in comparison with the other speeches in Acts, with what Deissman views as an emphasis on natural revelation over Scripture.10 In contrast to Deissman’s view, it has not been unusual for commentators to view Paul’s ministry in Athens as a failure, with Paul’s technique in Athens deemed to be entirely ineffective.11 Some say that Paul inappropriately capitulates to the Athenian culture.12


10 Yarnell, says that "because Paul cites a pagan poet or two, it is assumed by many scholars that Paul is thereby inviting Christians to look for general revelation within the philosophical and religious speculations of other religions and cultures." 201.

11 William Mitchell Ramsay, devoted his life to testing the authenticity of the writer of Acts. Ironically he found Luke to be historically accurate, as he writes, "I set out to look for truth on the borderland where Greece and Asia meet, and found it there [in Acts]. You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian's and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment." St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen, Lectures (New York, G. P. Putnam’s sons, 1896), 241; W.M. Ramsay, The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament, James Sprunt lectures (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), 89; F.F. Bruce, said that that Paul’s ministry in Athens was a failure because he failed to preach the 'word of the cross.' Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000), 246.
With respect to the meaning of the speech, there is a range of scholarly opinion. Critical commentators suggest that Paul’s Athens speech is barely Christian,\textsuperscript{13} or that it is the ‘free (fictitious) creation of the author’.\textsuperscript{14} For some it epitomizes Paul’s faithful proclaiming of the gospel, for others it demonstrates his aptness at contextualizing the gospel message to a specific audience. An attempt will be made to analyze the key historical views from the Patristic era until the current era, to establish a platform for the remainder of the thesis.

To help compare these views, they will be attached to what we will consider a “contextualization spectrum”\textsuperscript{15} with three groups categorized as: capitulation, critique and contextualization. Capitulation and Critique form the two extreme ends of the spectrum with contextualization taking the middle ground. Research henceforth will be focused on those views related to this spectrum. The contextualization spectrum concept is shown below in Table 1.

\textsuperscript{12} E.g. Dibelius, characterizes the concluding words (v.31) as ‘the only Christian sentences in the Areopagus speech,’ Dibelius, 57.


\textsuperscript{15} This term is derived from Hesselgrave and Rommen, where they introduce the concept of contextualization, and show it’s usage across the theological spectrum. \textit{Contextualization, 50-58}; Yarnell, coins the term ‘contextualization continuum’ borrowing from Hesselgrave and Rommen’, 201-2.
<table>
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Table 1 – ‘Contextualization Spectrum’.

1. Athens as Capitulation, Dibelius et al.

There has been a large contingent that considers the contribution of this speech to be a capitulation to the culture of the audience. By capitulation it is meant that Paul concedes his Judeo-Christian worldview in order to accommodate his audience’s pagan worldview. This contingent has been lead by Martin Dibelius, who concludes that the speech was intended by Luke to be a sample of preaching to pagans that Luke considered appropriate. According to him the text was composed by Luke and not by Paul, and it was a Hellenistic (pagan) speech about the knowledge of God.\(^{16}\) It is not difficult to see how Dibelius reaches his conclusions,

\(^{16}\) Dibelius; Conzelmann, Epp, and Matthews; Ernst Haenchen.; Tannehill; W.W. Gasque, *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Eugene OR, Wipf and Stock, 2000); Flavien Olivier Cedric Pardigon, provides a useful summary of this view’s proponents, saying that Dibelius separates the “Hellenistic” body of the speech from its "Christian" conclusion (vv. 30-31), and considers the latter to be merely ‘tacked’ to the former. In Dibelius’ view, the body of the speech is basically purely Hellenistic and philosophical in nature, with no trace whatsoever of biblical or Christian influence. Most of Dibelius’ followers, such as Haenchen and Conzelmann, are more moderate in their judgment and recognize that there is both biblical and Jewish influences on the content of the speech. See Flavien Olivier Cedric Pardigon “Paul Against The Idols: The
for there is in fact much pagan language in Paul’s address, but it will be argued that Paul did not use pagan language in order to capitulate to his audience, but as an effective method of Christian worldview communication.

Dibelius’ general thoughts were borrowed from others, in particular the church fathers. As early as the 2nd century, church fathers emphasized what they viewed as synthesis between orthodox theology and pagan thought, in doing so there was an attempt to show how pagans had their own knowledge of God. 17 Justin Martyr connected Jesus with Socrates saying that the latter was influential in introducing the Athenians to the ‘unknown God’. 18 Clement of Alexandria approved highly of Paul’s use of Aratus’ Phaenomena in his Athenian speech. 19 By the time of the Middle Ages, Aquinas used Paul’s Athenian speech as an example of natural revelation for philosophers. 20

In a similar vein to Dibelius, other scholars suggest that Luke was heavily influenced by Hellenistic philosophy, and that the book of Acts and its figures represent apologetic historiography, defined as ‘the story of a sub-group of people (the apostles) in an extended prose narrative...hellenizing their traditions in an effort to establish the group’s identity within the setting of the larger world’. 21 Are we to believe that the only intention of the

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17 Rowe, “The Grammar of Life” Rowe’s analysis of the church fathers and their synthesisism is very helpful, 32.


20 Thomas Aquinas, "Hence sacred doctrine makes use also of the authority of philosophers in those questions in which they were able to know the truth by natural reason, as Paul quotes in Acts 17:28 a saying of Aratus: “As some also of your own poets said: For we are also His offspring”. " Summa Theologiae, 1.8.2. trans. Kevin Knight, 2nd ed., 1920, available at http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1001.htm.

apostle’s was to form an identity in the world, requiring them to give up components of their religion? Gartner represents those who counter this argument. He says that the background of the speech is, on the contrary, found in Hebrew and not Greek thought, Paul’s content parallels the apologetic preaching of Hellenistic Judaism, but its main features reflect Paul’s thought in his letters.22

Two recent works help to show how the capitulating view has been received since Dibelius. Rowe concludes that capitulation is still prevalent and that modern scholarship has not been able to shake Dibelius’s leanings. He says that this is shown in the vastness of work contrasting the Paul of Athens against the Paul of Romans 1.23 Rowe observes that there has been a long-held tradition of viewing Paul’s address in a fairly narrow sense and writes that ‘When all is said and done, the Areopagus speech still emerges clearly as a kind of locus classicus for ‘natural theology’.’24

Pardigon acknowledges the tension in Paul’s speech between the Hellenistic and Jewish influences which he attributes to the author’s ‘ambivalence’. He says this kind of ambivalence should be expected from an experienced apologist, such as Paul was.25 Pardigon seems to disagree with Rowe by saying that most commentators now reject Luke’s hellenism, he writes ‘of all the major commentaries published in the twenty years prior to his study, Barrett’s is probably the only one considering that Luke was significantly or substantially


23 Rowe, “The Grammar of Life” 33-34.

24 Rowe, “The Grammar of Life” writes, ‘with more or less precision, the vast majority of Acts’ interpreters take the presupposition of Luke’s argument in ch. 17 to be that human beings as such—irrespective of the kind of knowledge marked by the names Israel and the church—know the one true God from the world he made and/or an introspectively generated awareness of his presence and/or philosophical anthropology’, 34.

25 Pardigon, ‘Paul Against The Idols” Pardigon calls this ‘ambivalence’ an intrinsic part of the narrative and speech movement which progresses from confusion to clarity on the part of the oratees. The narratees know the endpoint of the speech from the beginning, 194.
influenced by Hellenistic philosophy in the composition of the speech’. Instead of seeing Rowe and Pardigon in disagreement, we can conclude that a more balanced approach to Luke’s influences is accepted among scholars nowadays. This both/and over either/or understanding of Luke’s influences will be expanded on in the contextualization category.

Pardigon suggests that the majority of recent studies on Paul in Athens acknowledge the Judeo-Christian basis informing the content of his speech. This he says reflects the increasing sensitivity of scholars to the literary nature of Luke's work and a general turning away from the excessively skeptical historical-critical method. Despite the appearance of a more balanced approach to the passage, the question remains regarding those who adopt the capitulation understanding of Paul’s speech; to what extent did Paul inappropriately bend his Judeo-Christian theology to fit the Athenian worldview, and if this is was the case how effective was his mission strategy?

Associated with the view that Paul capitulated, is the contingent that claims his sermon was a failure, minimally effective, or as a minimum a one-off experiment in pagan engagement. Ramsay is a strong proponent of the failed view along with others. The basis of the argument is most often derived from the conclusion of the Athens address, where only a handful of converts were made, and 1 Corinthians 2:2, where Paul writes ‘For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified’. Stott labels this view of Paul’s sermon a “gratuitous theory,” which he believes was fair for Stonehouse to call

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27 Pardigon, “Paul Against The Idols”, 194.

28 Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveller, 241-249.
“untenable.”

Stott counters that there is no evidence that Luke was displeased with Paul’s performance in Athens, otherwise at the very least he could have chosen not to include it. It is also “most precarious to engage in rationalizing from the number of converts to the correctness of the message”.

2. Athens as Pure Critique, Yarnell et al.

The opposite of Dibelius’ capitulation view we might call Athens as Pure Critique. This is a lesser-held view than either of capitulation or contextualization, but aspects of the argument are often contained in both these other views. Those who view Paul’s speech as critique tend to reject the notion that he accommodates his audience culturally, instead emphasizing the counter-cultural implications of Paul’s message.

John Chrysostom, for example, took Paul’s speech to be primarily adversarial rather than an attempt to establish common ground or engage in Christian apologetics. Kistemaker suggests that Paul's Athens address is not a defense of the Christian faith, but rather a challenge to pagan religion and a proclamation of the gospel. He says that Paul nowhere indicates that the gospel occupies common ground with pagan religion and philosophy.

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31 Stonehouse, Paul Before the Areopagus, 34.

32 John Chrysostom, Quoting from the Homily; ‘Immediately therefore he removes this surmise of theirs: and then says, ‘God that made the world and all things therein, He being Lord of heaven and earth’ for, that they may not imagine Him to be one of many, he presently sets them right on this point; adding, dwells not in temples made with hands’ Acts 17:24, ‘neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything’ do you observe how, little by little, he brings in the philosophy? How he ridicules the heathen error?’ ‘To an unknown God?’ Of the Creator, or of the demon? Manifestly of the Creator: because Him they knew not, but the other they knew. Again, that all things are filled (with the presence) of God? Or of Jupiter a wretch of a man, a detestable impostor! But Paul said it not in the same sense as he, God forbid! But with quite a different meaning’. “Homily 16 on the Acts of the Apostles,” in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. Walker, J. Sheppard, and H. Browne (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889).
instead Paul uses these pagan aspects as points of contact with his audience whilst refusing to accommodate and compromise the gospel message.  

There seems to be a similar sentiment in Calvin’s commentary on the passage. Calvin takes a low view of the Athenian’s lifestyle saying they were ‘intoxicated in their own pride...wandering from the truth more shamefully than than the rest’. He contrasts Paul’s worldview against the Athenians, writing ‘Paul’s righteous anger did not lead him to be broken by weariness, or succumb to difficulty, but be driven by a sharper goad to defend the faith’.  

A more recent proponent of this view is Malcolm Yarnell who outright rejects the traditional reading of the Areopagus as cross-cultural missional paradigm. He says instead that the Areopagus sermon is ‘a confrontational, biblical, and evangelistic proclamation of the good news that every man in every culture must hear’. Yarnell borrows from Hesselgrave and Rommen where he argues that not all systems of contextualization are helpful. He does not however indicate what forms of contextualization are helpful, instead focusing on rebuking the so-called ‘emergent’ missiology scholars, notably Flemming and Bosch. Yarnell contrasts Flemming’s ‘convergence’ view, against what he calls his ‘Contextual Interpretation’. Yarnell says that when the passage is approached correctly, the speech can no longer be seen as an attempt to build bridges through pre-evangelistic apologetics; rather, Paul was attempting to proclaim the Word evangelistically with confrontational power. It is

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33 Kistemaker, 31–41.


36 Yarnell, 205.

37 This is what Yarnell considers his 'literary-critical exegesis' of the passage, in direct opposition to a historical-critical interpretation, Yarnell, 206.
clear that in answer to his own paper’s titled question, Yarnell understands Paul’s speech to be directing Christians to ‘pull down strongholds’ (2 Cor 10:4-5) rather than ‘build bridges’. Yarnell’s understanding of the term contextualization is also particularly interesting given he broaches the concept of the ‘contextualization spectrum’; and he seems to use the term contextualization exclusively to refer to the translation of Scripture.  

3. Athens as ‘Contextualization’, Flemming et al.

There are a large number of scholars who instead of seeing Athens as capitulation or pure critique, herald the ability of Paul to ‘contextualize’ his message to the Athenians. As noted previously, one purpose of this study is to determine an appropriate meaning for the term contextualization based upon the text. Also, because of the broad usage of the term it is difficult to tell in each case where Paul is deemed to fit on the ‘contextualization spectrum’. To help clarify this concept we could consider capitulation to represent 100% contextualized,

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38 Particularly in this segment Yarnell uses the term contextualization regularly to refer to the translation of Scripture. Yarnell says "Finally, let us remember that in evangelism, we must build bridges of honest communication through proper translation of Scripture; however, like Paul we must also burn bridges of deception resident within all human cultures. Yes, let us build bridges to God by translating His Word while simultaneously we also destroy demonic deceptions by applying His Word. Or, perhaps to introduce Pauline language into the question: While we are busy building bridges by translating the Word into other languages, should we not also be busy about ‘pulling down strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought captive into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:4b-5)?; Yarnell, 219. [Emphasis mine].

with all other contextualization views falling somewhere else between this and pure critique (0% contextualized).

Pardigon articulates the majority ‘both/and’ assumption regarding the influences of the speech by stating that even though the thought of the speech is without doubt biblical, it is expressed in a language unmistakably borrowed from Hellenistic sources.\(^{40}\) In terms of the morality of Paul to employ this method, Pardigon says that this approach is *necessary* for the ‘intelligible communication of the biblical message...(which) does not imply or require a transformation of the thought itself.’\(^{41}\) Gaventa says that the changing form of a constant content is likely why the speech appears to its modern readers to be ‘foreign’ to the book of Acts or the NT. She says, ‘That impression fades on closer examination, however, when it becomes clear that much in the speech coheres well with the remainder of Luke-Acts’.\(^{42}\) It will be shown that in comparison to the rest of the Acts speeches, the speech shows great similarity in content, along with a noticeably different ‘form’ to other speeches For this reason I argue the speech can not be seen as merely a combination of Hellenistic and Christian thought, but instead a carefully crafted Christian message in a necessarily Hellenistic form.

