

# **The God of glory: Explicit references to God in discourses in the Acts of the Apostles (7:2–53; 14:15–18; 17:22–31)**

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## **Abstract**

This essay offers insight into Luke’s concept of God by analysing three sections in which God is explicitly a topic of discussion. These sections are Stephen’s apology (Acts 7:2–53), the account of Paul’s and Barnabas’ mission in Lystra (Acts 14:8–18), and the Areopagus speech (Acts 17:22–31). Because these texts share similar motifs, they can be said to constitute an argumentative series. In these sections, Luke provides a coherent concept of God comprised of many motifs from Luke-Acts. The central motif is that God created the world, which results in God’s self-sufficiency. Therefore, a worship with neither sacrifices nor temple is the appropriate response to God as a self-sufficient, transcendent, spiritual, and perfect being that is completely different from every mortal being on earth.

## **Key words**

*God; theology; Luke-Acts; Christian worship; monotheism*

## **1. Introduction**

In 1975, Nils A. Dahl claimed that God is the “neglected factor” in New Testament scholarship.<sup>1</sup> He observed that “[f]or more than a generation, the majority of New Testament scholars have not only eliminated direct references to God from their works but have also neglected detailed and comprehensive investigation of statements about God.”<sup>2</sup> This situation

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1 Dahl 1975, reprint: Dahl 1991. I cite according to the reprint.

2 Dahl 1991: 154. For the reasons of this neglect, see Jantsch 2015: 463–465.

has changed during the last three decades, during which particularly the concept of God in both Paul's letters<sup>3</sup> and the Gospel of Mark<sup>4</sup> has increasingly received attention from scholars, resulting in a number of monographs.

Such scholarly attention to the concept of God has not extended to Luke-Acts, however, though statistics indicate that God plays a *decisive* role in Luke's narratives. In Luke-Acts, the noun θεός refers to the God of Israel 280 times<sup>5</sup> and joins numerous other references to God such as "father" (πατήρ),<sup>6</sup> "the most high" (ὁ ὑψιστος),<sup>7</sup> and "lord" (κύριος,<sup>8</sup> δεσπότης).<sup>9</sup>

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3 For a history of research in this field, see Jantsch 2011: 1–19; Hurtado 2010: 9–26 and the brief overview in Jantsch 2015: 465–468.

4 See Dechow 2000; Guttenberger 2004; Blumenthal 2014.

5 The noun θεός occurs 289 times in Luke-Acts. In only nine instances (all of them in Acts), this noun refers to Gentile deities, or to humans: In Acts 7:40, θεοί refers to the idols of the people surrounding Israel (citation from Ex 32:1), in 7:43, θεός refers to the deity Rephan (in a citation from Amos 5:25–27). Acts 19:26 focuses on Gentile deities, 19:37 on the goddess Artemis. In Acts 17:23, the inscription of an altar in Athens reads "to an unknown god" (ἀγνώστω θεῷ). In Acts 12:22, Herod Agrippa I. is called a god, and in Acts 14:11, Paul and Barnabas are referred to as gods by the pagan Lycaonians (similar in Acts 28:6 on the island Μελίτη). In Acts 8:10, Simon the Magician is called "the great power of God" (οὐτός ἐστιν ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ καλουμένη μεγάλη), which most likely refers to another deity than the God of Israel.

6 In Luke-Acts, God is explicitly referred to as "father" fifteen times, while there are a further ten references to a "father" in Luke 15:11–32. The designation "father" for God occurs significantly less in Acts (only thrice). God is referred to as father in the contexts as follow: a) God is the father of Jesus who is his Son: Luke 2:49 (from Luke's special material [henceforth referred to as S]); 10:21 (from the Sayings Source Q); 22:29 (S – however, the *context* is from Q); 22:42 (Mk 14:36); 23:46 (S); 24:49 (S). – b) God is "father" with respect to the believers as his children: Luke 6:36 (Q); 11:2 (Q); 12:30 (Q); 11:32 (S). – c) God is referred to as "the father", without any specification: Luke 9:26 (different from Mk 8:38, here it is the father of the Son of Man); 11:13 (Q, with a significant difference from Matt 7:11, where the text reads "your father"); Acts 1:4 (see Lk 24:49); 1:7; 2:33. – d) In the parable of the prodigal son, a father occurs within the narrative world (S; 10 times "father"). Luke 22:34 is, based on text critics, an addition to the original text.

7 Five times: Luke 1:32, 35, 76; 6:35; Acts 7:48, and additionally Luke 8:28; Acts 16:17 ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὑψιστος.

8 κύριος is by far the most important designation of God in Luke-Acts. It occurs thirty-four times in the Gospel of Luke alone.

9 Two times: Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24.

The sheer quantity of instances that need to be considered seems to be the reason why comprehensive studies on God in Luke-Acts are still missing.<sup>10</sup> Historically, scholars have outlined Luke's concept of God in monographs on Luke's theology (Bock 2012: 99–148), while studies drawing on narrative criticism have focused on God as a character in the narrative of Luke and Acts.<sup>11</sup> Other scholars have discussed Luke's assertions about God in the context of statements on divine activity in ancient historiography,<sup>12</sup> with further studies concentrating on God in specific sections (e.g., in the birth narrative [Kamplung 1996], in the passion narrative [Haacker 2011] or in one of both parts of Luke-Acts<sup>13</sup>) or on different topics related to God (such as monotheism in Luke-Acts [Kezber 2007]), God's plan and its fulfilment,<sup>14</sup> or God's kingdom in Luke-Acts<sup>15</sup>. Other studies have focused on the metaphor "father" for God in Luke-Acts (Chen 2006), or on specific statements on God's activity (such as the resurrection of Jesus [Flebbe 2009]), or the claim that God has set times and seasons [Salmeier 2011]), as well as on the relationship of God and Jesus (Cifrak 2003).

This essay, however, takes another approach and focuses on those sections in which God is *explicitly* a topic of discussion. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke provides three discourses on God, his attributes, and his nature, and in what follows I will outline what these discourses – Stephen's apology (Acts 7:2–53), the account of Paul's and Barnabas' mission in Lystra (Acts 14:8–18), and the Areopagus speech (Acts 17:22–31) – reveal about the author's concept of God.<sup>16</sup> This essay argues that, although the wording in these sections is different, they nevertheless share a number of motifs, which makes them an argumentative series. A comparison with statements on and motifs connected to God throughout Luke-Acts will show that this

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10 For a brief overview on the history of research on Luke-Acts, see also Chen 2006: 2–7.

