

“Recognizing the Gods (Acts 14:8-10),” Rick Strelan, *New Testament Studies* (2000): 488-503.

Little attention is given to the stare and the loud voice of Paul in the healing of the cripple in Acts 14:8-10. Strelan examines these two actions and argues that they explain how the Lystrans recognized that “the gods have come down” in Paul and Barnabas.

Strelan’s thesis is that there was something “off” in Paul that helped the locals to identify and acclaim him as a god. He draws out four dominant clues: (1) *Paul was a stranger*. In Greek antiquity, strangers were often associated with strange occurrences in the community. (2) *Paul stared at the lame man*. Strelan believes that Paul stares because he is possessed or infused with the living God (Acts 14:15). In this stare, Paul experiences and demonstrates paranormal vision and this is what attracts the attention of the locals. The Lystrans assume that this indicates he is possessed with the passions of the gods. (3) *Paul spoke in a loud voice*. Strelan spends the most time on this point. He insists that in Greek and Latin literature, the loud voice can be a sign that the speaker is either possessed by the gods or seeking to be in touch with the divine through prayer and invocation. He also argues from Jewish literature that there can be an explicit link between the loud voice and the spirit of God or the spirit of those involved. He also observes that there are instances where the loud cry is closely related to an intense Spirit-filled experience or vision. Finally, Strelan argues from early Christian literature that Paul’s loud voice is a telltale sign to the Lystrans that he is possessed by a god or is a god in human form. It also highlights Luke’s desire to portray Paul as being a chosen vessel of God. (4) *Paul commanded the lame man to stand to his feet*. Strelan states that it would seem without exception the command is given in the context of holy figures and holy actions. It is ultimately the command of God and there can be only the response of obedience.

In many ways, Acts 14:8-10 is a unique episode in the NT. It is the only occasion on which an apostle heals without any apparent calling on the name of Jesus. Apart from the healing of Lazarus, it is also the only recorded instance in which a healer uses a loud voice and combines staring with a loud voice. This should warrant a close treatment of this account.

This article should be a welcomed read for a more academic audience. Several times, Strelan makes the point that most commentators, with the exception of German scholars, ignore the clues that he

has analyzed. This should be a reminder to every Bible student that the biblical text must be read carefully paying attention to each and every detail. This article challenged and convicted me to think through God's Word as deeply and frequently as possible. It also persuaded me that Strelan is correct in the significance he places upon the above details. While I would not have previously alluded to his insights in my preaching, time permitting, I will likely do so in the future.