Both Rowe and Pardigon acknowledge that the majority ‘both/and’ position held by recent scholars articulates a view maintaining both Judeo-Christian content and Hellenistic language in the speech. Rowe formulates this as such;

> NT scholars would now view such Hellenistic/Jewish dichotomies as unnecessary, particularly when dealing with a culturally complex figure such as Luke. Furthermore, attention to the animating narrative moves of Acts as a whole precludes the ability to abstract ‘pagan’ from ‘Jewish’ elements when thinking about the

\(^{40}\) Pardigon, 241.

\(^{41}\) Pardigon, 241.

Areopagus discourse: Acts is plainly concerned with both aspects of Mediterranean life and weaves them inseparably into the fabric of the text. 43

The ‘both/and’ of the speech with respect to mission strategy parallels closely the ‘both/and’ regarding Luke’s influences. A number of commentators on the passage recognize Paul’s ‘double-edged’ communication approach, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. For example, Jipp says that Luke’s purposes are more complex than simply accommodation or critique, but that both are combined in accordance with Luke’s intent for the message. 44 Flemming says something similar when he calls Paul’s ministry in Athens both a ‘model of cultural sensitivity and creativity when presenting biblical truth to non-Christians’, and a ‘refusal to syncretize his message or to compromise its theological integrity’. 45 He adds that Paul engages Athenian culture with the aim of its transformation. Charles writes that like Paul, the church must understand the culture in which it ministers and draw upon that culture's internal resources if it hopes to herald the gospel in credible and convincing ways.

43 Rowe, does argue though that in at least one sense the majority view of Paul’s speech is misconceived. The point he makes is not that Luke capitulated to any cultural norm by recording Paul as he did, but that those who view Luke as endorsing a kind-of pagan natural revelation, i.e. the Greek appreciation for "the unknown God", misses the point of Luke’s passage. Rowe argues that there exists a "cumulative hermeneutical weight" (like because a majority of scholars see things this way puts pressure on others to conform) that has partially obscured others from seeing Luke’s pattern of reasoning in Acts 17. He says that "Given the power and longevity of this way of thinking, it is really no less remarkable that this is not what Acts 17 actually argues. Indeed, whatever the merits of larger theories about a philosophically or experientially based natural theology, they cannot be earned on the basis of a close reading of Acts 17. Paul’s Areopagus speech is not a paean of the Greek intellectual or spiritual achievement. It is instead the presentation of an alternative pattern of life." “The Grammar of Life: The Areopagus Speech and Pagan Tradition.” 33.

44 Joshua W Jipp, claims Luke’s purposes are at least two-fold, ‘to narrate the complete incongruity between the Christian movement and Gentile religion—exemplified by the speech’s critique of Greco-Roman religiosity, anti-idolatry polemic, and its theologically exclusive claims; and (2) to exalt the Christian movement as comprising the best features of Greco-Roman philosophical sensibilities and therefore as a superior philosophy. The speech is, then, simultaneously both radical and conventional, and a dualistic construct of accommodation or resistance is too simplistic to describe the purposes of the speech’. Paul’s Areopagus Speech of Acts 17:16-34 as Both Critique and Propaganda,” Journal of Biblical Literature 131, (2012): 567–588.

45 Flemming, says that Paul used his knowledge of Athenian culture to engage their worldview, drawing upon indigenous language, images, and ideas to communicate the gospel in culturally relevant ways. His means of persuasion are likewise appropriate to the context. With great care and rhetorical skill, Paul establishes rapport with his audience, and then through a series of contact points, he builds conceptual bridges that they can cross, 207.
He adds that this is especially crucial when communication must span significant cultural barriers, as was the case for Paul.\footnote{Charles, 60.}

It is interesting to observe that commentators in this middle party tend to fall on one side or the other, ultimately emphasizing either cultural capitulation or cultural critique, despite their own claims to harmonize the two. Importantly, whether a commentator views the speech as cultural capitulation or cultural critique, seems to align strongly with their respective view of the cultural origin of the speech. Mark Given provides some helpful insight in his 1995 article.\footnote{Mark D. Given, “Not Either/Or but Both/And in Paul's Areopagus Speech,” \textit{Biblical Interpretation} 3, (1995): 356-72.} He argues that both Hellenistic and Jewish aspects are present in the Athens speech, and that they are intentional on Luke's part. He thinks that the reason modern scholars tend to retain one over against the other is due to the fact that they read the text through the lens of either the original audience of the speech or that of the original readers of the book. If one chooses the former (as historical-critical scholars do), Greek philosophy and culture becomes the one hermeneutical key, while if one chooses the latter (as literary-critical scholars do) the OT becomes the sole focus of attention. Given's point is that both aspects are intended by Luke, who uses a good number of double-entendres (not only in Athens, but in several places in the book) in a rather ironic and entertaining style of writing.

E. Luke’s Theology

1. Introductory Matters

Luke includes 26 sermons or formal addresses in Acts, approximately 19 long and 7 short, such that speeches constitute at least half of the book.\footnote{Kistemaker, 31.} Many of these speeches are a
defense to charges made against the apostles. Luke’s account of the Apostles in the book of Acts has a decidedly evangelistic tone.49 The spread of the Word of God occurs in the context of immense opposition, it is clearly empowered by the Holy Spirit, it is for both Jew and Gentile, and it can be can be seen as both an example to believers, and a continuation of OT Israel. Luke’s speeches can be divided into a number of types of apologetic.50 When Paul takes the gospel to Gentiles in Acts it is often due to jealousy on the part of the Jews and their hardness of heart (13:36; 17:5,13; 18:6; 22:22; 28:28) according to the prophecy ‘I have made you a light for the gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth’ (vv.13:47b-48; Cf. Isa 49:6). The content of the apostle’s sermons to the Jews was largely based on the OT, seeking to prove from known texts that the Jesus whom they knew was crucified was also the prophesied ‘Lord and Messiah’ (2:36).

All scholars acknowledge pattern differences between Paul’s speeches in Acts, but they are explained in different ways. Bruce uses the differences as proof that Luke’s speeches are not his own creation. By suggesting that “there is much in the content that is not essentially Lucan”, he suggests Luke acts as a reporter of Paul’s actions and words rather than the creator of them.51 Not everyone agrees with Bruce however. Vielhauer’s view has been particularly influential, where he claims inconsistency between the Paul of Athens and the writer of Paul’s epistles. He claims that Luke has a place for natural theology evidenced in

49 Most scholars see 1:8 as programmatic for the book, with Jesus’ words to the apostles ‘You will be my witness, in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth’, growing to fruition as the narrative progresses.


51 Bruce, adds that Stephen’s defense in chapter 7 can be seen as a prototype of a Christian apologetic against the Jews rejection of the gospel, showing that the Jew’s rejection of the divine messenger is consistent with their rejection of the message brought by the earlier prophets; The Book of Acts, 62.
the Athens address, whereas Paul according to Romans 1, has none.\textsuperscript{52} Fitzmyer calls Vielhauer’s view ‘clearly exaggerated’.\textsuperscript{53} Bock agrees, saying that the differences can be attributed to communication technique, in fact saying the differences are explained by \textit{contextualization}.\textsuperscript{54} Ellis says about Vielhauer’s essay, ‘When he has difficulty in recognizing Luke’s Paul, (I) find a similar difficulty recognizing Vielhauer’s Luke!’

Pardigon articulates helpfully his position on the relationship between Paul and Luke in Acts where he says that ‘Luke does for the readers what Paul does for the listeners’, that is meaningfully translate the story of Paul’s stay in Athens for his own audience. He concludes that, ‘Luke as a historian is much more aware of the historical and cultural distance that needs to be bridged than many so-called ‘modern’ and ‘scientific’ historiographers of the past hundred and fifty years’.\textsuperscript{55}

We conclude for the purposes of this study that Luke is the author of Acts, and that he faithfully records Paul’s messages with a conscious appreciation for his reading audience. I adopt also the conclusions of Schubert and Soards; that the Acts speeches are interconnected


\textsuperscript{54} Darrell L. Bock, says that the difference between Paul's speeches and the Paul of Romans is between ‘someone reaching out to share the gospel ... making an effort to find common ground ... and a more forthright critique of pagan culture’; \textit{Acts, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament} (Grand Rapids, Baker Publishing Group, 2007), 16-17. For a comprehensive survey see also W.Ward Gasque, \textit{A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles}, in which Gasque points out that Vielhauer relies heavily on the assumptions made by Dibelius, where Vielhauer states that it's 'generally acknowledged (the speeches) are the composition of the authors', 284.

\textsuperscript{55} Pardigon, 194. Kistemaker, says that Paul's Areopagus speech and writings reveal similarity. In his letter to the Romans, Paul mentions that God has made himself known in creation, that God judges men's secrets through Jesus Christ, and that God has shown his forbearance by leaving sins unpunished (Rom 1:19-21; 2:16; 3:21-26). Comparing these comments with his Areopagus address, he asserts that Paul himself addressed the council members of the Areopagus; Kistemaker, 38.
and altogether present a consistent, complete message,\textsuperscript{56} and that the speeches serve to structure and move forward the narrative of the entire book.\textsuperscript{57}

2. Paul’s Speeches in Acts

It is generally agreed among scholars that Luke records three of Paul’s extended discourses in Acts: the synagogue sermon in Pisidian Antioch (13:16-41), his Areopagus speech in Athens (17:16-31), and his farewell speech to the Ephesian Elders (20:18-35).\textsuperscript{58} Gendy instead groups 13:13-41; 14:8-18 and 17:16-31 together in the category of ‘mission speeches’, basing his comparison upon these.\textsuperscript{59} Paul’s speech to the Athenians is one of only two accounts in Acts where Paul addresses a Gentile audience, the other is in chapter 14, located in Lystra. We see in both these accounts quite a different approach taken by Paul as compared to his customary addresses to the Jews.\textsuperscript{60} They contain next to no direct OT quotes, but do however employ OT concepts throughout.

As compared to evangelism with the Jews where the synagogue was central, in Lystra and Derbe Paul and Barnabus ‘fled to...the cities...where they continued to preach the gospel’ (14:6-7). In Athens Paul not only reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue but with God-


\textsuperscript{57} Soards, 204-8.

\textsuperscript{58} E.g. Kistemaker, says that the Pisidian Antioch sermon is a type that Paul delivered throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece (cf. 14:15-17; 17:22-31). Paul's sermon basically consists of three parts: (1) a survey of Israel's history; (2) the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and (3) the application of the gospel message. Many aspects of this sermon resemble features in the sermons delivered by Peter in Jerusalem (2:14-36; 3:12-26) and the one Stephen preached before the Sanhedrin (7:2-53); Kistemaker, 37.

\textsuperscript{59} Gendy, 247-8.

\textsuperscript{60} A common refrain in Acts is the apostles speaking or reasoning to Jews. (2:46; 3:1; 5:21; 5:42; 6:12; 11:19; 13:5; 13:14; 14:1; 17:2; 17:10; 17:17; 18:4; 18:28; 22:30; 28:17. These events occur in the temple, synagogue, before the Sanhedrin, or under guard. They ‘(spread) the word only among Jews’ (11:19) this activity stated as occurring “every day” (2:46) “day after day” (5:42), “as usual” (14:1) or “every Sabbath” (18:4), depending on the situation.
fearing Greeks in the marketplace (*agora*) (17:17). This is the only time mission in the marketplace occurs in Acts. Legrand says that Luke’s distribution is surely not by chance.61 Charles notes that the Athens speech is received with both hostility and faith; and so the reader can assume 17:16–34 to be exemplary for first-century apostolic preaching.62

3. Speech Selection and Method

A comparative study of a number of Paul’s substantial speeches in Acts will be made against Paul’s Athenian speech in 17:16-31. Speeches made to the governing authorities (before Felix 24:10b-21, before Festus 25:8b, 10b-11, and before King Agrippa 26:2-23, 25 to 27, 29), and short speeches (less than five verses long, i.e. before the Corinthian Jews 18:6b-d) will be excluded due to space constraint, and because they are not considered Paul’s major missions speeches. The remaining speeches include Pisidian Antioch (13:16-41), Lystra (14:8-18), and the farewell speech to the Ephesian Elders (20:18-35). Attention will be given to each of these speeches for the primary purpose of comparing with the Athenian account. The aim of this comparison is to show Paul’s method of conversing in Athens as necessary and paradigmatic for cross-cultural mission. It is hoped this will be achieved by demonstrating continuity on points of mission strategy between Paul’s missions speeches, against a discontinuity on points of mission strategy between these same speeches and Paul’s Christian audience in Miletus.


62 Charles, 49.
Chapter 2

Paul at Athens - Acts 17:16-34

Exegesis of the account of Paul in Athens will be conducted with the aim of defending the first clause of the thesis, namely that Paul used an integrated missions approach containing both bridge-building and critique, and in doing so he faithfully proclaimed God’s word to the Athenians. The second part of the thesis, that this approach of Paul’s should be seen as paradigmatic for all cross-cultural mission, will be established in the next chapter.

Acts 17:16-23, 32-34 (ESV)

16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. 18 Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. 19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” 21 Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

22 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.” ... 

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” 33 So Paul went out from their midst. 34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them
A. Introductory Matters

Though this has often been overlooked due to lingering effects of form criticism, the narrative context of the Athens speech, as with all of them in Acts, is important for interpreting the speech itself. Hence exegesis in this chapter will look to balance the content of the narrative context (introduction, conclusion and speech introduction), with the speech content itself.

Commentators suggest that there is a remarkable amount of attention given by Luke to both the content of Paul’s speech at Athens and the social context in which it is delivered, as compared with other Acts speeches.1 This point is further emphasized given that Athens did not appear to be a part of Paul’s original travel plans, but the account is presented by Luke as a climactic point in Paul’s preaching career.2 Luke’s account of Paul in Athens plays a prominent role in directing the narrative of the whole of Acts, and the spread of the gospel to all nations.

Pardigon rebuffs the attempts of form-critical scholars who understand the speeches to be disconnected from their narrative context, instead suggesting that there is significant ‘interplay and interdependence’ between the speeches and their narratives.3 It has been

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1 J Daryl Charles, comments that there is obvious missionary interest in the Areopagus address and that readers must come to terms both with why there is an exceptional amount of detail given and also why Luke is so concerned to present the ‘human side’ of Paul’s preaching, “Engaging the (Neo) Pagan Mind: Paul’s Encounter with Athenian Culture as a Model for Cultural Apologetics (Acts 17:16-34),” *Trinity Journal* 16, (1995).