11 Brawley 1990; Vinson 2014; Eisen 2016.

12 Uytanlet 2014; Shauf 2015.

13 Bovon 1981; Green 1995: 22–49; Marguerat 2000.

14 Squires 1993; Moessner 1996; see further Bock 2012: 121–148.

15 Wolter 1995; Prieur 1996; Blumenthal 2016.

16 Such sections are relatively rare in New Testament writings. The reason, as Erich Gräßer has stated for the Pauline letters, is that God is the unquestionable precondition, but not the questionable issue of discussion, see Gräßer 1985: 179–180. This statement could be attributed to most of the authors of New Testament writings.

argumentative series engages ideas that are central for Luke's conception of God and that this series in fact provides a summary of that conception. Because the argument in Acts 7 (esp. vv. 39–50) can be better understood after an analysis of Acts 14:8–18 and 17:22–31, I will discuss Acts 7 as the last one of these three sections. In the course of the analysis, I will discuss Luke's statements before their backdrops in the Old Testament, in early Jewish as well as in pagan Greco-Roman literature.

## 2. Paul and Barnabas in Lystra and the difference between God and men (Acts 14:8–18)

The first text under discussion is the narrative of Paul's and Barnabas' mission in Lystra in Acts 14:8–18. After witnessing the healing of a man who had been unable to walk since his childhood, the astonished Lycaonians exclaimed, “the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” (v. 11), taking Barnabas for Zeus and Paul for Hermes (v. 12) with the intent of worshipping them (v. 13). Barnabas and Paul prevented the worship only with difficulty (v. 18), through a short speech that included a proclamation of the existence of a living God and his works (vv. 15b–17). After an opening address to the audience (v. 15b–c), the speech begins by asserting that Barnabas and Paul are mere men with the same emotions and desires as the Lycaonians (v. 15d). The adjective here, *ὁμοιοπαθής*,<sup>17</sup> refers to beings with the same feelings, and thus this argument implies that God is a being *different from man* insofar as God has no human feelings, needs, or desires. This idea – that God has no needs and therefore does not need service from man (i.e., a sacrifice) – is a common motif in the ancient philosophic tradition (see Jantsch 2017b: 498–500). In the Areopagus speech, this motif is used explicitly (see Acts 17:25; cf. implicitly in 7:48–50).

In the speech in Acts 14:15b–17, we find a call to turn away from “vain things” to God (v. 15α). “Vain things” (τὰ μάταια) is a common lexeme in the Septuagint designating the gods of the Gentiles as well as the statues depicting them.<sup>18</sup> The wording in Acts 14:15, therefore, draws on the polemics against “idols” in the Old Testament. According to this tradition,

17 See Wis 7:3; 4 Macc 12:13; see also James 5:17.

18 See, e.g., Lev 17:7; 1 Kgs 16:2, 13, 26; 2 Kgs 17:15; 2 Chr 11:15; Hos 5:11; Amos 2:4; Jer 8:19; Ezek 8:10.

idols are made of earthly materials, and instead of a deity, they depict animals (Isa 2:20) and men.<sup>19</sup> Nobody who trusts in them will find help;<sup>20</sup> rather, they will perish (Jer 2:5). Joining “vain things” as another pejorative designation of the gods of the Gentiles and their statues is εἰδωλα (or εἰδωλον).<sup>21</sup> Though it does not occur in Acts 14, Luke does use this lexeme in Acts 7:41 (referring to the Golden Calf) and 15:20. This polemic states that the idols are dead (Jer 16:18) and do not live;<sup>22</sup> that is, that they are powerless.<sup>23</sup> They are also deaf,<sup>24</sup> meaning that they do not hear prayers and cannot react to them. In sum, they are no deities,<sup>25</sup> and therefore it is foolish to worship them instead of the true God.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to turning *away from* “vain things”, the Lycaonians must, according to Acts 14:15εα, turn specifically *to* “the living God”. This call closely parallels Paul’s assertion in 1 Thess 1:9, with both texts showing that the call to turn *away from* the idols and *to* the one and true God is a common motif of the early Christian proclamation among Gentiles.<sup>27</sup> The formulation “the living God” (θεὸς ζῶν) appears in the polemics against the idols of the Gentiles. In the Septuagint and in texts from early Judaism, it refers to the God of Israel as the one and true God, who is the creator of the world and is, as such, opposed to weak and powerless idols.<sup>28</sup> This motif occurs regularly in Luke-Acts, such as when, in Acts 19:26, the silversmith Demetrius summarizes Paul’s proclamation in Ephesus, in which Paul allegedly proclaims that “gods made with hands are not gods”.

In Acts 14:15εβ, we encounter the motif of God as the creator of everything: “... the living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and

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19 Jer 10:3; Wis 15:8; cf. with εἰδωλα in Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 113:12; 134:15; Hos 8:4; Hos 13:2; Dan 5:4.

20 Jer 10:15; cf. Isa 44:9.

21 In the Septuagint, εἰδωλον/εἰδωλα is an equivalent for a number of Hebrew words, see Woyke 2005: 66–84.

22 Isa 37:19; Wis 15:15; Sir 30:19.

23 Isa 41:28; 48:5; Jer 14:22; Isa 30:22.

24 Hab 2:18; 3 Makk 4:16; JosAs 8:5–6.

25 Deut 32:21; cf. 1 Chr 16:26.

26 Deut 29:16; Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 96:7; Wis 14:11–12, 27, 30. Wis 13–14 provides a detailed discussion of the foolishness of pagan worship of idols.

27 See also Acts 11:21; 15:19; 26:18, 20.

28 See Jantsch 2011: 54–57 (with references from the Old Testament and early Judaism).

everything within them”. This formulation alludes to Ex 20:11 (see also Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 145:6), with the relative clause clarifying that God is the living one, *because* he is the creator of all things. This motif occurs regularly in Luke-Acts.<sup>29</sup>

Next, Acts 14:16–17 emphasizes God’s continuous caring for man rather than the initial act of creation. God did beneficial acts, giving rain and “fruitful seasons” to satisfy human “hearts with food and gladness”. That God’s beneficial acts for humans enable them to recognize the unseen deity who provides everything that man needs is a common motif in ancient philosophy and in early Judaism.<sup>30</sup> This idea can be traced back to Socrates, and it later became an element of different philosophic schools (Platonic, Stoic, Cynic; see Jantsch 2017b: 492–498) and influenced Hellenistic Judaism. The previous statement in vv. 16–17a requires more explanation: “<sup>16</sup> In past generations he (i.e., God) allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. <sup>17</sup> Yet he did not leave himself without witness . . .” The sentence “he did not leave himself without witness” (v. 17a) refers precisely to the aforementioned motif that God can be recognized through his beneficial deeds. The statement that God allowed the nations “to walk in their own ways” (v. 16) means that God’s patience and mercy<sup>31</sup> gave them the freedom to choose their way of living. Because this led them away from the living God, they are now confronted with the call to turn back to him.