3 Flavien Olivier Cedric Pardigon, says that the notion defended by such critical scholars that the speeches have no actual connection with their narrative situation simply runs in the face of both the textual and
helpfully said that the introductory narrative for each speech ‘sets the tone’ for the respective speeches.⁴ Rowe points out that most modern studies covering Paul’s time in Athens focus on Paul’s speech without considering the narrative context surrounding it. The risk with this approach is to miss much of Luke’s preparatory remarks especially regarding the audience that Paul addresses. Rowe claims that Luke carefully places explicit narrative markers in 17:16-21 that shape the reader's perception of the speech.⁵ As stated, an attempt will be made to balance the narrative context with the speech content.

A generally agreed upon outline for the passage is as follows;

v16-21, Narrative introduction;
v22-23, Paul's speech introduction;
v24-29, Critique of pagan worship;
v30-31, Call to repentance;
v32-34, Narrative conclusion.

B. Paul’s Pagan audience

Following the rationale of Rowe and Pardigon that the narrative framing plays a significant role in understanding the speech, it will be important to understand the key characters and context surrounding Paul’s speech in Athens, hence the following.

Although Athens had once been a military powerhouse and the intellectual center of the


⁵ C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 28-9.)
ancient world, it was in a state of decline by the time of Paul’s visit. He likely found vast numbers of images of Hermes all over the city and especially at the entrance to the agora. Pliny believes that in his day the city of Rhodes had 73,000 statues, with ‘no fewer’ in Athens and in the temple cities of Olympia and Delphi.

Paul’s missionary efforts were progressively focused on cities. Having started ministering in small un-named towns with Barnabus (ch. 13-14) he paid attention to Philippi (16:11-40), Thessalonica (17:1-9), Berea (17:10-15) and now Athens (17:16-34), which was the greatest city of them all. Having grown up in Tarsus, a renowned university town, Paul might have been tempted to sympathize with the intellectual Athenian mindset, except that his OT learnings were largely at odds with the Greek philosophical views. Also unique to this passage in Acts is Paul’s engaging in missionary work alone, without any support from others.

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6 James Montgomery Boice, says that following a minor defeat to the Persians which started in 499BC, the Athenians rebuilt their city and their civilization, creating the first example of a democracy in human history. Paul arrives nearly 600 years after this climax of literature, philosophy and art. Athens had a free city and a famous university, but it tended to live on its reputation. Acts: An Expositional Commentary, Expositional Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 293-4.


C. Speech Context

1. Narrative Introduction, vv.16-21

When Paul arrived, he was not so much impressed by the culture as irritated by the evidences of idolatry. Paul does not seem to be in awe of what he saw in Athens, instead viewing the city through the lens of his Christian worldview, causing him to take action. The adjective Luke uses in verse 16, κατειδωλος appears nowhere else in the NT; most versions translate it ‘full of idols’, the idea is also conveyed of being ‘under’ them or ‘smothered’ by them. The verb associated with the adjective is παροξύνω, and has been called an extremely intense response by Paul.\(^\text{11}\) The verb is in the imperfect implying Paul was in a continuous state translations include ‘provoked (spirit)’ (ESV), ‘greatly distressed’ (NIV), he ‘was stirred’ (KJV). The imperfectivity is perhaps best captured in the NAS with, ‘was being provoked’. The meaning of the term is expounded by John Calvin where he says, ‘he expresseth the unwonted heat of holy anger, which sharpened his zeal, so that he did address himself more fervently unto the work’.\(^\text{12}\)

It is in this state that Paul interacts with the people of Athens. The common term μέν οὖν (trans. ‘so he’, NIV) indicates a connection between Paul’s feeling toward the Athenian

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\(^{11}\) Pardigon, “Paul Against The Idols”, 216.

\(^{12}\) John Calvin, Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles, vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966); Pardigon, notes that the verb appears only one other time in the NT: (1 Cor 13:5), the cognate noun is used in Acts 15:9 to describe the sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, and is used regularly in the LXX to denote God's fierce anger, e.g. Deut 9:7-8; 18-19; 31:20; 32:16, 19, 41; Ps 9:25, 34; 77:41; 105:29; Isa 5:24; 65:3; Pardigon, “Paul Against The Idols”, 217; Wright suggests that there is no question what a previously devout Jew such as Paul would have thought about the obvious pagan worship of Athens, saying that this is reason why it is so remarkable Paul held his scorn; Nicholas T. Wright, Acts for Everyone. Part 2: Chapters 13--28 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008), 83. Although Paul was previously a devout Jew his conduct towards his audience is now obviously affected by his transformational gospel experience.
idolatry and his subsequent actions. Most scholars who note this point agree that Paul’s actions can be read as an inference or consequence of his ongoing distressed state. This being the case, we note already that Paul chooses to respond to the Athenians out of a strong internal tension between the worldview of his audience and his own worldview. Certainly we observe here a collision of worldviews. This sets the foundation for us to assess Paul’s attitude towards cross-cultural mission from Paul’s response to the Athenians in what follows.

We read in verse 17, διελέγετο µὲν οὖν, (trans. ‘So he reasoned...’), where the verb διαλέγομαι is a term used by Luke in 10 of its 13 NT occurrences, and can be described as dialectical reasoning, the process of giving and receiving information with someone to reach a deeper understanding. Charles says that Paul ‘adapted himself in astonishing fashion to the dialectical habits of Athens inhabitants. This is confirmed with the appearance of a similar term in verse 18, συνέβαλλον translated conversed (ESV) or debated (NIV), and is used to

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13 E.g., Pardigon, cites the fact that Luke uses the same phrase in v. 30 to transition from his main argument (vv.23-29) to his climactic call to repentance (vv. 30-31). There is good reason to assume that Luke would use the same expression in the same way in the same pericope, and therefore it would be preferable to understand the µὲν οὖν of v. 17 as implying that the subsequent Pauline activity is the result of his strong reaction to the surrounding idolatry. Also because Paul had no intention of ministering in Athens, something caused him to change his mind, and his strong emotional response would be an obvious reason. It is likely from the context that Luke/Paul intends this transition to be inferential or consequential; Pardigon, “Paul Against The Idols.” 102.

14 N.B. this term is used according to the previous definition, where cross-cultural means ‘cross-worldview’. Stott, gives the following framework for understanding Paul's experience: What Paul Saw, What Paul Felt, What Paul Did, and What Paul Said; Stott, 280-2.

15 Pardigon, says διαλέγομαι is a Lukan term used 10 times in Acts 17-24. It always describes Paul's activity. It is used to give Paul's speaking four times in the context of a synagogue (17:2; 18:4, 19; 19:8), one time at Tyrannus' school (19:9), twice in a church meeting (20:7, 9), once in the temple (24:12), once before Felix (24:25), and in 17:17, where it refers to both synagogue and agora. It is always related to Paul's public proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and except for the church meeting, this proclamation is evangelistic in nature. Finally, it generally implies a situation where the audience interacts with the speaker, where there is address and reply. Pardigon, “Paul Against The Idols.” 112.

16 Charles, 50-51.
mean ‘engage in discussion with’ in Acts 4:15.” We note also the *locations* where and the *length of time* that Paul debated the Athenians. It is generally accepted that Paul’s custom was to address the local synagogue as a first priority. Having done this in Athens (v.17) he sees the opportunity to speak also in the Athenians’ own marketplace, which is the only time mission in the marketplace occurs in Acts. In light of the narrative progression in the book of Acts so far, it is clear that opportunities among Jews at this stage are decreasing but with the opposite among gentiles and pagans. Regardless of this we see Paul’s taking the gospel to τοὺς παρατυγχάνοντας (trans. those who happened to be there v.17) the impression being that Paul shared with whoever was available.

Paul is said to reason, διαλέγοµαι with those in the marketplace, ‘day by day’ (v.17). Wright suggests that the Athenian marketplace represented both a trading of physical commodities, as well as the trading of ideas. Marshall says that διαλέγοµαι in Acts generally arose as a result of an initial proclamation, and so the purpose of διαλέγοµαι was always to correct misunderstandings of the gospel.

The key idea that Paul presented in the marketplace is shown in verse 18, ‘...Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the Resurrection’. In a taste of the speech content

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18 Paul’s speech to the Athenians is one of only two accounts in Acts where Paul addresses a Gentile audience, the other is in chapter 14 and is located in Lystra. We see in both these accounts quite a different approach taken by Paul as compared to his customary addresses to the Jews. A common refrain in Acts is the apostles speaking or reasoning to Jews (2:4; 3:1; 5:21; 5:42; 6:12; 11:19; 13:5; 13:14; 14:1; 17:2; 17:10; 17:17; 18:4; 18:28; 22:30; 28:17). These events occur in the temple, synagogue, before the Sanhedrin, or under guard. They “(spread) the word only among Jews” (11:19) this activity stated as occurring “every day” (2:46) “day after day” (5:42), “as usual” (14:1) or “every Sabbath” (18:4) depending on the situation. Acts also recounts Paul’s taking the gospel to Gentiles, often due to jealousy on the part of the Jews and their hardness of heart (13:36; 17:5, 13’ 18:6; 22:22; 28:28) according to the prophecy “I have made you a light for the gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (13:47b-48, Cf. Is 49:6).


to follow (‘when they heard about the resurrection (ἀνάστασις), v.32), Luke parallels Paul’s marketplace ministry with his public proclamation. We note that Paul’s philosopher audience respond in three ways; curiosity, mockery and confusion. In a rare editorial comment, Luke illustrates the audience’s cultural curiosity in a relatively negative way in verse 21, they ‘...would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.’ Verse 18’s ‘babbler, σπερμολόγος’ is an uncomplimentary statement, and can otherwise be understood to mean someone who picks up scraps of knowledge and casts them around. By labeling Paul σπερμολόγος, the Athenian philosophers undoubtedly question his philosophical credibility.

Lastly it is striking how Luke presents the Athenian’s general misunderstanding of Paul. In an ironic way the philosophers are presented as mocking Paul for his ignorance, while Luke sees that it is the Athenians who are in fact ignorant. This is evidenced in the fact that

21 To outline Paul’s audience; The Epicureans descend philosophically from Epicurus (341-270BC), whose endorsed the pursuit of pleasure ultimately leading to tranquility. They understood a rudimentary atomic theory and believed either that the God’s did not exist or they were so far removed from the world as to have no influence on it; I.H. Marshall, The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary, 18. The Stoics stressed the importance of reason as the guiding principle of the universe, taking a pantheistic conception of God as the world-soul. The stoics emphasized self-sufficiency and obedience to duty, fatalism, submission and the endurance of pain. Schnabel, “Contextualizing Paul in Athens”, 172–190. Schnabel adds that the Epicureans pursuit of ultimate pleasure caused them to avoid the competitive life (with the distress of jealousy and failure) and by avoiding intense emotional commitments (with the pain of emotional turmoil). The philosophy of their day did not refer to an abstract concept as we might understand it today, but was an entirely rigorous way of life; Stott, 281. Calvin says that, ‘There is no doubt God allowed the Athenians to fall into extreme folly, so that they (would become)’ a warning to all generations that all the acuteness of the human mind, aided by learning and teaching, is nothing but foolishness.’ He adds that although the Stoics placed their highest good on virtue, they did not grasp what true virtue was, Calvin, Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries, 104-108.

22 Pardigon, “Paul Against The Idols”, 223.

in verses 18-20, Paul’s audience is unable to provide any accurate information about his preaching.24

With the narrative context taken in its entirety, the picture painted of the Athenian’s reception of Paul is rather disparaging. It is fascinating then to notice that Paul still chooses to conduct himself in an exemplary fashion. While much of the focus in the introductory section is on Paul’s audience we can surmise from Luke’s account that he was prepared to listen to the Athenians and observe their local cultural practices, answer anyone who questioned his ideas (quite possibly debating with the same people numerous times), and as far as we know he chose not to return any mockery he received. In the face of this mockery and opposition (e.g. the subsequent charges laid against him, v.18b) and without support from Barnabas, Silas, Timothy or others, Paul responds in a humble fashion, fully in accord with his ‘all things to all people’ exhortation in 1 Cor 9:19-23.25

Paul’s Speech Setting

One question that will be helpful to answer for the purposes of the thesis, and is commonly debated among scholars, is the nature of the Areopagus setting faced by Paul. It will be argued that Paul’s speech at Athens is neither a trial setting or an informal setting, but something such as a formal discussion. The text reads: ‘Others said, ‘He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities’—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?’” (vv.18b-19).

24 Pardigon, notes that the only content provided by these folk regarding Paul is that he ‘appears to be the herald of foreign deities’ (v.18), which is a complete misunderstanding of Paul’s identity and mission. “Paul Against The Idols”, 226.

25 Paul’s text in 1 Cor 9 regarding his use of freedom reads, ‘For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them...I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings’ (vv.19-23).
On the one side it is suggested that Paul was ‘taken’ to the Areopagus to defend himself against his views. Those in favor of this view interpret Luke’s use of ἐπιλαμβάνομαι, translated ‘took/taken’ (ESV, NIV, NAS, KJV) in a forceful manner, and they cite the numerous similarities to the trial faced by Socrates. On the other side there are those who suggest that the context does not present a judicial process, but simply an informal gathering.26 Others like them say that unlike many others of Paul’s speeches, e.g. the Jerusalem council (15:1-21), before Felix (24:1-23) and Agrippa (25:23-26:32), there is no legal charge, prosecutor, presiding judge, verdict or sentence.27

Both sides present evidence which appears to favor their view. Those who consider the speech as a trial, cite the fact that Luke’s use of ἐπιλαμβάνομαι elsewhere in Acts most often refers to the ‘seizing’ or ‘laying hold’ of Christians,28 made more likely given Luke’s ἐν μέσῳ (v.22) translated ‘in the midst’.29 They say that it is also hard for astute readers to see verses 16-19 and miss the strong parallels between Paul and Socrates. One commentator suggests that by using the dialectical method of conversation often referred to as the ‘Socratic method’, Paul ‘evangelized the city of Socrates, using Socrates own method’.30 On the other


28 Cf. 16:19; ‘They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them’. 18:17; ‘And they all seized Sosthene’s’, 21:30; ‘They seized Paul and dragged him out’, 21:33;’ the tribune came up and arrested him’ & 9:27; ‘But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. The tribune took him by the hand’. Other examples of ill-intended capture occur in Luke 20:20-26; ‘that they might catch him in something he said, (but) they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said’, 23:26; ‘And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene’.

29 C Kavin. Rowe, argues against those who suggest Paul was simply escorted to the hill for a better audience, saying that it is exceedingly difficult to make sense of Luke’s language in this sense. C. Kavin Rowe, World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 37.

30 Ajith Fernando, Acts, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2010), here refers to the so-called ‘Socratic method’ of dialectical discussion, as presented in v.17 by Paul in the
side, those who argue against the notion of a trial suggest there is minimal lingual evidence to suggest a parallel, that the key components of a trial are missing,\(^{31}\) and it is simply coincidental that Plato’s trial of Socrates is recorded historically, while there may have been many other trials at Athens as well.