As we have seen, the brief speech in Acts 14:15b–17 draws on traditional motifs known from the polemics against idols from the Old Testament and early Judaism. Furthermore, it has similarities to motifs common in ancient philosophy. Luke draws a number of conclusions from the assertion that God created the world: he is the living God in opposition to idols, and he is a being without human “feelings” (that is, without needs and desires),

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29 This is the case in the statement parallel to Acts 14:15 in the Areopagus speech (Acts 17:24), and it occurs elsewhere implicitly: the reference to Adam in the genealogy in Luke 3:23–38 (here v. 38), for example, refers to the Biblical creation story in Gen 2:4b–25 (esp. vv. 18–25). According to Luke 3:8 from the proclamation of John the Baptist, God is able to raise up children for Abraham even from stones, i.e., from inanimate matter, which is clearly an act of creation.

30 See, e.g., Cicero, *Tusc.* 1.68–70; Josephus *Contra Apionem* 2.190–192. These ideas trace back to Socrates, see, e.g., Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 4.3.3–18.

31 The motif of God’s mercy is an important theme in Luke-Acts, see Jantsch 2017a: 135–137.

which follows implicitly from the statement in 14:15d. Additionally, God can be perceived because of his beneficial acts for man. Numerous aspects of Acts 14:15b–17 are repeated in a clearer and more explicit way in Paul's Areopagus speech. Let us, then, progress to the discourse on God in Acts 17:22–31.

### 3. Paul in Athens and his proclamation of God's divinity (Acts 17:16–34)

In Paul's speech on the Areopagus (17:22–31), Luke provides another discourse on God. It is commonly accepted that Luke portrays Paul in this section with elements that remind the reader of Socrates, an eminent philosopher in Athens (see esp. vv. 19–20; see Jantsch 2017b). The Areopagus speech can be structured as follows. (i) After a *captatio benevolentiae* in v. 22 that underlines the Athenian's piety (a topos commonly connected to Athens),<sup>32</sup> the thesis of the speech is stated in v. 23: Paul has found an altar dedicated “to an unknown god” (ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ), and he will proclaim exactly this God whom the Athenians worship as unknown. Altars with the inscription “for unknown gods” (in the plural form!) did indeed exist in Athens.<sup>33</sup> (ii) In the following section (vv. 24–29), Paul makes a number of statements about God, which we shall discuss below in more detail. (iii) The final section (vv. 30–31) features a call for repentance, which is typical for the mission speeches in Acts. This section contains further relevant statements about God.

The basic idea of the thesis in v. 23 is that the Athenians, as pagans, cannot have a full understanding of God. It is Paul's proclamation that makes them know God. As has been discussed above, Luke regards the polytheistic worship of the pagans as a completely false understanding of God, a position that Paul corrects in the central section of the Areopagus speech (vv. 24–29). The first significant idea laid out in this speech is that God, as creator of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples and does not need any service of man (vv. 24–25) – God is completely self-sufficient.

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32 See Sophokles, *Oid. Col.* 260; Pausanias 1.24.3; Philostrate, *Vita Apoll.* 4.19–21 and even Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.130–131.

33 Pausanias 1.1.4; Philostrate, *Vita Apoll.* 6.3; Diog. Laert. 1.110. Pausanias 5.14.8 witnesses such an altar for Olympia. See van der Horst 1989; Börstinghaus 2002.

In what follows, Paul argues that God made all men from one ancestor (referring to Adam) and allotted times and spaces for living to the nations (vv 26–27). In contrast to Acts 14:17, the idea that God does beneficial acts for man is absent from the Areopagus speech; however, the reader would likely recall this motif here, because its connection to God’s direction of all nations had already been established in the Lystra speech (see Acts 14:16–17). Additionally, God’s care for man is a motif common to both early Judaism and the ancient philosophic tradition. This motif suggests, according to Acts 17:27 that humans ought to search for God, since he has cared for the nations by allotting them times and spaces for living.<sup>34</sup> This is, of course, more of a feeling (ψηλαφᾶν) for – rather than a clear recognition of – God. This assertion of “feeling” God refers back to the starting point of the speech: The Athenians developed an inaccurate understanding of God, which led them to worship him ignorantly at the altar for an unknown God (v. 23). The statement in Acts 17:27 finds its climax in the assertion that God “is not far from each one of us”. This indicates that God, although he is the creator of the universe (v. 24) and needs no service by human hands (v. 25), does not exist at an unattainable distance from man. What does this mean? From the narrative of the Gospel of Luke and the sections of Acts that precede the Areopagus speech, we learn, among other things, that God feels compassion for humans, that he gets involved in their fate, that he directs them, and that he forgives sins if they repent (see Acts 17:30). The God that Luke proclaims is a compassionate God. There is an open path of communication from man to God, as God can be addressed in doxology and in prayers. As Stephen’s apology in Acts 7 will show, however, Luke does not intend to suggest that there is a close “personal” relationship between God and *every single human* with respect to a continuous two-way communication. God can be reached by man’s prayers, but the communication from God to man is restricted to select persons such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Therefore it is important to understand the statement in Acts 17:27 in its strictest sense: Humans do not have a direct access to a full recognition of God; rather, they have a “feeling”.

The statement of God’s nearness to man in v. 27 demands the justification that follows in vv. 28–29. Here a passage from Aratos (*Phainomena* 5) is

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34 For the motif of allotting times etc., see Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 73:16–17; 147:3–6; Jer 5:22–24; see also Deut 32:8. See Eckey 2011: 401.



cited, stating that humans are of God’s offspring. This justifies the similarity between God and man, and therefore the deity is “not similar to gold, or silver, or stone, to an image formed by the art and imagination of man”. This is an argument by analogy, which assumes implicitly that because humans, as living beings, cannot be represented adequately with images and statues made from metals and stones, the same is true for God. In the philosophic tradition (and also in ancient Judaism), the similarity between God and man does not refer to the shape or to any aspect of materiality, but rather to the mind (νοῦς).