On review there appears to be evidence of a parallel between Paul and Socrates, if not consciously intended by Luke then quite possibly obvious to Lukes reading audience. Despite this, there is insufficient evidence to conclude this, while there is significant evidence to reject the notion of an informal setting. We conclude that Paul was neither held in a legal trial or simply having mild conversation with the Athenians. He was charged with introducing new deities, but not necessarily in a judicial sense. Having established this marketplace, 474. The most definitive evidence to suggest Paul is placed on trial in Athens is in verse 18b where we see Paul charged with ‘οἱ δὲ: Ξένων δαμονίων δοκεῖ καταγγελεὺς εἶναι’,(trans. ‘He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities’) (17:18), like Socrates, ‘ἕτερα δαμόνια καινά’ (trans. ‘He believes in other, new divine beings’) was charged with introducing foreign deities to Athens. Plato, Euthyphr. 1C; 2B; Apol. 24B. Xenophon, says that the formal charge against Socrates was that he “does evil, for he does not acknowledge the gods whom the state acknowledges, while introducing other, novel divine beings” Mem. 1.1.1. Ironically it seems, the charge of the Athenians against Socrates disparages novelty or new divine beings, while Luke presents the Athenians opposing Paul as enamored with novelty or new divine beings, while Luke presents the Athenians as enameored with novelty, v.21, ἡμεῖς χρηστὲς τοὺς λαούς ἐπιστασάμενοι τι ῞ν ὧδε τι ἁμαρτῶν (trans. ‘spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas’) . We might conclude that the same charge was presented in both cases, but the intention regarding novelty is to disallow new offensive ideas (according to a given philosophical and legal viewpoint, i.e. the Gods whom the state acknowledge), whilst encouraging new ideas supportive of this narrow viewpoint. Daniel Marguerat, provides additional reasons to see Paul in light of Socrates where he compares their respective speeches, concluding that (1) Both attempt to expose the ignorance of their audience. (2) Both are convinced that what they do is due to divine commission. (3) Paul uses the Socratic strategy of fooling his audience - this includes first introducing a matter the audience thinks they know, second - pretending to share similar convictions of the audience with minor objections, and third - raising a series of questions that prove to the audience their ignorance, Paul in Acts and Paul in His Letters, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.310. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013, 3. Gendy, “Style, Content and Culture: Distinctive Characteristics in the Missionary Speeches in Acts,” Svensk missionstidskrift 99, (2011 concludes these are all superficial reasons, but I think it is hard to overlook the merit in some of Marguerat's arguments. 247–265.

\(^{31}\) Bruce, says that although the Areopagus was once a place of important judicial function, exercising jurisdiction in matters of religion and morality, by the time Paul reached Athens its power was curtailed with the growth of the democracy in the 5th Cent BC; Frederick Fyvie Bruce, “The Book of Acts”, in NICNT, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, Gordon D. Fee, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988). Calvin, calls the occasion a ‘serious public debate’ Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles, vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 109. Bruce W. Winter says that orators who were invited by the magistrates of a city to demonstrate their rhetorical abilities and philosophical orientation were usually given a day’s notice to prepare their declamation on a predetermined topic; Bruce W. Winter, Philo and Paul among the Sophists, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 96 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 149-151.
moderate position and knowing that Paul certainly did face significant audience pressure as he spoke, assists us in assessing Paul’s approach towards his audience. The narrative context naturally builds anticipation for the speech to follow.

2. Paul’s Speech Introduction, vv.22-23

Paul responds to the charge against him in a distinctively Christian way. It will be shown that Paul attempts to both establish communicational bridges with his audience as well as critique their philosophical presuppositions. Not one to shy away from a speaking opportunity, Paul stands, thoroughly prepared to speak. He says boldly, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious’ (v.22b). The majority of scholars understand this phrase to constitute a Captatio Benevolentiae, a rhetorical technique common in antiquity, designed to capture an audience’s goodwill at the beginning of a speech.32

Paul uses the term δεισιδαιμονεστέρους, which can be translated either in a positive sense ‘very religious’ (ESV, NIV, NASB), or alternatively translated ‘(ye are) too superstitious’ (KJV) conveying a negative connotation; Bock suggests the comparative noun in Acts 25:19 has a similar negative sense.33 Either of these translations may be valid given the ordinary Greek usage and the historical understanding of the term.34 In any case one’s understanding


33 Bock, Acts, 563.

34 The term is used both in a positive sense, i.e. reverencing god or the gods, pious, religious, and also in a negative sense, superstitious. Barrett, details the various translations of the term, Acts: Volume 2: 15-28.
of the meaning of this term, perhaps more than any other term in the pericope, is critical in determining their view of Paul’s approach to mission.35

Allowing the surrounding text to inform an interpretation, it appears that the Athenians are by way of life highly devoted to religious matters,36 allowing either a positive or negative interpretation. We note from the previous section the adversarial nature of the relationship that developed between Paul and the Athenians, which could easily have lead Paul to rebuke them. On the other hand, given the nature of the setting and the real threat of punishment that Paul faces it would seem unlikely that he meant the term entirely negatively.37 Rowe has presented the most compelling case for double entendre by saying that δεισιδαιμονεστέρους is at one and the same time ‘exceptionally religious’ and ‘quite superstitious’. He says that on the one hand the reader is positioned having read vv.16-21 to interpret the term negatively, meanwhile it is prudent to acknowledge Luke’s ability to convey more than a single level of meaning in the term,38 and his seemingly purposeful ambiguity in communicating meaning.39

The following verse helps further explain Paul’s intention with his use of δεισιδαιμονεστέρους, where Paul uses the connecting term γὰρ (trans.’for’) to introduce what

35 It is interesting to note the prominence of use of this phrase among scholars, as support for either Capitulation, Critique or a more moderate view. Those holding the capitulation view, take δεισιδαιμονεστέρους in a positive sense; the opposite for the Critique view, and some combination of both for a moderate view, which is being argued here.

36 It is suggested that the ‘extremely devout’ of v.22 can be compared to the ‘devout’ of v.17, although at the word level this argument is not supported, (i.e. ‘devout persons’ or ‘those worshipping’ τοῖς σεβομένοις does not directly parallel the ‘very religious’, δεισιδαιμονεστέρους). Conceptually it does make sense to make this connection. Clare K. Rothschild, Paul in Athens: The Popular Religious Context of Acts 17, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 51.

37 Bock, says that ‘Acts is clear that Paul is vexed by the idolatry (v. 16), but he finds it important to graciously show the way to the one God;’ Acts 558.

38 Rowe, interestingly considers dramatic irony to be a major Lukan literary technique. He says that to eliminate the ambiguity in δεισιδαιμονεστέρους is to eliminate the dramatic irony in Luke's statement, “The Grammar of Life”, 31–50. Bruce, suggests with some merit that the term may be neither a compliment nor an insult, but merely a statement of fact; The Book of Acts, 380.

39 Marguerat’s, article provides many instances of Luke’s skill in constructing purposefully ambiguous statements. Paul in Acts and Paul in His Letters, 75.
he says next. He says ‘For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found...an altar (v23a)’. There seems little doubt Paul intends to mean ‘you (Athenians) are very religious for I can see that you are’. One cannot help but be reminded of Paul’s strongly felt response in observing the city’s idols in verse 16. The reason he felt so strongly is not just his acknowledgment of their religiosity, but the fact that their religious habits directly opposed his own, hence Paul’s negative view.

Paul says that he found an ‘altar with this inscription: “To the unknown god.” What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you’ (v.23). This verse has been the subject of much debate on a variety of matters, not the least of which is Paul’s supposed capitulation to the Athenian philosophers, where it is claimed he praises their religiosity for worshipping the unknown God. While it is understandable that a number of scholars take this view, it will be argued that Luke’s audience demonstrates ignorance towards the true God. We note that Paul answers the charge that he is faced with by subtly rejecting the claim that he is introducing foreign deities to Athens, instead he claims that the God he comes to speak of has been present in Athens but has not properly been acknowledged.

In verse 23 Paul critiques the Athenians’ worship in a number of ways. He speaks not of the Athenians’ knowledge of God, but their ignorance towards God. He says ‘So you are ignorant (ἀγνοοῦντες) of the very thing you worship (NIV),’ or ‘What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you’ (ESV). Ignorance appears more than once in the passage and is a prominent theme in the passage. It appears both earlier in the marketplace and in the

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40 Dibelius, as noted previously interprets the speech as Paul's failed attempt to establish common ground with the philosophers. He says that vv. 30-31 is the "only Christian sentence in the speech", and that "the main ideas of the speech...are stoic rather than Christian;" Studies in the Acts of the Apostles, 57.

41 ἀγνοοῦντες, (trans. not knowing), referring to an absence of knowledge. Concurring that Paul’s comment should be read as ignorance over against worship are; Ned B. Stonehouse, Paul Before the Areopagus: And Other New Testament Studies (London, Tyndale Press, 1957), 19; Fernando, Acts, 480; Pardigon, “Paul Against The Idols”, 226-7.
conclusion of Paul’s speech.\textsuperscript{42} The concept of ignorance forms the ‘book-ends’ of the pericope vv. 16-34 and so can rightly be called the theme of Paul’s speech, and the motivation for Paul to speak as he did.\textsuperscript{43} Pardigon points out that this absence of knowledge and understanding is not defined simply in philosophical, or intellectual terms, but in religious terms, having to do with the worship of the true God.\textsuperscript{44} Paul says that the Athenians are not unconsciously worshipping the true God, but worshipping the wrong gods altogether.

Given that ignorance features so prominently, the implication is that Paul by contrast is not ignorant, but despite this Paul graciously chooses to communicate to the Athenians on their own level. While he maintains that the Athenians hold a position of ignorance he draws attention to his own worldview and the true God via what the Athenians already know. Jipp argues that the altar mentioned by Paul functions as a way for him to introduce his audience’s ignorance and, and to transition into a proclamation of his true God’s identity.\textsuperscript{45} Paul conscientiously engages with his audience using language that he knows they will understand.\textsuperscript{46} Paul tells his audience that his true God is ultimately responsible for the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} E.g. conceptually, in the marketplace in v.18a, others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities” and blatantly in the speech at v.30, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent”.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Pardigon, helpfully explains how this can be the case, showing also that a number of scholars have connected the ΑΓΝΟΣΤΩ and ἀγνὸοντες of verse 23 with the ἀγνοίας of verse 30, forming an inclusio; “Paul Against The Idols,” 226.
\item \textsuperscript{44} In this way we can see how the translation ‘very religious’ is valid even in a negative sense, where religion is not exclusively attributed to worship of the true God; Pardigon, “Paul Against The Idols”, 245.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Joshua W. Jipp, Paul’s Areopagus Speech of Acts 17:16-34 as Both Critique and Propaganda,” Journal of Biblical Literature 131, (2012), 578.
\item \textsuperscript{46} vv.22-23, It is obvious but noteworthy that Paul spoke in the native tongue of his audience, in Koine in the case of the Areopagus, in Hebrew at the Jewish synagogue, in Aramaic at another time as necessary also. Acts 22:2 says ‘And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet’. McGrath, rightly says that both Paul and Jesus didn’t seek in any way to isolate themselves from their audiences, by for example using arcane religious vocabulary or mystical symbols. Instead ordinary language was deemed to have the dignity of grace, just as our ordinary language can do the same if we bother to take the trouble over it; Alister E McGrath, Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetic, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), 50.
\end{itemize}
phenomena they attribute to *their unknown* God. Paul does not praise the Athenians’ behavior, but as Calvin says, he takes ‘free material for teaching from their attitude’. By this Calvin means that Paul noted the points of difference between his audiences and his own views, so as to be informed in his speaking.

3. Narrative Conclusion, vv.32-34

William Ramsay argues that Paul abandoned preaching for philosophy and that, as a result, there were no converts. Those with Ramsay suggest that Paul’s determination when he moves on to Corinth to ‘know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified’ (1 Cor 2:2) was the result of disillusionment from the Athens results. Against these views, it is false to conclude from a small number of converts that the address was inappropriate. On the contrary, the fact that Luke records the converts of the address is significant as this occurs rarely in Acts. Additionally, the nature of the converts Luke records matches the pattern of Acts perfectly. Verse 32 says ‘Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, *some mocked. But others said*, ‘We will hear you again about this’. This polarizing effect is typical of preaching in Acts, and accords with Paul’s same understanding in his letters. Nowhere

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47 Calvin, says that “the Athenians attitude is corrupt, but that this doesn’t prevent Paul from acknowledging common views. Paul takes it as axiomatic that, that they do not know what they are worshipping, and do not have a definite deity. Superstition he says, is an agitated state, always turning out something new. Anxiety, which does not allow unbelievers to plume their feathers, is more tolerable than such stupidity;” *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, 111-12.


49 The author reasons that if Paul had not utilized philosophy with the Athenians but instead quoted Scripture would we expect a better result? Surely not. What Paul renounced in Corinth was Hellenistic worldly wisdom, not his both/and approach. His decision to preach nothing but Jesus Christ crucified was taken because of the anticipated challenges of proud Corinthians, not because of his supposed failure in Athens. Paul did not change his tactic in Corinth, but continued to teach, argue and persuade (18:4-5).

50 E.g 4:2-4; 14:8-20; 17:4-5, 12-13, 32, 18:27-28; 28:24

51 E.g. 1 Cor 1:18, 2 Cor 2:15, 1 The 2:14-16,
in Acts is there a depiction of mass conversion of Gentiles,\textsuperscript{52} so we conclude the Areopagitica receives the same kinds of responses to other missionary speeches reported in the book of Acts.

For these reasons, and given the fact that the text does not suggest explicitly that Paul’s strategy is misguided, Charles concludes that Paul’s mission in Athens can be considered exemplary of first-century apostolic preaching.\textsuperscript{53} It is prudent to note that if God wanted to provide an example of a poor missions method in Scripture, given the transparency of narrative and characters in other parts of scripture,\textsuperscript{54} he could easily have done so. Thus, it is significant that this is not how Paul’s speech is represented, pointing towards the Pauline missions approach being paradigmatic.

D. Paul’s Speech Proper, vv.24-31

24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,\textsuperscript{25} nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.\textsuperscript{26} And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,\textsuperscript{27} that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,\textsuperscript{28} for

“‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said,

“‘For we are indeed his offspring.’

29 Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.\textsuperscript{30} The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,\textsuperscript{31} because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in

\textsuperscript{52} Jervell, “God’s Faithfulness to the Faithless People”, 34.

\textsuperscript{53} Charles, 48.