The discourse about God in vv. 24–29 clearly draws on motifs from the Old Testament and early Jewish traditions.<sup>35</sup> Just as in the speech to the Lycaonians, a number of basic ideas in the Areopagus speech can be traced back to Socrates, ideas that later became elements of different strands of philosophy (Platonic, Stoic, and Cynic).<sup>36</sup> Among those motifs known from Socrates are the idea that God is the creator of the world and that the existence of a creator can be deduced from an observation of nature. Although God is invisible, he can be recognized through his deeds, his care for mankind. It is the mind that connects man to God. Even polemical motifs against cultic worship can be traced back to Socrates: because of the nature of God, he argued, it is inappropriate to worship him with cultic acts as a substitute for virtuous living.

The last section of the Areopagus speech (vv. 30–31) continues this focus on God and his acts. The idea that God “overlooked the times of ignorance” (v. 30) means that he forgives sins, because he is patient and merciful. This is a belief that early Christianity shares with ancient Judaism.<sup>37</sup> It is a common ancient motif that “ignorance” absolves guilt.<sup>38</sup> As Acts 3:17;

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35 See the references, e.g., in Eckey 2011: 389–405 and Barrett 1998: 834–854.

36 See Jantsch 2017b: 490–503 (with literature).

37 The motif that God’s patience and his mercy are the reasons for his forgiveness of sins (without a special reference to sacrifices) is broadly confirmed in the Old Testament and in early Judaism, see Isa 43:3–4; 54:8; Ps 32:5; 38:5; 51; 79:9; 130; 143:1–2, 11; Esr 9:6–15; Neh 9:9–37; Dan 9:4–18; Dan<sup>LXX</sup> 3:26–45 (Prayer of Azariah); 1QS 10:9–11, 22; 4 Esr 8:36; *OrMan*; *JosAs* 12–13 and more texts. See von Stemm 1999: 54–243; Jantsch 2017a: 132–135. For Luke, God’s mercy is the reason for the forgiveness of sins (not Jesus’ death), see Jantsch 2017a: 95–140.

38 See Metzler 1991: 83–87, 306. See, e.g., Aristoteles, *Eth. Nic.* 1110b19; 1136a6–9; Demosthenes, *Or.* 45.7 (μηδὲν εἰδώς); 59.83; (ἐξαπατηθέντι); see also Alexander

13:27; 17:30 (see the context) show, the term “ignorance” (ἀγνοία, ἀγνοεῖν) refers to the misunderstanding – and therefore to the rejection – of Jesus and his mission, which originates in God. After Jesus has come, the times of ignorance are over; the proclamation of the Gospel brings them to an end. Therefore, God commands all people (that is, Jews and Gentiles) to repent *now*, since he has fixed a day on which his commissioned minister will judge the world in righteousness (referring to Jesus’ parousia at the end of the days). That he can command all nations to repent implies that God has authority over all people. God’s eschatological activity in the Christ event terminates the time in which sins shall be unconditionally “overlooked”. God gave the opportunity for salvation by means of repentance, and now there is no other way for man to be forgiven and, ultimately, saved. This position is justified by the statement in v. 31: God “has given assurance to all by raising him [i.e., Jesus] from the dead”. This takes up the motif that Jesus was raised from the dead by God’s activity, a motif that occurs regularly in Acts.<sup>39</sup>

In sum, Paul’s Areopagus speech provides a comprehensive overview of Luke’s concept of God. Because Paul’s audience in Athens consists of Gentiles, this speech resembles patterns of thought and motifs that are prominent in the ancient philosophic (particularly Socratic) tradition. The speech even cites a pagan author in 17:28 (see also the reference to the inscription on the altar in v. 23). Paul proclaims the nature of the God whom the Athenians unconsciously worship. The main point of his proclamation is that God, as the creator of the universe (v. 24), is completely self-sufficient and therefore does not need man’s sacrifices (v. 25). The statement of God’s nearness to man and of the similarities between God and humans in vv. 27–29 justifies the claim that God cannot be depicted in statues. The speech ends with God’s command to repent, which indicates that God has authority over all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. This idea refers back to the initial statements on God as the creator of the world.

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Aphrodisias, *Quaest.* 130.11–12; 1 Esr 8:72; Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 24:7; *JosAs* 13:9; 17:7; see also 12:5. Similar Philo, *Deus.* 134; *Vit. Mos.* 2.208 (ἀγνοία).

39 See Acts 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 37; see also Luke 9:22; 24:6, 34. According to Luke 20:37 and Acts 26:8, God has the ability to raise the dead. See also Flebbe 2009.

#### 4. Stephen's speech: The history of Israel as a history of God's actions and Israel's idolatry (Acts 7:2–53)

Stephen's speech in Acts 7:2–53 provides a number of parallels to the aforementioned speeches in Lystra (14:15b–17) and Athens (17:22–31). Additionally, Stephen retells the history of Israel as the interplay between God's action and Israel's reaction, which eventually resulted in Israel's idolatry.<sup>40</sup>

Stephen's apology can be structured as follows. After a solemn address (v. 2b–c), the speech focuses on Abraham (vv. 2d–8) and the Patriarchs, particularly Jacob and Joseph (vv. 9–16). The subsequent narration of Moses and Israel's fate in the wilderness (vv. 17–44) is the most detailed one in the apology. The topic of the "tent of witness" follows in a passage that summarizes very briefly the story of the settlement in Israel under Joshua before progressing suddenly to David and Solomon (vv. 45–47). The next section argues in detail that God does not dwell in temples (vv. 48–49). In the last section (vv. 51–53), the audience is accused of prosecuting the prophets just as their fathers did, the result being that they eventually became the murderers of the promised just one (that is, Jesus). In the following analysis, we will focus on aspects that concern Luke's concept of God.

The section on Abraham begins with the solemn designation "the God of glory" (Acts 7:2d). The *genitivus qualitatis* denotes δόξα as an attribute of God. In Luke-Acts, the noun θεός (or κύριος, or πατήρ, referring to God) and words from the semantic field δόξα, δοξάζειν occur regularly together.<sup>41</sup> In a number of cases, this combination results from the motif that God deserves honour, reverence, and worship.<sup>42</sup> In other cases, however, another semantic background of δόξα is relevant. In these cases, the glory and splendour of the heavenly world is described or at least indicated – a

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40 For the history of research of Stephen's speech in Acts 7, see Shin 2018.