\textsuperscript{54} Cf. the many OT characters implicitly rebuked because of their failures, such as Cain, Moses, Saul, David, Solomon, etc.
righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Having reviewed the narrative introduction (vv.16-21) speech intro (vv.22-23) and narrative conclusion (vv.32-34) thus far, it is important to realize that the content of Paul’s speech proper, parallels in many ways the narrative in which it is found. These parallels include idolatry (v.16); the audience's ignorance (vv.18-20), Jesus and the resurrection (‘foreign deities,’ v.18), Paul's ‘holy anger’ (v.16) and his later pronouncement of judgment (vv.30-31).\(^{55}\) Fitzmyer correctly concludes that the speech and the narrative are well integrated and that the speech ‘constitutes an essential element of the narrative.'\(^{56}\) Pardigon says that there is therefore no justification for anyone to conclude that the Paul of v.16 is different from the Paul of v.22!\(^{57}\)

With Pardigon’s statement in mind as far as it relates to the topic of cross-cultural mission and Paul’s approach, it is noticeable that there is a connection between the part of the passage emphasized by scholars and the view that they hold regarding Paul’s approach. The trend seems to be that those who sit on the capitulation end of the ‘contextualization spectrum’\(^{58}\) emphasize the narrative context, introduction to Paul’s speech, and narrative conclusion.\(^{59}\) Those however who sit on the critique end of the spectrum emphasize Paul’s speech proper.\(^{60}\) Interestingly, when the speech content is considered in its full narrative

\(^{55}\) Dunn, 230.

\(^{56}\) Fitzmyer, 601.

\(^{57}\) Pardigon, 219.

\(^{58}\) To use the term provided by D.J. Hesselgrave and E. Rommen, 123-27.

\(^{59}\) Those who hold this view tend to interpret the introduction narrative key term, ἐπιλαμβάνωμαι to mean ‘invited to speak’, and the speech introduction term δεισιδαιμονεῖτερος as ‘well done on your religiosity’, e.g. This party would tend to conclude Paul’s speech was at least a partial failure also.

\(^{60}\) John Chrysostom, for example quotes much more often from Paul’s speech in his homily than referencing the narrative context, “Homily 16 on the Acts of the Apostles,” in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,
context, the two ‘extreme’ views on either side of the spectrum become untenable. In this way it must be agreed with Pardigon that Paul simply cannot be saying something in one part of the passage that is inconsistent with another part, instead seemingly irreconcilable views must be understood in light of each other, and the rest of scripture. 61

1. Critique of Pagan Worship, vv.24-29

Paul begins the main part of his address by critiquing the pagan worship of the Athenians. In contrast to their unknown God, Paul proclaims a God who created all things including the world (κόσμον) and everything in it. Because God is lord of the world; he does not need a temple or human cultic ritual (v.24f); man is God’s creation; he needs God (v.26f). We see at this point Paul’s clear divergence from common knowledge with the Athenians. Before this point, although he was distressed, we did not see him clearly correcting the Athenian viewpoint, whereas at this point he does.

Paul states emphatically that the purpose of God’s revelation, his providence and sovereign control, is that men would seek him out. 62 Against the Epicurean and Stoics notion that the Gods are distant and uninvolved, 63 Paul asserts that the one true God is in fact within arm’s reach, and desires contact with his creation. There are distinct similarities in Paul’s statements to OT texts, particularly the ‘anti-idol polemic’ of Isaiah and creation narratives of


61 I.e. Scripture interpreting Scripture. An attempt will be made in the final chapter to show how this Paul’s strategy is supported by a systematic theology also.


63 Pardigon, says that Plato and the Epicureans taught that the Ideas or the gods had absolutely no direct connection with the material world. The Stoics taught that the divine Logos penetrates the material world just like a soul indwells a body. (“Paul Against The Idols”, 254).
Genesis. The similarity in wording between vv.24-25 and Is 42:5 is acknowledged by a number of scholars. Pardigon says the verses are held together by an allusion to the words of Isaiah, with just a few wording modifications. Verse 24 also closely matches Exodus 20:11 with both describing the world and all it’s contents being created by God. Verse 26 progresses the description of God’s creative acts, going on to say that all mankind was created from one man, so that the nations should inhabit the whole earth, and God’s appointing of man’s times and boundaries.

Both Dibelius and Haenchen say that Paul’s triad use of ‘life and breath and everything’ in the intermediate verse 25b is a thoroughly Hellenistic thought not based on the OT. But we can see this terms consistency with both the preceding and following texts, which have clear correlations to OT passages (e.g vv.24-25 Cf. Is 42:5, v.26 Cf. Deut 32:8)

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64 “Thus says God, the Lord,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it”


66 Pardigon, provides a side-by-side comparison between the two verses showing points of similarity, and highlighting the inclusio formed by the allusion. “Paul Against The Idols”, 250.

67 “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

Cf. Mal 2:10 ‘Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us?’

68 Cf. Gen 1:28, ‘God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it”.’

69 Cf. Deut 32:8, ‘When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, When He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples According to the number of the sons of Israel,’ Ps 74:17 ‘You have established all the boundaries of the earth; You have made summer and winter.’

70 Cf. Deut 32:8, ‘When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, When He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples According to the number of the sons of Israel, ’Ps 74:17 ‘You have established all the boundaries of the earth; You have made summer and winter.’


and a general consistency with OT prophetic language on the whole. The doctrine of Creation spoken by Paul (vv.24-26) is strongly supported in OT texts and parallels strongly with Paul’s words in Romans that God has ‘not left himself without a witness’ (Rom 1:19-20).73

The content of Paul’s speech was thoroughly informed by his familiarity with the OT. Instead of quoting directly from scripture he spoke biblical themes of monotheism, anthropology and anti-idol polemic, in Hellenistic language. Although he does not quote sentences of scripture directly, he uses scripture in his speech both at the word74 and concept levels. Paul’s overarching narrative also matches the biblical pattern, by beginning with God the creator and finishing with God the judge, in so doing Paul seeks to correct the common pagan understanding of history as cyclical and replacing it with the Bible’s view of history as linear.

We note at this point Paul’s obvious engagement with sources from multiple cultures and histories. These include the OT scriptures and Hellenistic Greek Philosophy. As highlighted earlier, Paul consciously chooses not to use direct biblical quotes as proof for his arguments, but utilizes what he views as common ground with pagan philosophers, familiar to his audience. Paul, it appears is prepared to acknowledge the glimmerings of truth in pagan

73 Bruce, says 'If the author of Romans had been invited to address an Athenian audience on the knowledge of God, it is difficult to see how the general purport of his words would have differed considerably.' The tone is different but this is credited to Paul’s wisdom in appropriately contextualizing the message for his audience; The Book of Acts, 338. Calvin believes Paul’s approach is appropriate, according to him 'the true rule of Godliness is this; to have a clear grasp of who the God is, whom we worship. If anyone wishes to discuss religion in general this will be the first point, there there is some deity to whom worship is due from men.' As opposed to a God who needs served, the true God served us entirely - life, breath and everything else including Salvation. Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles, vol. II, 114.

74 E.g. comparing the LXX with the Greek NT; God, Θεὸς; made, ποιήσας – having made; heaven, οὐρανοῖ -of heavens; all in v.24.
philosophy by quoting Cretan philosopher Epimenides, along with fellow Cicilian philosopher Aratus.

While establishing truths common to these philosophers Paul is careful not to concede a view any less high than his thoroughly scriptural worldview will allow. It is notable that while Paul used sources that were known to his audience, he qualified the meaning of the source in a thoroughly biblical way. For example when he quoted from both Epimenides and Aratus, he introduced the quotes with a biblical view of God, and so utilized the audience’s authority sources to support his own biblical view. In this way Paul did more than simply ‘translate’ his worldview into that of his audience, but he used his audience’s language as a self-critique for themselves, demonstrating its inconsistencies against the one consistent worldview. We conclude that his humility in considering these sources, his proficiency in understanding and recalling these, as well as his preparedness to speak to them, demonstrate firstly his strong desire to communicate in a manner that his audience can connect with, and secondly his view that this is the most effective strategy in communicating the gospel across various cultures.

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75 Soards says that while it’s not certain Epimenides was the author of Paul’s quote, attributing this quote to Epimenides is quite valid, 98; Rowe is somewhat more skeptical in (“The Grammar of Life: The Areopagus Speech and Pagan Tradition”, 42). In any case, it does not matter whether the quote belongs to Epimenides, because we know that Paul quotes from the audience’s own sources in the second half of the same verse, (v.28b).


77 Rowe, says that Paul did not intend to equate his worldview with the wisest of the pagans, and his would have incorrectly lead to ‘Paul’s proclamation and certain constitutive aspects of pagan philosophical thinking point to the same truth’. Instead he says that ‘The worldviews of Paul and the Athenians are and remain different and competing languages about the truth of the world’, (“The Grammar of Life”, 42-50).
2. Call to Repentance; vv.30-31

Referring now to his previous theme of idol worship, Paul then increases the distinction between his view and his listeners, critiquing their worldview whilst maintaining commonality with them in certain ways. Schnabel finds approximately 9 statements where Paul agrees with the Athenians views, then approximately 10 statements in contradiction.\(^79\) Yarnell’s estimation supports Schnabel’s, saying there are five explicit and five implicit statements of contradiction in the speech.\(^80\) This yet again demonstrates the both/and approach typical of Paul. It is a matter of interpretation as to whether a particular statement is considered an affirmation or a critique, but examples of agreeable statements might include ‘you are very religious’ (v.22), ‘so that they would seek him’ (v.27), ‘In him we live and move and have our being’ and ‘We are his offspring’ (v.28).

Examples of critical statements might include ‘you are very religious’ (v.22 – used as both a bridge and critique), ‘you are ignorant of the very thing you worship’ (v.23 NIV), ‘God...does not live in temples built by hands’(v.24), ‘he is not served by human hands...rather he gives everyone life’ (v.25), ‘the divine being is not like gold, silver or


\(^80\) Yarnell, gives five explicit contradictions as follows; v. 24: God does not dwell in the Athenians’ man-made temples; v. 25: God does not need the Athenians’ man-made sacrifices. v. 29: God's nature is not composed of the elements of the world. v. 29: God’s nature may not be represented by human art, the work of human hand; v. 29: God’s nature may not be discerned or perceived by the human imagination. He also gives five implicit contradictions also; v. 24: Using God in the singular rather than the plural v.26, God is the one who appoints times and boundaries; v. 28: Against the Middle Stoics, Paul posited a direct origin between God and men. vv. 26,31, Paul advocated the biblical worldview that God is personal, vv. 18-31. Against all the philosophers, Paul taught that the soul continues to exist; Yarnell, 212-13.
stone’ (v.29), and he goes on to rebuke the worship of idols. Paul says also that ‘In the past God overlooked such ignorance’ (v.30), ‘he has set a day when he will judge...He has given proof of this by raising him from the dead’ (31).

Paul’s both/and approach is noticeable not just in his direct statements but in the allusions he garners as well. Schnabel suggests that Paul’s elements of agreement are in the ‘foreground’ of the speech while elements of contradiction are often in the sub-text. Because these sub-text elements are less often recognized, this is a contributing factor to why Paul’s speech is regularly interpreted on the capitulation side of the spectrum.

It is worth noting that this criticism of Paul’s towards his audience involved a real danger to himself, but despite this Paul considered that telling his message was worth the risk. Paul tactically criticized the Athenians only in specific, focused areas. He could have spoken of their gross immorality or their intellectual arrogance, but he did not, or at least not directly. Instead he focused on the Athenians’ wrong worship. He finishes with the need to repent and

81 Stott, says that Idolatry, as practiced by the Athenians, was the attempt either to ‘localize’ God, confining him within limits which we impose, to ‘domesticate’ God, making him dependent on us, or to ‘alienate’ God, blaming him for distance and his silence. Paul’s says against these assertions that 1) God created everything and he is everywhere, He is the sustainer of human life, he is not dependent on us, he is the Ruler of the nations, and he is not far from any of us. Idol ‘worship’ does appear to be a more prominent concept in the biblical cities; Stott, 288-99.

82 Schnabel, calls these points of agreement Ankunftung, and points of contradiction Widerspruch. Paul pointedly distinguishes religion and revelation, referring to common notions and contradicting the elements that are contradicted by the revelation of Scripture: Elements of agreement include Paul’s relating to his listeners, among them Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (17:18), using terms, concepts and language easily understood by the Athenians; Schnabel, “Contextualising Paul in Athens”, 746-758.

83 Schnabel, says that Paul’s criticism of the Athenians involved significant risks. ‘No Athenian would welcome abandoning temples, discontinuing sacrifices ensuring the goodwill of the gods, or missing the opportunity to officiate in the cults of the city, thereby consolidating one’s superior social status’, Acts, 748.
who the final judge is – Jesus Christ. He draws his argument to a climax with words indicating a sense of urgency. Judging by the final result (vv.32-33) his listeners would either have been held in suspense or ready to disregard him. The antithesis between Paul’s view and his listeners view is now at a maximum. We see this in the fact the Athenians could easily have thought Paul was introducing two new Gods, ‘Jesus’, a male God and his female consort - ‘Anastasis’. The concept of bodily life after death was antithetical to both Epicureans and Stoics.

Against the view held by the capitulation camp that Paul’s speech did not sufficiently include a gospel component, Stott considers what Paul has preached as central to the gospel or at the least, indispensable background to the gospel. We might safely conclude that Paul’s speech constitutes ‘pre-evangelism’ or what Carson calls ‘worldview evangelism’.

84 Boice, paraphrases Paul as saying God has been patient, God commands repentance, and God has appointed a day for final judgment,” 299.

85 In any case, the concept of Anastasis would have been considered unreasonable by both Epicurean and Stoics; Stott, 282. The most widely held opinion concerning the after-life was that ‘death is nothingness, eternal sleep’, Philippe Ariès, Paul Veyne, and Georges Duby, A History of Private Life: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium, A History of Private Life (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992); Both Stoics and Epicureans could have agreed with Apollo’s words ‘Once a man dies and the earth drinks up his blood, there is no resurrection’, since the body was increasingly regarded as evil in comparison with the soul. Bruce, The Book of Acts, 363.

86 Especially Dibelius, who says that that especially missing in Paul’s address is the cross, 57-63. Against this view is the reasonable notion that Paul could not have preached the resurrection without first mentioning the cross. We expect this was the case, but due to the Luke’s needing to select content from the speech, the crucifixion is not explicitly recorded.