41 See Luke 2:9, 14; 9:26; Acts 7:2, 55.

42 See Luke 2:14 (cf. also 19:38). God's glory is regularly referred to in (accounts of) prayers, see Luke 17:18 (δοῦναι δόξαν τῷ θεῷ), cf. Acts 12:23. For δοξάζειν τὸν θεόν (sometimes parallel to αἰνεῖν), see Luke 2:20; 5:25, 26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15; 18:43; 23:47; Acts 4:21; 11:18; 21:20. Furthermore, the people praised Jesus (Lk 4:15) and, according to Acts 3:13, God has glorified (ἐδόξασεν) Jesus. Additionally, δόξα denotes abundance of wealth (Lk 12:27) and earthly reign (Luke 4:6).

glory that can best be imagined as a blindingly bright light.<sup>43</sup> This meaning of δόξα as a bright light draws on the “theology of God’s glory” (*kābōd* or δόξα in LXX) in the Old Testament.<sup>44</sup> In the Septuagint, the Hebrew *kābōd* (often in the syntagm *k<sup>c</sup>bōd-yhwh*) is translated with the Greek equivalent δόξα. *kābōd* designates, inter alia, weight, honour, reverence. In narrations of theophanies, it designates God’s splendid glory.<sup>45</sup> In these texts, *kābōd* refers to a bright, fiery radiance,<sup>46</sup> which is so powerful that it frightens humans and even brings death.<sup>47</sup> In a number of cases, the presence of *k<sup>c</sup>bōd-yhwh* designates the presence of YHWH himself.<sup>48</sup> In Luke, this motif is applied to the magnificent God, who himself radiates a splendid glory and therefore deserves reverence and worship.

The motif of God’s glory provides the background for Acts 7:2, according to which “the God of glory” (ὁ θεὸς τῆς δόξης) appeared (ᾤφθη) to Abraham. This form of the verb ὀφᾶν occurs in Luke-Acts regularly when an angel appears to a human (see Luke 1:11;<sup>49</sup> Acts 7:30). Furthermore, it denotes the appearance of the risen Jesus (see Lk 24:34; Acts 13:31; 26:16) or a vision

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43 This is the case in the narratives on Paul’s conversion. According to Acts 22:6–11 (vv. 6, 11), a heavenly light (φῶς) occurred when Paul was nearby Damascus, and it was so bright that he could not see anything and was blinded. According to Acts 26:13, this light was brighter than the sun (see also Acts 9:3, 8). Exactly this light is indicated when Luke tells us that angels occur and the glory of the Lord (i.e., God, δόξα κυρίου) has shone around the shepherds in the nativity narrative (Luke 2:9). According to the narrative of Stephen’s martyrdom, he is filled with the Holy Spirit and sees “the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55) – i.e., he sees God’s heavenly throne room. A similar scene in which the splendour of the heavenly world occurs on earth is the narrative of Jesus’ transfiguration where Moses and Elijah occur (Luke 9:29–36, esp. vv. 29–32). This glory is also indicated in texts referring to Jesus’ way into the δόξα (i.e., into the heavenly world; see Luke 24:26) and the Parousia of the son of man from heaven (Lk 9:26; 21:27).

44 For the background of δόξα in the Septuagint, see Jantsch 2011: 325–328, for the use of δόξα in Luke-Acts, see Jantsch 2017a: 241–244. For the Hebrew Old Testament, see Westermann 1997.

45 See, e.g., Isa 6:3; Ps 29:3.

46 See Weinfeld 1984: 36, e.g., Ps 104:1–2; Hab 3:3–4.

47 Num 4:20; Deut 18:16; Ex 33:22–23. The motif of God’s splendid glory is particularly stressed in the Septuagint version of Isaiah (even in addition to the Masoretic text, see, e.g., Isa 4:2; 6:1; 30:18, 27), see Schwindt 2007: 37.

48 See Exodus 40:34–35; Ezekiel 1:27–28; 10:4, 18.

49 Luke 22:43(–44) is text critically doubtful.

(see Acts 16:9). As such, it expresses the appearance of the heavenly world within the world of humans.<sup>50</sup>

The appearance of God himself, however, is an extremely rare event in Luke's narrative. The "chronologically" first appearance of God takes place before Abraham (Acts 7:2). In this case, Luke describes the event *differently* than the narrative in Gen 12:1–3 (also in LXX), in which God *talked* to Abraham (that is, there is no visionary element indicated). This difference in contrast to the Biblical narrative in Gen 12 indicates Luke's interest in re-narrating the beginning of Abraham's story as a direct "calling" by God. In what follows, God talks to Abraham and foretells the history of the people of Israel up to the time of the settlement (Acts 7:6–7).<sup>51</sup> The last interaction between God and Abraham that Luke re-narrates is God's granting of the covenant of circumcision (7:8).

Luke tells us that only a very limited number of persons have experienced an "encounter" with God, either as a vision, or an audition. After Abraham (see also God's oath in Lk 1:73), it was only Moses (Acts 7:30–34), who experienced a divine audition, and after him it was David, whom God had sworn an oath (Acts 2:30). Additionally, Jesus is identified as the Son of God by God's voice in his baptism (Lk 3:22) and in the story of his transfiguration (Lk 9:34–36; besides Jesus, the audience are Peter, John and James [see 9:28]). The last account of a direct communication of God with a character of the narrative is Peter's vision in Acts 10:11–16 (re-narrated in Acts 11:5–10; the heavenly voice appears in 10:13, 15 and 11:7, 9). But except for these instances, nowhere else in Luke-Acts does God take up direct contact with humans. In any other case, if God wants to communicate with humans he sends a messenger (an angel), the Holy Spirit fills a person

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50 As Blumenthal 2016 has shown, the narrative world of Luke-Acts consists of two levels that exist simultaneously. These are the world of the humans, in which the narrative takes place, and the heavenly world, in which God, the angels and the risen Lord dwell. Only rarely does the second-level world appear within the earthly level of the narrative. This disruption of the earthly level of the narrative takes place when a messenger of God appears (an angel). Furthermore, Luke tells us that after Jesus ascended to heaven, he appears very occasionally at important points of the narrative, e.g. when Stephen, the first martyr, is stoned and has a vision of God's glory and Jesus standing at God's right hand (Acts 7:55–60), or when Jesus appears to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3–6 [see also the appearance before Hananias in 9:10–12]; 22:6–11 [and in 22:17–21 in the temple]; 26:12–18).

51 Acts 15:6–7 cites Gen 15:13–14, however, with many differences.

(see, e.g., Lk 1:67) or teaches someone (see, e.g., Lk 2:26), or a vision occurs without further explanation of the origin, or the Scriptures are the medium of God's communication.<sup>52</sup> This underlines the very special significance of Abraham, of Moses, of David, and of Jesus, whereas the point in Acts 10–11 is to emphasize God's own initiative of the Gospel proclamation to the Gentiles.

The following section of Stephen's speech briefly summarizes the stories of the patriarchs (Acts 7:9–16). God's activity during this period focused on Joseph. God "was with him",<sup>53</sup> and he "rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favour and wisdom", so Joseph eventually became ruler over Egypt.