87 Stott, 289.

88 Carson provides an excellent view on what he calls ‘Worldview Evangelism’, demonstrated by Paul in this text. He says ‘I would like to think that most of us have become convinced of the primacy of what might generically be called worldview evangelism ... as compared with an aggressive presentation of a small part of the Bible’s story line’, and that evangelism in a postmodern context requires ‘starting farther back’ because of partly a lessened biblical literacy, but also a shift in worldviews from those which the Bible presupposes. To illustrate this Carson says ‘The person of Jesus cannot be understood without categories for a personal / transcendent God ... We cannot possibly agree on the solution that Jesus provides if we cannot agree
Flemming, like Carson says that Paul is careful to ‘prepare the ground’\textsuperscript{89} with his audience. Overall Paul establishes a thoroughly biblical worldview, beginning with the agreeable and progressing towards the most difficult components. Paul begins by affirming universal human experience, God’s creation and general revelation, anthropology, before proceeding to human rebellion, and the miraculous nature of the person of Jesus.\textsuperscript{90} To quote Stott on the matter;

We learn from Paul that we cannot preach the gospel of Jesus without the doctrine of God, or the cross without creation, or salvation without judgment. Today’s postmodern world needs a bigger gospel, the full gospel of scripture, what Paul would describe later in Ephesus as ‘the whole counsel of God (20:27)’.\textsuperscript{91}

E. Conclusion - A Missions Approach Including Bridges and Critiques

We see in Paul’s address to the Athenians his distinctive approach to mission combining both bridge-building and critique. The narrative context surrounding the speech fully supports this line of reasoning, and is in full accordance with the speech itself. A number of terms are found in the narrative context which strongly inform ones view of the speech, these include παροξύνω (trans. ‘provoked’), σπερμολόγος (trans. ‘babbler’), ἐπιλαμβάνω (trans. ‘taken’), δεισιδαιμονεστέρους (trans. ‘very religious’), that when taken in their individual contexts present a reasonable likelihood of Paul’s critical view towards the Athenians and...
vice-versa. In Paul’s speech, despite the fact that Paul faced the threat of death, he did not capitulate to his audience but he preached unhindered, prominent OT themes including idolatry, and concluded with Christ and the Resurrection. When both narrative context and speech content are taken together they present a strong argument for Paul’s critical approach.

At the same time we observe Paul’s gracious communication to the Athenians. Despite his being provoked Paul engages in dialogue without bitterness towards his audience. He chooses not to limit his discussion in the marketplace or at the Areopagus to the quoting of scripture, but sought to explain Jesus and the Resurrection in a way that the Athenians could best appreciate it. A common way that Paul achieves his both/and balance in Athens is his ‘exploiting’ his audiences worldview. The term exploiting can be used to describe how Paul utilizes a given audiences philosophy or ultimate authority and in effect, uses it against them. In Athens, Paul having identified the idolatry of the Athenians, both quotes their own writers in support of his biblical worldview, and presents his biblical worldview in their own language. In this way Paul utilizes components from his audiences worldview to discredit the worldview as a whole, thus rendering it incoherent, at the very least, inconsistent.

Paul’s time in Athens is to be viewed as a successful account of gospel communication, in line with the many other speeches in Acts. Naturally, there were some who when confronted with their ultimate religious ἀγνοοῦντες (trans, ‘not knowing’), ‘sneered’ (v.32), dismissing Paul as a peddler of knowledge. But ‘some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.’(v.34)

92 Charles, uses this term where he says ‘with the skill of a surgeon, the Apostle exploits the language and ideas of his contemporaries’, 48.
Chapter 3

Paul’s Other Speeches

A. Introductory Matters, A Comparative Study.

The previous chapter has shown that Paul in Athens employed a combination of bridge-building and critique. The purpose of this chapter is to expand on the previous and demonstrate that Paul’s method of mission used in Athens compares similarly to other speeches in Acts, and may therefore be considered paradigmatic for missions in general. In this chapter, a comparative study of three of Paul’s substantial speeches in Acts will be made with respect to the account of Paul in Athens, with the aim of showing that Paul’s method of conversing in Athens is both necessary and paradigmatic for cross-cultural mission. By comparing with Paul in Athens, it’s hoped that either points of continuity or discontinuity be identified, in order to establish meaningful patterns from which to base conclusions.

We assume as before that Luke is both a historian and theologian: that is, a reporter and not creator of Paul’s address to the Athenians. The conclusions of Schubert and Soards are also adopted with respect to speeches of Acts; that they are interconnected and present a consistent and complete message,¹ and that they form a book-long development, building one upon another.² Also previously mentioned, it is generally agreed among scholars that Luke records three of Paul’s extended discourses in Acts: the synagogue sermon in Pisidian


Antioch (13:16-41), his Areopagus speech in Athens (17:16-31) and his farewell speech to the Ephesian Elders (20:18-35). Rationale for the selection of speeches for comparison was also given previously, with the decision to include Paul in Lystra (14:8-18) due to its length, mission orientation, and close similarities to Paul in Athens. Specific areas of comparison will include those emphasized in the previous chapter; narrative context, speech content, and missions approach, with the first two informing the third to a large extent.

Paul’s address to the Ephesian elders will be considered an Interpretational Control Text, that is, a neutral comparandum from which to fairly analyze variables in other texts (i.e. Athens, Pisidian Antioch, and Lystra). In order to support the thesis that Paul’s missions approach is paradigmatic in general, it will be argued that there is significant continuity between the speeches in Pisidian Antioch, Lystra and Athens (all of which required a correction in worldview), and significant discontinuity between these and the speech to the Ephesian elders (which required minimal correction in worldview compared with the other three). The key areas of both continuity and discontinuity include: Paul’s knowledge of each audiences culture, his feelings towards his audience and their behaviour, the circumstances that provided Paul with an opportunity to speak, the level of understanding demonstrated by the audience, and the extent of opposition Paul faced.

1 Charles says that the Pisidian Antioch sermon is a type that Paul delivered throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece (cf. 14:15-17; 17:22-31). Paul’s sermon basically consists of three parts: (1) a survey of Israel’s history; (2) the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and (3) the application of the gospel message. Many aspects of this sermon resemble features in the sermons delivered by Peter in Jerusalem (2:14-36; 3:12-26) and the one Stephen preached before the Sanhedrin (7:2-53). “Engaging the (Neo) Pagan Mind: Paul’s Encounter with Athenian Culture as a Model for Cultural Apologetics (Acts 17:16-34),” *Trinity Journal* 16, (1995), 52-55.


3 We see in both Lystra and Athens a different approach taken by Paul as compared to his customary Jewish addresses. They both contain next to no direct OT quotes, but do however employ OT concepts throughout.
Although Soards would suggest that grouping only some of Luke’s speeches together for comparison has limited value against comparing all speeches together, this study would not permit a comparison of all speeches, and it is argued on the contrary that there is significant value in comparing speeches that exhibit similar patterns with each other. Additionally, given more time or space, it would warrant further research on not just the speeches but narrative content in Acts which describes Paul’s missions approach and conduct but where Paul does not speak.⁴

A key question that will be asked is, does Paul’s speech to the Athenians, or his other speeches, play the role of the model or the foil? that is to say, Does Paul’s encounter with Athenian culture serve as a model, either positively or negatively, for the Christian community of any age?⁵ It will be argued that because of the discernible continuity between Paul’s mission speeches, in contrast to the discontinuity shown between these same speeches and Paul’s Christian audience, Paul’s Athens encounter serves as a positive model for Christian mission directed across differing worldviews.

B. Paul at Pisidian Antioch – A Comparative Study with Acts 13:13-41, Paul’s Jewish Audience

1. Narrative context in Acts

Commentators have long compared Paul’s first major speech recorded in Acts, in Pisidian Antioch (PA), to one or more of the other speeches in Acts.⁶ Flemming calls the

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⁵ Wording for this question comes from Charles, 48.

speech ‘the apostolic equivalent to evangelism among churchy folk’. Paul’s audience were both Jews and worshipping Gentiles (v.16) – regular synagogue attendees and so were familiar with the scriptures. Paul and his companions arrived in town, and ‘On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down’ (v.14). Like in Athens, Paul and the others were invited to speak.\(^8\)

Similarly to Athens, Paul accepted a speaking opportunity. He began by standing and ‘motioning with his hand,’ (κατασείσας τῇ χειρί) (v.16), making what some call a Hellenistic orator’s gesture,\(^9\) and addressing those gathered with ‘Ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλίται’ (Men of Israel). Both here in PA and in Athens Paul requests the attention of his audience, the difference being in 13:16 he expects his audience to listen due to synagogue custom, while in 17:22 he has to ‘capture’ the attention of the Athenians, hence the Captatio Benevolentiae\(^10\) It is possible that Paul’s greeting to the Jews of PA contains a combined positive and negative connotation as it did for the Athenians.

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\(^8\) The term “invited” is used liberally given the previous discussion with the view of Paul being seized in Athens. In both cases though, the initiative to speak comes from the listening audience. It’s significant that Paul and his companions were invited to speak, showing their reputation among the Jews was known. Cf. Luke Ch.4 which parallels Jesus. “News about him spread throughout the whole countryside... And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.” (Luke 4:14-16)


\(^10\) The parallel is between 13:16 “So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: ‘Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen’,” and 17:22, “So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious’.”
Paul’s first sermon in PA is received with gladness, but on the following Sabbath the Jews and the Gentiles become polarized towards Paul. From that point on, we see the same pattern repeat in nearly every city with a synagogue. Paul then faced a growing persecution on the part of the Gentiles that culminated in his arrest and trials of chs. 21-28.

Regarding the success of Paul’s speech in PA, we read on the one hand that ‘When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed’ (v.48). On the other hand, the Jewish leaders ‘stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.’ (v.50).

We see from this Paul’s missions speeches in both Athens and PA produced mixed results.

2. Content and Themes Comparison

Paul gave his Jewish audience a general retelling of early Israelite history. The allusions to OT scripture would have been foremost in the minds of Paul’s listeners. Noticeable references to scripture include Genesis chs 12, 46-50; Exodus ch.6; Deuteronomy chs.1, 7; Joshua chs.14-17; 1 Samuel chs.7-10, 15-16; 2 Samuel ch.7; and possibly Psalm 77. Soards calls this speech section ‘A theologically saturated survey of history, ending in a Christological claim.’

For our purposes it is notable that Paul here both clearly builds bridges and critiques parts of his predominantly Jewish audience’s worldview. Because of Paul’s approach to his Jewish audience we can conclude that like Athens he considered this a missions speech, i.e.

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11 “As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath.” (v.42.) “many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God” (v.43).

12 Pardigon, 199.

13 Soards, notes that psalm 77 repeatedly incorporates a negative critique of the Israelites behavior into the account of God’s faithfulness, 83.
his audience held a worldview in opposition to his own, hence he considered it necessary to use both both bridge-building and critique.

The first section of the speech covers history that would have been non-controversial to Jews. Paul’s begins, ‘The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power he led them out of that country’. This includes celebrated concepts to Jews, i.e. divine election and the Egyptian exodus. Paul goes on to include other ideas entirely agreeable to Jews; the overthrowing of the Canaanite nations, inheritance, and kingship (specifically citing king David, a much revered figure). In many significant ways Paul extends bridges between himself and his Jewish audience. As at Athens, although it might appear to the audience that Paul’s bridges demonstrate his full agreement with their view, he understands these concepts in a different way to what they do. We can tell this firstly because Paul affirmed the new covenant fulfillment of the OT concepts, something many of the Jews would have been unable to do. Secondly, the ultimate response of the Jews to Paul’s message was negative (vv.48-52), meaning they disagreed with him. In this way Paul utilized the Jews’ own worldview and authoritative sources as a critique against themselves.

Paul then skillfully transitioned from what was known and accepted into the less accepted and potentially controversial and divisive, albeit the crux of his message. He said ‘From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised.’ (v.23). From this point in the speech Paul alternates between making a claim regarding Jesus (and the subsequent impact this should have on his audience) and referencing verifying his claim by appealing to evidence or authority. Gendy says that Paul’s tactic is similar to that of Peter in

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14 Gendy says that Paul acknowledges ‘common heritage, history interest in the Torah, the prophecies and promises, and the Jewish salvation history. He speaks about the Jewish ancestors as ‘our fathers’ (v. 17). He calls his Jewish audience ‘brothers, sons of the family of Abraham’ (v. 26),’ 250-1.

15 E.g. Paul says “Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in
chapters two and three, where the resurrection account consisted of a reference to the fact that God has raised Jesus from the dead, an appeal to the testimony of the eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus, proof texts from the Psalms and Prophets that let the resurrection appear as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, and a call for a positive response.¹⁶

Like in Athens, a part of Paul’s speech is his use of quotes to support his argument. The difference is in this case Paul uses OT citations instead of pagan philosophical quotes. Paul uses five direct OT quotes in Pisidian Antioch (Ps 2:7, Isa 55:3, Ps 16:10, Hab 1:5, Isa 49:6), as opposed to the two quotes from Epimenides and Aratus in Athens. In both cases Paul attempts to build a cumulative case using the audience’s authorities. Paul used his last citation, ‘You will not let your Holy One experience corruption.’ (Is 49:6 in v.35), as Peter did in Acts ch.2, to prove that this promise revealed to the Jews cannot apply to David himself since he had already died and his body undergone decay. In this way Paul seeks to show his audience a true interpretation of the scriptures they know well.

The critique component of Paul’s speech incorporates a strong warning dynamic, especially near the end of the first Sabbath address (vv. 40-41) and in the second Sabbath address (vv. 46-47) Paul quotes from Habakkuk with a warning of fearful judgment against skepticism and unbelief. Cleverly, Paul avoids directly attributing the negative term καταφρονηταί (trans. ‘scoffers’, ESV, NIV, NASB, ‘despisers’ KJV) to his audience, instead he warned them not to become either scoffers or unbelievers (v.41b).

3. Missions Approach Comparison – Bridges and Critiques

It is argued here that Paul’s combined approach of bridge-building and critique applied as much to his Jewish audience as it did to the Athenians. It can be said that just as pagan

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¹⁶ Gendy, 250.
philosophy is a source of authority for the Athenians, OT scripture is authoritative for the Antioch Jews. Paul, knowing this, attempts in both instances to demonstrate a truly Christian worldview utilizing common principles found between his audiences worldview and his own.

Being exceedingly familiar with both the OT scriptures and Hebrew culture, Paul is easily able to identify common knowledge with his audience. But despite his familiarity with his Jewish audience, Paul is aware that his own worldview differs significantly from theirs. Although he uses sources his audience considers authoritative, he understands them differently to his audience, and so Paul needs to combine the work of ‘gentleness and respect’ (1 Pt 3:15) with the work of ‘teaching, correcting, rebuking’ (2 Tim 3:16).

As in Athens, Paul exploited the worldview of the Jews in PA as well. Whereas in Athens Paul quoted the pagan philosophy familiar to the Athenians, in PA he referred to the Scriptures so familiar to his audience, citing particular passages that illustrate Christ in the OT, and he demonstrated how the Jews were wrong in failing to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. Just as the pagan philosophy of the Athenians was unable to present a coherent, consistent worldview in light of the revelation of Jesus, neither was the Jewish worldview able to do so.

\[\text{17 Cf. Acts 22:3 “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.” Phil 3:4-6 “If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless”.}\]
C. Paul at Lystra – A Comparative Study with Acts 14:8-20, Paul’s First Pagan Audience

1. Narrative Context in Acts

In a continuation of great signs and wonders, (14:3) harsh treatment,\(^{18}\) and the polarization of their audience in Iconium (v.4), Paul and Barnabas flee to Lystra, where they ‘continued to preach the gospel.’ (v.7). The population of Lystra consisted of Roman soldiers,\(^ {19}\) Greeks, a small Jewish community (16:1-3) and native Lycaonians (14:11).\(^ {20}\)

The way Paul’s speaking engagement arose in Lystra was much different than in Athens, though a certain amount of tension is common to both (if one adopts, as herein, the view that ἐπιλαμβάνομαι in the Areopagus scene is primarily negative). Immediately preceding the speech Luke recounts Paul’s miraculous healing of a lame man (vv.8-10). Then instead of being taken (ἐπιλαμβάνομαι) to a group of waiting listeners, the apostles in Lystra ‘tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd’ (14:14).

We note here the parallel theme of misunderstanding in Chapter 17, regarding in particular, idol worship, and the view that Paul represents or advocates.\(^{21}\)

\(^{18}\) “The Jews....stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers” (v.2). “When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra” (vv.5-6a).

\(^{19}\) Who formed the defence force of the colony; Gendy, 254.

\(^{20}\) The native Lycoanians are described as ‘popular, Hellenistic, mythological and polytheistic’, Gendy, 254.

\(^{21}\) 17:18 says “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears.” (vv.19b-20a)
And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” (14:11)

“What does this babbler wish to say?”
Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities” (17:18)

Table 2 – Audience Misunderstanding
Note that Paul’s response is similar to Athens also. Both here and in Athens Paul becomes distressed at the concept of idol worship – this accords with the view that the act of tearing one's garment was usually a reaction and a response to blasphemy.22

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out (14:14)
While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. (17:16)

Table 3 – Apostles Emotive Response
Paul’s reaction then represents a proclamation against idolatry, spurring him to speak about the contrasting knowledge of the true God.

After the apostle’s speech23 is finished Luke writes;

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22 Only two other times in the NT, both relating to Jesus crucifixion, and the high priests reaction to Jesus’ Son of Man statement; Matt 26:63-65; Mk 14:61-63. Examples of different types in the OT: David, when Saul and Jonathan were killed, 2 Sam 1:11–12; Elisha, when Elijah was taken up into heaven, 2 Kgs 2:11–12; Job, when he was bereft of all he possessed, Job 1:20; Jephthah, when he learned the result of his rash vow, Jgs 11:34–35; Mordecai, when he learned of Haman’s plot to destroy the Jews, Est 4:1; Ahab, when Elijah pronounced a judgment against him, 1 Kgs 21:27; and Paul and Barnabas, when the people of Lystra began to worship them, Acts 14:14. Sometimes, the tearing of one’s clothes was accompanied by other signs of humility and grief, such as shaving one’s head, Job 1:20; throwing dust on oneself, Job 2:12; and wearing sackcloth, 2 Sam 3:31.

23 Of course the speakers in this case are “the apostles” including Barnabas and not simply Paul. Whether or not Paul is the speaker directly does not affect the thesis that the missions speeches use a certain approach. This is especially true given that the patterns between speeches appear to exist without this consideration.
Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifices to them. But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city. (vv18-20a)

We notice here a number of parallels to ch.17 in addition to those already discussed; heavy opposition to the spoken word (v.19) and persistent idolatry (v.18), the polarization between the Jews (who won the crowd over against Paul, v.19), and the predominantly gentile crowd (who until that stage had not opposed Paul, v.19), and ongoing miracles (Paul, thought to be dead is revived by the disciples, v.20).

2. Content and Themes Comparison

Paul speaks to his pagan audience in Lystra in a similar manner to the way he does in Athens. Paul again assumes the people of Lystra’s ignorance towards the true God, and seeks to point them toward him. In order to achieve this, Paul must first rebuke many of the views of his audience, which he knows are in contradiction to a scriptural understanding of God. The disparity between Paul’s view and that of his audience is made clear from the beginning of his speech (14:15) Despite this disparity and the apostle’s obvious distress, the apostles graciously build bridges in a way that proclaims the nature of the true God. In a much shorter speech than the one in Athens, Paul includes the key features of the Athens address in Lystra, as shown in table 4.

24 For just one example, Paul addresses his audience ἀνδρεῖς (“men”, 14:15), this appears in 7:26, 14:15; 19:25; 25:24; 27:10, 25, with 17:22 “Men of Athens” very similar.
It appears that no mention of Jesus was possible in Lystra, allowing Paul to only proclaim general statements about God the Father. Gendy argues with some merit that this was because the audience could only receive the content of what Paul initially addressed, after which presumably they could take no more.

The content of Paul’s speech in Lystra, like in Athens and PA, indicates his educated awareness of his audience’s authority figures and sources. Like Athens, Paul does not directly cite OT scripture, but couches scriptural content in pagan language. Ferdinand Hahn says that Paul’s preaching to Gentiles ‘presupposes, not the covenant with and the promises to the fathers, but the care of the Creator’. Paul, of course, presupposes both the covenant promise and the Creator’s care, but he is careful to emphasize the aspect that he knows his

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<th>Lystra (Ch.14)</th>
<th>Athens (Ch.17)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Critique of pagan worship</td>
<td>vv.14-15</td>
<td>vv.24-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proclamation of the true God</td>
<td>v.15</td>
<td>vv.24-29</td>
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<td>Call to repentance</td>
<td>v.15</td>
<td>vv.30-31</td>
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Table 4 – Content / Theme Comparison

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25 Of course, like the Athens address, Luke must select what to and what not to include in the text. In the case of Athens for example, we can deduce easily that Paul did mention Jesus’ crucifixion from the response to his mention of the resurrection. It’s believed that because Luke records specifically and with detail that Paul spoke about Jesus and the resurrection at Athens, if Paul had done the same in Lystra, the same would have been recorded.

26 They could at least hear Paul talk about abandoning false beliefs in idolatry, and a doctrine of God as creator and sustained, whereas anything more was unbearable to them. Gendy, 262.

audience will most easily hear. In the case of Lystra, Paul uses pagan language very similar to what he used in Athens.

In both Athens and Lystra Paul’s immediate rebuttal of idol worship includes a proclamation of the true God as both Living and Creator. Paul followed this with more strong parallels to his Athens speech; God’s history of mercy, his common grace and provision, and his revelation to his creatures. See tables 5 and 6 below.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Living / Creator</th>
<th>‘Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living [ζῶντα] God, who made [ἐποίησεν] the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them’ (14:15)</th>
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<td>‘The God who made (ποιήσας) the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life (ζωὴν) and breath and everything else.’ (17:24-25)</td>
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Table 5 – God as Living (ζῶντα) and Creator (ἐποίησεν)

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28 Soards, says that v.17 is a *hapax legomenon* (ἀμάμτωτον, “without a witness”), echoing Acts witness theme (1:8), it also parallels strongly with 17:24-31, 89-90.
Table 6 – Parallel themes: History of Mercy, Common Grace Provision, Revelation to Creatures

3. Missions Approach Comparison – Bridges and Critiques

Paul’s approach to mission in Lystra, as has been shown, was very similar to his approach in Athens. The people of Lystra could be classified as Pagans, and were likely to have held a similar worldview, i.e. materialist and rationalist. Knowing this Paul, both utilized what he knew of their worldview but in a way that brought about his audiences own
indictment.. Wright correctly suggests that Paul knew he ‘was playing against a different team’ to perhaps his usual Jewish audiences, and so he prepared accordingly.

It is worth noting that Paul’s strategy in both Lystra and Athens was significantly different from his typical Jewish approaches; points of obvious difference included how the speaking engagements arose, sources and illustrations provided, and general emphases given.

I am arguing though that the points of discontinuity between Paul’s speech to the Jews and to his Pagan audiences in Lystra and Athens, arise from matters of context, while the points of continuity arise from content and approach. This is exactly what should be expected if the thesis is true, that a missions paradigm containing an unchanging content, exists spanning various contexts. The points of continuity when taken together provide a high degree of likelihood that the apostles approach in Lystra, just as in Athens and PA, demonstrates this paradigm.

Points of continuity between Lystra and PA, as expected are the same as those common to Athens and PA. They are shown in Table 7 below. Points of discontinuity are attributed to ‘contextualization’ of a consistent biblical content to two different audiences, and have already been mentioned.

29 Noticing that this is the first pagan audience that Paul is recorded addressing, Nicholas T. Wright, says that this demanded a different game plan or strategy, which Paul prepared for. Acts for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 13-28 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008), 82.
Paul addresses the crowd in Lystra using the same term used in both PA and Athens (Ἅδρες) and identifies that human-hood (v.15), is common to both him and his audience. This for Paul leveled the playing field, given they have just attributed to him divine status.\textsuperscript{30}

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\textbf{Table 7 – Points of Continuity between Pisidian Antioch and Lystra}


1. Narrative Context in Acts

It will be argued that the narrative context of Paul’s speech to the Ephesian Elders exhibits significant discontinuity with Paul’s missionary speeches in PA, Lystra and Athens, due to Paul’s different approach towards those in a non-missions context.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{30} Noticing that Paul and Barnabas could have (at least temporarily) abused this status for their own benefit, the fact they did not demonstrates their attitude of humility towards their mission task. Though there may have been a temptation for Paul to consider himself spiritually superior to his somewhat ignorant audiences, he is well grounded, recognizing his equal status as a man (v.15), he continued to engage his audiences with a non-superior way.

\textsuperscript{31} Acts 19 records a riot in Ephesus regarding the manufacture of idols and a silversmith named Demetrius, (19:23-31), demonstrating the increased opposition that Paul and the apostles faced in their mission. The rioters provide an accurate description of Paul “Not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has
We read ‘from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them’ (20:17-18). Paul does not address his audience as he did in PA, Lystra, or Athens, but instead says ‘Ὑµεῖς ἐπίστασθε’ (trans. ‘You know’) suggesting the Ephesians had much prior knowledge of Paul. No introduction is mentioned either. When Paul had finished speaking,

He knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship. (vv.37-38)

Notice the contrast in response from Paul’s Christian audience to his ‘cross-worldview’ audiences. The Jews in PA stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, ‘and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went. (vv. 50-51). In Lystra Paul was stoned until he was thought dead! In Athens, ‘some mocked, but others believed’ (v.32). In every other city of comparison Paul received either an entirely negative or a mixed response. In Miletus they wept out of love.

Paul was distressed in both Lystra and Athens in response to what he observed. By contrast, in Miletus Paul experienced an opposite emotion: sorrow. Although it might seem sorrow is a similar feeling to distress, in this case the context indicates the sorrow felt by Paul and the Ephesian elders is a positive emotion, due to their deep unity of faith and fellowship, grounded in their shared Christian worldview.

2. Content and Themes Comparison

It will be argued that the content of Paul’s speech to the Ephesian Elders exhibits significant discontinuity with Paul’s missionary speeches, due to the speech’s non-missions persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods.” (19:26). After travelling some more, Paul spoke in Troas, and revived a dead believer who fell from a window (19:7-12). It’s in this context that Paul meets with the Ephesian Elders while based in Miletus, near Ephesus.

32 Recall Paul’s use of the greeting Ἄνδρες, which was used in all of 13:16; 14:15; 17:22.
context and a general agreement in worldview with his audience. As mentioned, Paul does not address his Christian audience with his usual ‘men’, but begins with ‘You know’. The lack of formal address underlines Paul’s intimacy with his audience, but it also conveys a strong sense of agreement at the outset. His use of ‘You know’ regarding his audience demonstrates this agreement and stands in direct contrast to his missions speeches, which from the outset assume ignorance, misunderstanding, and thus necessary bridge-building from Paul.

The first four verses of Paul’s speech are all statements of what it is his audience knows, they include; ‘how I lived among you’ (v.18), how Paul ‘served the Lord with all humility...with tears... in trials’ (v.19), ‘how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house’ (v.20), and how Paul ‘testified both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ’ (v.21).

Paul’s speech then takes a turn from the past to the future, illustrating both what Paul himself does not know, as well as what he does know that his audience does not. Paul uses the term μὴ ἐξέδωκ (trans. not knowing) to say that he does not know what will happen to him when he arrives in Jerusalem (v.22). Following this turning point Paul returns to what he knows that his audience does not. He says ‘καὶ νῦν ἵδον ἐγὼ οἶδα’ (trans. And now behold, I know), that ‘none of you...will see my face again’ (v.25), ‘I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God’ (v.27) ‘I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you  (v.29), and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things (v.30). These last statements of Paul’s constitute a warning to his audience, introduced with ‘Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock (v.28’). But notice in this speech that Paul warns his audience but does not critique them. Notice also that unlike in

33 Soards, 106.
his missions speeches, Paul does not provide any quotations in his speech. Although critics might suggest that this point is irrelevant, I would argue that the Luke’s lack of recording particularly quotations with the purpose of critique suggests that Paul did not require any bridge-building or critique with his audience. Even if Luke had recorded Paul quoting scripture in Miletus, the expectation would be that Paul did not use these quotes as a direct critique towards his audiences worldview, but instead - as he does in many other places, uses scripture as ‘within-worldviews’ corrective, or encouragement.

Paul finishes by saying ‘I commend you to God and to the word of his grace’(v.32), which is certainly something he could not have said to a non-Christian audience. He finishes with a series of statements regarding his intentions that he implies the elders know about him. He establishes his financial credibility, ‘I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities’ (vv.33-34a), and concludes with ‘In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’ (v.35). This last statement of Paul’s can be seen as descriptive of his approach to missions in general.

3. Missions Approach Comparison – Bridges and Critiques

I argue that there is significant discontinuity between Paul’s so-called missions speeches (in Athens, Pisidian Antioch, and Lystra), and Paul’s speech to the Ephesian Elders in Miletus. I argue that this discontinuity was intentional from Paul, and the reason for it was due to his understanding of his audience and conscious approach to mission. Where in a missions context Paul built bridges between and critiqued his audiences non-Christian worldview, instead in a non-missions context neither of these were necessary, so Paul instead affirmed and warned his audience.

Critics could suggest that it is obvious that Paul’s approach to Christians differs from his non-Christian audiences, and in a sense this is correct. For example, Paul has no need to
engage in pagan philosophy to establish rapport with fellow Christians. But, the fact that they are notably distinct approaches, combined with the fact this model is found consistently in other parts of scripture, demonstrates the likelihood that Paul’s approach in both cases should be seen as models for effective communication.