We may skip to the detailed section on Moses (Acts 7:17–44). According to vv. 30–34, God spoke to Moses. Just as in the intertext from Exodus 3:1–4:17, in Acts 7:30 "an angel of God" appeared in the burning bush (see also v. 35!). From v. 31 onwards, however, Moses heard the voice of God who introduced himself in v. 32 as "the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob". This is a quotation from Exodus 3:6<sup>54</sup> and is partially taken up in Acts 7:46 with the reference to "the God of Jacob". This quotation points to an important theological topic for Luke. He regularly connects θεός with Israel's patriarchs (see Acts 5:30; 22:14; 24:14), especially with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (see Lk 21:37–38; Acts 3:13; 7:32). Particularly God's covenant with the patriarchs (Lk 1:72), especially with

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- 52 Luke provides a theory of inspiration in Acts 4:25, according to which God has spoken by the holy spirit through David (it follows a citation from Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 2:1–2). Similarly, the Holy Spirit has spoken through the Prophet Isaiah (Acts 28:25–26, citing Isa<sup>LXX</sup> 6:9–10). The citation from Joel 3:1–5 in Acts 2:17–21 is, according to v. 16, said "through" (διά with genitive) the prophet Joel, and Luke adds λέγει ὁ θεός in v. 17b, in addition to the text from the Septuagint, pointing to the fact that God himself is the author of these words. The same is true for the series of allusions in Acts 13:33–35. God speaks through the Scriptures to humans. This is, however, a mediated communication, whereas God's direct and unmediated communication is restricted to select persons, as explained above.
- 53 Luke tells us that God "was with" Jesus (Acts 10:38), who, anointed with the holy spirit by God, was empowered to exercise healings and exorcisms. According to Luke 1:66, the hand of the Lord (sc. God) was with John the Baptist.
- 54 These three patriarchs are mentioned together in a number of further texts from the Old Testament and from early Jewish literature, see, e.g., Gen 32:10; 35:27; 50:24; Ex 2:24; 6:3, 8; 33:1; Lev 26:42; Num 32:11; Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 29:12; 30:20; 34:4; 2 Kgs 13:23; Jdt 8:26; Tob 4:12; Bar 2:34; 2 Macc 1:2; *PrMan* 1:8.

Abraham (Acts 3:25), is in focus.<sup>55</sup> Stephen’s speech refers in detail to God’s covenant with Abraham (Acts 7:2–8, esp. v. 8) and reflects God’s history with the people of Israel.

These references to the patriarchs show convincingly that Luke emphasizes the continuity between the Biblical people of Israel and the early “Christians”. This continuity is based on the belief that the God who is proclaimed by the “Christian” messengers is the same one referred to by the narratives of the Old Testament. It is the God of the patriarchs and the God of Israel who has sent Jesus and who is the origin of the Gospel. In order to make this point, Luke’s re-narration of Israel’s past is particularly biased,<sup>56</sup> as will be discussed below.

The point in this passage is that God sent Moses as “ruler and redeemer” – in other words, *exactly* that man who had previously been rejected by the people (see vv. 17–29). The motif “the rejected man becomes ruler and saviour” resembles the story of Jesus as narrated by Luke. Like Moses, Jesus is an extraordinary prophet sent by God who is rejected by Israel but becomes ruler and saviour after his rejection. Exactly *this* makes him the promised “prophet like Moses” (Deut 18:15, cited in Acts 7:37). The fact that Luke cites or alludes to this passage (Deut 18:15–18) three times in total shows that this is an important motif in Luke’s Jesus narrative.<sup>57</sup> Peter Doble has justly claimed that the motif of the suffering just man who is justified by God is a basic motif of Luke’s Jesus narrative.<sup>58</sup> As Mary’s

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55 Additionally, in Paul’s speech in Antiochia in Pisidia (Acts 13:16–41), Luke states that God has chosen the patriarchs (Acts 13:17), then he progresses to re-narrate the history of Israel up to the time of John the Baptist and Jesus (13:17–25). Luke refers to God’s covenant with Israel as an “oath” sworn by God (Luke 1:73). Additionally, Luke mentions God’s oath to David that one of his descendants will sit on David’s throne (Acts 2:30).

56 This is even more the case if Acts 7 is compared with summaries of Israel’s history in ancient Jewish literature, as Wischmeyer 2006 has shown. See *ibid.*, at p. 355 (emphasis there): “It [Stephen’s speech] is, however, a *very particular representation of this* [i.e., of Israel’s] *history* which inserts the Deuteronomistic pattern into a new, Christian view of history.”

57 Deut 18:15–18 is also cited in Acts 3:22, and it is alluded to in Luke 9:35. See Jantsch 2017a: 271–272.

58 See Doble 1996. Doble refers to this motif as “Luke’s theology of the cross” (for a discussion of the wording, see Jantsch 2017a: 231) and claims that the motif of the justification of the rejected righteous one constitutes the sub-structure of Luke’s narrative of Jesus’ fate.

hymn, the *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46b–55), shows, such acts are typical of God, who brings down the proud, mighty people and lifts up the lowly ones (Lk 1:52). Jesus’ story, however, surpasses Moses, for Jesus is the Son of God and becomes the *heavenly* ruler, the saviour for all people – Jews and Gentiles – and the just judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42).

Acts 7:39–41 emphasizes the response of the people of Israel to the mercy God has historically shown toward Israel. This response is unbelief, rejection of God, and idolatry. Acts 7:41, for example, alludes to the Golden Calf (see Ex 32). This illegitimate goddess is referred to as the “idol” and the “works of their hands”, which evokes the motifs found in early Jewish polemics against pagan idolatry.<sup>59</sup> After this allusion, Luke departs from the Biblical narrative (Acts 7:42–43). He asserts that, in response to Israel’s idolatry, “God turned away from them and handed them over to worship the host of heaven” (v. 42a–b), which is supported by a citation from Amos 5:25–27.<sup>60</sup> This citation has two functions: First, the citation as a whole justifies the statement of Acts 7:42a–b and underlines the idolatry committed by the people of Israel in the wilderness. Second, the first sentence of the citation is significant for the argument that follows. The rhetorical question, “Did you offer to me slain victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?” (Acts 7:42d–e; Amos 5:25) primes the reader to recognize the original worship of Israel as a worship without sacrifices. This rhetorical question is supposed to be answered, “No, Israel *did not* sacrifice God during the forty years in the wilderness”. And indeed, in contrast to the implied Biblical narratives from Abraham onwards, Luke does not mention *any* sacrifice of the patriarchs, Moses, or Israel except for the illegitimate sacrifice to the Golden Calf (Acts 7:41). Instead of a temple tent with an altar for sacrifices (such as the one for Moloch, Acts 7:43a/Amos 5:26a), the fathers had the tent of the witness (Acts 7:44–46) that came into the land during Israel’s settlement under Joshua. This is, according to Luke’s re-narration, the only object related to Israel’s worship up to the time of David. This obviously contradicts the narratives from the Old Testament, which mention an altar and objects related to sacrifices.