Regarding Paul’s conduct toward the Ephesians, we notice from the context that he treated them differently from how he would have if they were not believers. Instead of being distressed at their lifestyle, there was no mention of their wrongdoing. Rather than being invited to speak to them, no invitation was necessary. Rather than addressing them formally he assumed prior knowledge. By way of response, rather than reluctance and opposition, Paul’s audience wept at the thought of his leaving them.

Regarding his speech content, Paul established common ground with his audience, noting the many things they knew in common but he did not quote from either non-Christian or Christian sources, i.e. pagan philosophers or the scriptures in order to build bridges. Rather than the audience being ignorant and in need of critique, Paul’s audience was affirmed and warned of impending challenges. It is worth qualifying that it is not always the case for Paul that he does not quote from scripture or other sources when addressing Christian audiences. For example, in his letters Paul regularly quotes from scripture as a corrective for believers. But in this case, Paul does not choose to quote from any sources as a means of building commonality with his audience.

4. Conclusions

Some conclusions can be drawn from a comparison of Paul’s Christian audience against three other non-Christian audiences. Firstly, although Paul considered it necessary to approach his non-Christian audiences with a combination of bridge-building and critique, he used neither of these things for his Christian audience. For clarification, it could be argued that the bridge has already been built between Christians, and despite the fact that Paul does regularly critique his Christian audiences, the term is used here to describe a more thorough
criticism spanning worldviews which oppose each other, which is not the case between believers.

Although Paul does seek to establish common ground with his audience it is in this case truly common ground, rather than the often required reinterpretation of seemingly common ground with non-Christians. The concept of building bridges between differing worldviews is a lot less necessary between believers than it is between people with vastly different worldviews. 34 Because of this Paul is able to affirm the position of the Ephesians, like he is not able to do with his other audiences.

To restate is, although Paul does warn his Christian audience in Miletus, he does not heavily critique either their views or their lifestyle in the way that he does for the people of PA, Lystra or Athens. As already described, Paul would often use the views of his non-Christian audiences in a self-rebuking way - as a means of demonstrating the futility of holding that view. No such thing is seen in Miletus. Instead of correcting the views of the Ephesians, he simply adds to their knowledge, for example where he says in effect, ‘you will never see me again’ (20:25), and ‘after I leave there will be wolves’ (v. 29) etc.

34 I am not saying that critique is unnecessary between believers. Paul regularly demonstrates the bridging of different doctrinal understandings between Christians in his writings. I am saying that Paul’s critique for non-believers has to be much more thorough due to the greater distance between worldviews.
Chapter 4

Conclusion - Paul in Athens as a ‘Both/And’ Cross-Cultural Mission Approach.

Having introduced the thesis with the various views of Paul’s speech in Athens, the conclusion now sets out the author’s view of the passage regarding Paul’s approach to mission. This is based upon the exegesis of the passage and the comparative study of three other speeches.

The thesis has argued that a false dichotomy exists between the ‘bridge-building’ and ‘critiquing’ views of the passage, but that according to Paul, both are necessary when addressing an audience with a non-Christian worldview. An attempt has been made to show that for all of the considered missions speeches, Paul employs a simultaneous ‘both/and’ strategy, and that this strong continuity between missions speeches, as well as the distinct discontinuity between the mission speeches and Paul’s Christian audience in Miletus, altogether suggests a paradigmatic approach for all mission.

Regarding the historical views of Paul’s Athens speech, Rommen and Hessel’s ‘contextualization spectrum’ was introduced to help ‘hang’ various views on. The views were categorized in three areas, Capitulation, Pure Critique and Contextualization, with the first two representing the extreme ends of the contextualization spectrum. The thesis has since argued that the two so-called extreme views are untenable given exegesis of the Athens passage and it’s comparison to Paul’s missions speeches and his speech to Christians, this point will be considered established.

It was attempted to establish the first component of the thesis, that Paul employs the ‘both/and’ strategy, with the exegesis of Paul’s Athens experience (17:16-34). We note
particularly that either ‘extreme’ view of capitulation or pure critique was deemed to be untenable when the narrative context and speech introduction (vv.16-23, 32-24) was considered alongside the speech content (v.24-31). Instead it was found that Paul’s balanced approach including both bridge-building and moderate critique was consistent with both the narrative and speech proper.

Paul’s ‘both/and’ strategy was confirmed by comparison with the two other mission speeches (13:13-52, 14:8-20). While between the two mission speeches there is a strong continuity in terms of strategy, with Paul’s Christian audience there is a strong discontinuity, further confirming that Paul’s approach for his mission speeches is deliberate and consistent. In the comparative speeches also, a balance was attempted between the speech content and the narrative context surrounding the speeches. It was found in all cases that the narrative context supported each speech in confirming the ‘both/and’ claim regarding Paul’s missions approach.

It is argued here that the points of continuity across all Paul’s mission speeches include the following; Paul’s knowledge of his audience and their sources of authority (i.e. the Athenian’s pagan philosophy, the Jews knowledge of scripture), a general misunderstanding and ignorance of his audience to the Christian worldview, Paul’s use of his audiences sources as a self-critique, Paul’s worldview proclamation, and a polarized response to Paul’s message.

Other points of continuity exist, but do not occur across all three mission speeches, they include; a strong emotive response from Paul following his observation of his audience (14:14, 17:16), and Paul’s formal introductory address (13:16, 17:22). While there are significant points of continuity between Paul’s missions speeches, these same points are largely discontinuous with Paul’s speech to the Ephesian elders - the speech that was considered an interpretational control text, for the purpose of neutrally comparing the missions speeches against. Table 8 below illustrates the results of the comparative study between speeches.
Table 8 – Comparative Study Results

I argue that the results of the comparative study, as illustrated in Table 1 indicate clear areas of continuity and discontinuity between Paul’s missions speeches and the one Christian speech considered. From this I argue the thesis, that these points of continuity are significant in firstly confirming Paul’s both/and approach to mission, and secondly showing Paul’s mission speeches can be considered paradigmatic for missions in general.

Some qualifications need to be made. In relation to the first point, 1) Paul did have a thorough knowledge of his Christian audience but this is entirely expected given this is Paul’s own worldview. By contrast it is unusual that he possessed a thorough knowledge of the Lycaonian and Athenian pagan cultures, and the Jewish culture to a certain extent also. Although Paul was himself a ‘Hebrew of hebrews’ (Phil 3:5), the fact that he understood the key points in scripture which would cause the Jews to not accept Christ indicates his cultural awareness. 2) Paul did not proclaim his Christian worldview in Miletus, but this was entirely
assumed by his audience. In many of Paul’s writings he does proclaim at least parts of his worldview to Christians as a corrective, but the difference is that with non-Christians Paul has to ‘start further back’. 3) Paul did have a strong emotive response in Miletus, but as indicated in chapter three his emotions can be considered as opposite to those in both Lystra and Athens. 4) Paul did not give a formal greeting in Lystra like he did in both PA and Athens, but he was not able to because he wasn’t introduced. Instead he and Barnabas responded immediately to the situation (14:14). It is believed that if Paul was invited to speak in Lystra like he was in Athens, he would very likely have given a formal greeting. With these qualifications made, the stated continuities and discontinuities are more accentuated between the mission speeches and the Christian speech.

Is there warrant for the argument that continuity between missions speeches indicates a missions paradigm? For many scholars the answer will automatically be the affirmative due to the prevalence of treating scripture as normative in general. I would argue that instead of assuming a particular narrative is normative, the reality is that because of inherent contradictions every passage can not be normative, and so warrant should be provided to prove this is the case for particular passages.

A number of points have been identified as continuous between speeches, and it will be shown that these points are consistent with mission in the Bible as a whole. Considering a number of texts pertaining to mission in Scripture, four common themes can be identified; unbelief, gospel proclamation, the need for repentance, and a response. Biblical texts considered include the following OT texts; 1 Chron 16:24, Cf. Ps 96:3 ‘Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!’ Is 61:1-2, Cf. Lk 4:18-19, The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the
LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.’ The concept of unbelief is prominent in Is chs. 40-56.

NT texts include: Mt 28:18-20, ‘And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’’ Mk 13:10, ‘And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. Lk 4:43, ‘but he said to them, ‘I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.’’ Lk 24:47, ‘And that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem’. Rom 10:16-18 ‘But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for ‘Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.’’ These themes in both the OT and NT are consistent with what is seen in Paul’s missions speeches, and so it can be said of Paul’s missions speeches that they are an example of a ‘biblical’ method for mission.

Using these four biblical categories I will demonstrate how Paul’s speeches fit these themes. Firstly, they are considered missions speeches because of Paul’s understanding that his audience are not believers, that is hold to a Christian worldview. His audiences also consistently showed both ignorance and misunderstanding towards the Christian worldview. Paul considered it necessary to both build-bridges and critique his audiences worldview implying their unbelief.

Secondly, Paul proclaimed the Christian worldview to all his Athens, PA and Lystra listeners. As noted, despite many scholars claiming Paul failed to preach the gospel in Athens and Lystra, what Paul did (or was allowed time to) say was at the least ‘indispensable
background to the gospel’, without which the effectiveness of the telling of the gospel would be less. It is argued that Paul neither capitulated or purely critiqued his audiences but instead both built bridges and critiqued, in order to most effectively proclaim the gospel to his audiences.

Thirdly, Paul’s method of combining bridge-building and critique necessarily included the hard truth about repentance (e.g. 17:30-1, 13:41, 14:15). While finding common understanding with his audience, Paul considered repentance a non-negotiable part of his gospel content. Preaching repentance required Paul to not just build bridges but to critique his audiences also, and this was considered an essential element of his telling the gospel message. To expand on the concept explored earlier, Paul exploited his audience’s worldview to demonstrate it’s own inconsistencies, showing the futility of holding such a view, before presenting a better alternative. This alternative was a gospel requiring repentance.

Fourthly, Paul’s call for repentance placed a burden on his audience, many of whom were not prepared to accept it. Both the polarized response of his audience, and the general opposition faced by Paul matches both the book of Acts, and the biblical pattern closely.

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1 Stott, 289.

2 Among other things, most notably ‘Jesus and the Resurrection’ (17:18,31-2)

3 Carson, gives the excellent analogy of a computer hard-drive. He says that ‘the people we wish to evangelize hold some fundamental positions that they are going to have to abandon to become Christians. They retain numerous files that are going to have to be erased or revised, because as presently written, those files are going to clash formidably with Christian files. At one level, of course, that is always so. That is why the gospel demands repentance and faith; indeed, it demands the regenerating, transforming work of the Spirit of God. The less there is of a common, shared worldview between “evangelizer” and “evangelizee,” between the biblically informed Christian and the biblically illiterate postmodern, the more traumatic the transition, the more decisive the change, the more stuff has to be unlearned’, Don A. Carson, Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2002), 286.

4 Eg. Stephen’s martyrdom, Acts 7:51-53; Saul’s persecutions, chs 8-9. Various trials; Peter and John, 4:1-20; Peter and Apostles, 5:17-42; Stephen, 6:6-7:60; Paul and Silas, 16:16-40; Paul before Gallio, 18:12-17; Paul and companions, 19:24-41; Paul in Jerusalem ch.22; before the Sanhedrin, ch.23; Before Felix, ch.24; Before Festus, 25:1-12; and before Agrippa, 25:23-26:32.
Having established that Paul’s missions strategy matches closely the biblical pattern, we are left with the question of how can *many* speeches serve as *one* example, and so just what is a biblical approach to missions? Related questions are, where exactly in the middle of the contextualization spectrum does Paul’s Athens speech fall, and so what exactly does it mean to combine bridge-building and critique for any audience with a non-Christian worldview? The reason I believe these questions still remain is because, although Paul’s model serves to inform us on the basic principles of mission, due to mission’s changing contexts, it cannot and should not prescribe a one-size-fits-all approach to mission.

To answer the question of just what is a biblical approach to mission according to Paul’s missions speeches; the consistent elements of Paul’s speeches should be applied; *understand the audience, build bridges and critique, proclaim the gospel, and expect opposition*. Altogether, these consistent strategic elements from Paul present a biblical model for mission, and flow from one to the next.

As Paul demonstrates with his use of the audiences sources, understanding one’s audience requires knowing the worldview they ascribe to more thoroughly than they in fact know it themselves. All missions audiences will demonstrate ignorance towards the Christian worldview as Paul’s audiences did. For mission to be effective, there is a noticeable asymmetry between knowledge on the part of the Christian and their audience.⁵

Knowledge of one’s audience allows the believer to identify possible *bridges* for building, which might include the use of one’s audience’s authoritative sources, be they local media publications, sportspeople, scientific writings or postmodern philosophy. Knowing thoroughly an audiences sources helps identify areas of untruth or inconsistency which can

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⁵ Matt 5:11-12 says, “Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you”.

⁶ With this said, knowledge is obviously not the only factor preventing someone adopting a Christian worldview.
be *critiqued*. In this way, an audience’s worldview is exploited in order to ‘delete’ views incompatible with a biblical worldview. The work of ‘hard drive deleting’ creates an opportunity to re-fill the contents of a person’s worldview ‘folders’ with biblical content. To put it another way, the hard work of destruction, ‘pulling down strongholds’ and ‘demolishing arguments’ (2 Cor 10:4-5) is a necessary work for meaningful construction to occur in someone’s worldview.

Construction will involve a proclamation of necessary gospel truths, biblical content which regardless of audience demonstrate what the bible presents as the only truly consistent worldview. Does this mean that the content is the same in every case? Paul’s example suggests not, he explained the gospel using a different language to each of the Athenians, those at Pisidian Antioch and Lystra. But, while the language was different, the underlying concepts were founded in scripture and ultimately focused on the person of Jesus. This to say, the details of how to communicate an unchanging gospel message will depend in large part upon the audience, except for a certain non-negotiable content including necessary repentance and the person of Jesus. Having proclaimed the gospel, Christians can expect to face opposition, and for results to be mixed. Both of these things can serve as an encouragement and a necessary recalibrator of expectations when it occurs.

In sum, it is hoped that this study has achieved a re-grounding of the term ‘contextualization’ using the biblical account of Paul in Athens. I finish with a quote highlighting the glorious truth that biblical contextualization, while following certain necessary principles involves a sovereign God and the variety of human creatures he created. Hence, perhaps the best way to determine a personal meaning for contextualization, is with practice.

The principle is that the best method of evangelism is the one which serves the gospel most completely… which bears the clearest witness to the divine origin of the message… which makes possible the most full and thorough explanation of the good news of Christ and his cross… which most effectively engages the minds of those to
whom witness is borne… What that best method is in each case, you and I have to find out for ourselves.⁷