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59 See the explanations above in Section 2 (p. 198). For the lexeme εἶδωλον/εἶδωλα, see Woyke 2005: 66–90.

60 This is the longest citation from Amos in the New Testament. For the text critical problem, see Klein 2006. (Additionally, Luke cites Amos 9:11–12 in Acts 15:16.)



It is nevertheless relevant how Luke *constructs* Israel's history in his re-narration, not what we might find in the narratives in our printed Bibles. In *his* re-narration, Luke claims that Israel's worship has originally been *without* sacrifices. That this claim contradicts the fact that there *was* a temple and that there *have been* sacrifices (a fact that Luke himself refers to<sup>61</sup>) is solved by the claim that *Solomon* was the one who erected the temple (Acts 7:47).<sup>62</sup> This rhetorical “trick” provides the opportunity to depict the temple (which includes its cult) as a deviation from the original worship of the patriarchs and of Israel until the time of David, since it was erected by the king who was (among others) known for his apostasy as a result of his devotion to foreign women.<sup>63</sup> Josephus tells us that Solomon therefore introduced unlawful inventions into Israel's worship.<sup>64</sup> That Luke regards this as a deviation from the original and pure worship becomes evident in what follows:<sup>65</sup> After an emphatic ἀλλά, set against Solomon's erection of

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- 61 See Luke 1:9–10 (Zechariah's incense offering); 2:24 (the offering of a pair of doves by Mary and Joseph after Jesus' birth, which is according to the “law of the lord”, 2:23; see also 2:27, 39); 5:14 (an offering for cleansing from leprosy, as Moses has commanded); 13:1 (pilgrims from Galilee offered sacrifices in Jerusalem and were slaughtered by Pilate); Acts 21:23–26 (Paul is told to take part in the purification offering for four Nazirites and to pay for it).
- 62 According to Acts 7:46, David asked to find a dwelling place for the house of Jacob, *not* for the house of God. This is again a contradiction to the Biblical narrative (see 2 Samuel 7; see also Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 131:5). This (intentional!) “error” of Luke was “corrected” in a number of manuscripts (see, e.g., A C and others, which read “house for God”, οἶκω θεῷ). The original text (which is referred to as the “harder reading” by Shin 2018: 497 n. 13) is, however, “house of/for Jacob” (οἶκω Ἰακώβ). The significance of this wording becomes even more obvious, if Acts 7:46 should indeed allude to Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 131:5, as Shin 2018: 511 suggests, which reads ξως οὐ εὐρω τόπον τῷ κυρίῳ, σκῆνωμα τῷ θεῷ Ἰακώβ. Shin concludes correctly that Luke's phrasing ἡτήσατο εὐρεῖν σκῆνωμα τῷ οἶκῳ Ἰακώβ “may well be intentional”. We ought to take Luke's change of the phrasing seriously. The “house of/for Jacob”, which Luke has in mind, might be Jerusalem – however, it is surely *not* the temple.
- 63 See 1 Kgs 11:1–13; Neh 13:25–27; Sir 47:19–20, 23; Josephus, *Ant.* 8.190–194.
- 64 According to Josephus, *Ant.* 8.195, Solomon committed unholy acts against the law (see 8.197: παρανοήματα) already before the idolatry in his last years. This refers to his innovations at the temple, namely the bronze oxen as a votive offering (ἀναθήματα; see 1 Kgs 7:25 and 2 Chr 4:4 [MT vs. LXX!]) and the lions around his throne, which were against the law. (In 8.80, however, Josephus refers to the same “oxen” as “calves” [see 2 Chr<sup>LXX</sup> 4:4] without any criticism.)
- 65 A positive interpretation of Luke's re-narration of Solomon's construction of the temple will *necessarily* result in a contradictory perspective on the argument in Acts 7:44–50 and Acts 7 as a whole, see, e.g., Shin 2018, who refers to Solomon's temple as “an ambivalent entity” (at p. 509, see also 510). The ambiguity can be solved by a strict

the temple, Luke declares that “the Most High does not dwell in things [sc. houses, temples] made by human hands” (οὐχ ὁ ὑψιστος ἐν χειροποιήτοις κατοικεῖ), a fact justified by the prophetic word from Isa 66:1–2.<sup>66</sup> For Luke, “the Most High” (ὁ ὑψιστος) is a prominent designation of God, as it occurs five (plus two times ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὑψιστος) in Luke-Acts.<sup>67</sup> Although the designation θεὸς ὑψιστος occurs on many inscriptions from the Roman Empire (Wischmeyer 2005), Luke’s use is derived from the Septuagint.<sup>68</sup> He applies the designation ὁ ὑψιστος exactly in contexts identical to those in the Septuagint: it designates God as creator,<sup>69</sup> as the one true deity, and as dwelling in heaven (Lk 2:14 [cf. 19:38]).

The statement that heaven is God’s throne and earth his footstool (Acts 7:49) is a metaphorical description of God’s magnificence resulting from the fact that he is the creator of all things (v. 50). As creator of all things, God needs no temple and, if we take into account the argument from Amos

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reading of Acts 7:44–50, in combination with other utterances on worship and temples in Acts, as it is proposed here.

- 66 There are a number of differences between Isa<sup>LXX</sup> 66:1–2 and Luke’s citation in Acts 7:49–50. It should be noted here that the impossibility of God’s dwelling in the temple is already reflected in Solomon’s prayer on the occasion of the consecration of the temple (see 1 Kgs 8:23–53, here in vv. 27–30, see also vv. 36, 39, 43, 45, 48–49). The solution of 1 Kgs 8 is that God’s *name* is present in the temple. See Jantsch 2017a: 263. The motif that God does not dwell in the temple is broadly attested to in early Jewish texts, see Faßbeck 2000: 90–99.
- 67 See note 8.
- 68 ὁ ὑψιστος refers to God in the narrative of Abraham’s encounter with Melkisedek, king of Salem, in Gen 14:18–24. In this text, “the God most high” (ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὑψιστος) is mentioned who created heaven and earth and who was with Abraham (vv. 18–20, 22). In 2 Sam 22:14 as well as in the Psalms (see, e.g., Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 7:18; 9:3; 12:6; 20:8), ὁ ὑψιστος occurs in parallel with κύριος. Additionally, it becomes clear that God dwells in the heaven. The motif that God dwells in heaven is a common motif in the Old Testament (e.g., Isa 14:14; 57:15) and is particularly prominent in the Psalms (e.g., Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 17:14; 90:1; 148:1). In the Greek version of the Book of Daniel, κύριος ὁ ὑψιστος regularly renders the syntagm “God of the heavens” (‘*lah šemayyā*’), e.g. Dan<sup>LXX</sup> 2:18, 19, and many other instances). In other instances, ὁ ὑψιστος occurs without any further explanation (see Num 24:16). According to Deut 32:8, the Most High set the boundaries of the nations – a topic that Luke will apply later in the Areopagus speech (Acts 17:26; cf. 14:16). God as “the Most High” is king over the whole earth (Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 46:3; 82:19), and no one else is comparable to him (Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 70:19), as he is exalted above all gods (Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 96:9). In ancient Jewish texts, ὁ ὑψιστος becomes a very prominent name of God, e.g. in 3 Esr 2:3; 6:30 and more instances; Judit 13:18; Tobit 1:4, 13; 4:11; 2 Macc 3:31; 3 Macc 6:2; 7:9; Wis 5:15; 6:3; Sir 4:10; 7:9, 15; PsSal 18:10; Arist 37, and many further instances.
- 69 See the continuation in Acts 7:48–50, see also Luke 1:35.

5:25 in Acts 7:42d–e, he needs no sacrifices.<sup>70</sup> This is *exactly* the argument found in the Areopagus speech (Acts 17:24–25), while the speech in Lystra (Acts 14:15) implicitly provided the same argument.<sup>71</sup>

In Acts 7:(39–41) 42–50, Luke argues that God, as creator of the world, is self-sufficient and therefore needs neither temple nor sacrifices. In order to reach this conclusion, Luke re-narrates the history of Israel in a way that contradicts the narratives of the Old Testament – only *his* version of Israel's past supports his argument. Why is Luke doing that? The first reason for this strategy is that Luke writes from a perspective after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. The temple no longer existed, having been destroyed by Titus. In Acts 7:(39–41) 42–50, however, Luke claims that the temple *has never been* a house “suitable” and appropriate to God. In light of the narrative in Luke and Acts, it is nevertheless a holy place – namely, as a house of *prayer* (Luke 19:46; see also Tischler 2016). Israel's worship with sacrifices in the temple is, therefore, even set in close proximity to Israel's illegitimate sacrifices to the Golden Calf (Acts 7:39–41, 42–50). There is a second reason for Luke's argument: the line of thought running through the speeches in Acts 7; 14 and 17 shows that Luke regards the early Christian's worship with neither sacrifices nor temple as the realization of the true worship that is appropriate to God's quality of a completely self-sufficient being.

In Stephen's speech in Acts 7:2–53, Luke provides a selective and very biased summary of Israel's history. Within this summary, two persons stand out to whom God appeared: Abraham and Moses. God gave Israel guidance and everything that the people needed. God has always demonstrated his commitment to his promises to the patriarchs. Israel, however, refused to worship this God exclusively. Luke transforms the Deuteronomistic motif of Israel's guilt into a theory of deterioration from the origins: namely, the unhindered interaction between God and Abraham. This deterioration culminates in Solomon's erection of the temple, which includes its cult. According to Stephen's speech, the worship in the temple resembles Israel's original sin of the worship of the Golden Calf in the wilderness, since the creator of the world does not dwell in temples made by human hands.

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70 This argument traces back to the prophetic polemics against a cultic worship of God without doing justice, see, e.g., Micah 6:6–8 (LXX θεὸς μου ὑψίστος vs. MT).

71 See Section 2 (p. 198).

## **5. Conclusions: Luke's concept of God in the light of explicit references to God in discourses in Acts**

This essay argued that Acts 7:2–53; 14:8–18; 17:22–31 comprise an argumentative series, because these sections are linked by the same set of motifs, albeit with different wording. In these passages, Luke provides a coherent summary of his concept of God, as many motifs connected to God from Luke-Acts are recapitulated here. We have seen that Luke's statements about God also draw on motifs that are common in the Old Testament and in early Jewish literature. Furthermore, ancient philosophy (particularly of "Socratic" origin) forms a significant background to his assertions about God. From the assertion that God is the creator of the world, Luke draws a number of conclusions. In the Lystra speech, this motif results in the rejection of worship of the apostles who are mere humans. The deity proclaimed is the living God, who is opposed to idols. In the Areopagus speech, the philosophic motif of the similarity between God and man demonstrates that God cannot be depicted by idols.

Another important topic is God's self-sufficiency. Luke argues that God does not need any sacrifices and that he does not dwell in temples built by humans. In Stephen's speech, Luke radicalizes this idea and likens Israel's cultic worship in the temple to the idolatry of the Golden Calf. This shows Luke's strong post-70 CE perspective, formed after the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed.

In the Lystra and the Areopagus speech, Luke stresses God's mercy and patience. God can be perceived by means of his beneficial acts for men. The Areopagus speech culminates in the claim that God commands every human, Jews and Gentiles, to repent. This results from the conviction that God is the creator of the world and therefore of all people on earth.

The last speech in this argumentative series in Acts, Paul's Areopagus speech (Acts 17:22–31), shows that Luke considers the worship of the early Christians to be the realization of a "philosophic" image of God. A worship with neither sacrifices nor a temple – let us say, a "spiritual" worship – is the appropriate response to God as a self-sufficient, transcendent, spiritual and perfect being that is completely different from every mortal being on earth.

One last word is necessary about an aspect completely absent from the argumentative series on God in Acts. This is the motif of God as “father”, which is very prominent in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>72</sup> Significantly, this designation is rare in Acts. However, it occurs in a very prominent section in the beginning of Luke’s second “volume” (Acts 1:4, 7; 2:33) – namely, in the context of the commission of the apostles by the risen Jesus and the beginning of the Gospel proclamation in Jerusalem. It is likely that the reader is supposed to transfer this specific aspect of the concept of God from the Gospel of Luke into the Acts of the Apostles. However, the designation “father” is absent, as the narrative progresses into the world of the Gentiles. The reason for its omission might be that “father” was a typical designation of Zeus as well as of other deities and has been an element of the Roman Emperor cult (see Zimmermann 2007: 64–74). Luke apparently intended to avoid such connotation

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72 See above, n. 6.

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