

# A socio-historical study of the meaning and implication of salvation in Acts 16

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this to the memory of two women who affected my life in unique ways. Their death within a year of each other during the course of this research impacted me profoundly, to near despair. They were both faithful followers of Jesus Christ and faithful witnesses in their communities.

**Late Mama Sarah Awashima Igba**, (died, Nov 2015). She never had the opportunity to gain a formal education, but ensured that each and every one of her 11 children received a formal education, at a great cost to her in so many ways. She was the first to take me to school and the first to introduce me to the stories of the Bible. Her final words still echoes: “*Mo mngu u Yesu, u hiden jime nguga*” meaning, “I belong to the Lord Jesus, there is no turning back.”

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## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Mr JT Igba	PhD student, responsible for the research concept, design and methodology, literature study, textual analysis, the research process and conclusion. Authored all articles
Prof. Dr RS Hobyane	Chief promoter, critical reviewer of the study
Prof. Dr. HG Stoker	Co-promoter, critical reviewer of the study

## **DECLARATION**

I, Jacob Terhemba Igba, hereby declare that this study was conceived, planned and carried out as an independent research work by me and that my role in this study complies with what is described above.

**JTI**

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**Jacob Terhemba Igba**  
**30.05.2018**

## ABSTRACT

The importance of an engagement with the Biblical text through methodological frameworks that speak to the context of African theologians and Christians, while also taking into consideration the centrality of Scripture is essential to this research.

In this study, salvation is studied as it appears in Acts 16 through a combination of exegetical analysis and the socio-historical method to draw implications for the African context. The Socio-historical method in particular led to the identification and establishment of contextual similarities between the African and Greco-Roman contexts.

The research argues that salvation is a spiritual intervention with possible physical ramifications. In Acts 16, Luke demonstrates this as the “setting at liberty” of the slave girl from the oracular burden of the πνεῦμα Πύθωνα (*python spirit*) and economic exploitation. He also shows salvation to be freedom from the fear of death such as expressed by the Philippian jailer. The jailer and the slave girl’s need for salvation that was met, was both spiritual and temporal. This definition is in line with the salvation mission of Jesus in the fourth chapter of Luke’s Gospel. The definition speaks directly to the worldview of Luke’s actual, authorial and narrative audiences. It also speaks to the worldview of Africans.

The research concludes that based on Acts 16, salvation does not come from the Greco-Roman Θεός Ὑψίστος (*Theos upsistos* – most high god), nor from other gods. It is not obtained by offering any sacrifices, but comes from invoking and believing in the name of Jesus. This is a new concept for Greco-Romans and Africans because ‘the Lord Jesus’ is not listed in their pantheon of deities. It is new to every culture where the message of salvation advances and encounters pre-existing notions about the meaning and means of salvation.

**Key words:** *Acts 16; salvation in Acts 16; socio-historical; Greco-Roman salvation; African context; python spirit.*

## OPSOMMING

Die dryfkrag vir hierdie navorsing spruit uit 'n besef van die noodwendigheid daarvan om met die Bybelse teks om te gaan deur middel van metodologiese raamwerke wat spreek tot die konteks van Afrika-teoloë en Christene, terwyl die sentraliteit van die Skrif terselfdertyd behou word.

In hierdie studie word redding bestudeer soos dit na vore kom in Handeling 16 met behulp van die sosiohistoriese metode om sodoende afleidings te maak vir die Afrika-konteks. Die metode stel die navorser in staat om die kontekstuele raakpunte tussen die Afrika- en Grieks-Romeinse kontekste te identifiseer.

Die navorsing argumenteer dat redding 'n geestelike intervensie is met moontlike fisiese gevolge. In Handeling 16 wys Lukas dit deur die vrystelling van die slawemeisie van die duistere las van die πνεῦμα Πύθωνα (*slanggees*) en van ekonomiese uitbuiting. Hy wys ook dat redding vryheid van die vrees vir die dood bring, soos wat die Filippiese tronkbewaarder toon. Die tronkbewaarder en die slawemeisie se nood aan redding was beide geestelik en temporaal. Hierdie definisie hou verband met die reddingsmissie van Jesus in die vierde hoofstuk van Lukas se Evangelie. Die definisie spreek ook tot die wêreldsiening van Lukas se werklike gehoor. Dit spreek verder tot die wêreldsiening van Afrikane.

Die navorsing bevind dat Handeling 16 leer dat redding nie kom van die Grieks-Romeinse Θεός Ὑψίστος (*Theos upsistos* – hoogste god) of van die ander gode nie. Dit kom ook nie as die resultaat van offers nie, maar eerder uit die aanroep van en geloof in die naam van Jesus. Dit is 'n nuwe konsep vir beide Grieks-Romeinse en Afrika-lesers, want “die Here Jesus” is nie gelys in hulle panteon van gode nie. Dit is nuut vir elke kultuur waar die boodskap van redding versprei word en waar die boodskap voorafopgestelde idees oor die betekenis en middele tot redding teëkom.

**Slutelwoorde:** *Handeling 16; redding in Handeling 16; sosiohistories; Grieks-Romeinse redding; Afrika-kon*

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# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Personal interest, Preface and Synopsis**

### **1.1.1 Personal interest**

My involvement in the ministry of the Gospel across denominations in my native Nigeria and some other parts of Africa for over two decades exposed me to the reality and state of African Christianity. Coupled with my recent study in theology and Christology in Africa (Igba, 2013), I can attest to the fact that Christianity is showing an impressive level of growth in this non-Western part of the world. In some ways this is similar to the events described in the book of Acts. The Biblical message of salvation, which is at the core of the Christian faith, is advancing. During this advance, the message and meaning of salvation is encountering various pre-existing and non-Christian cultures, views, understandings and even challenges.

The above exposure and understanding compelled a study of this nature, which in my view touches on an aspect of Christian theology that is crucial not only for Africa, but for any culture or community that encounters the Christian message of salvation or engages with it.

### **1.1.2 Preface**

This research project bears in mind the need for scholarly contribution, knowledge production, and increased research output. It therefore follows the article format. The thesis is made up of seven chapters, 5 of which are conceptualised as publishable articles while the other two chapters introduce and conclude the study. The final chapter summarises and draws overall conclusions and offers recommendations for future studies. Because this research is designed as a single thesis of various publishable journal articles that are to stand alone and be published in different journals, overlapping material or similar ideas may be noticeable in places. Where there is such occurrence, the purpose could be either to restate, reiterate, or summarise a previous premise or foundational argument upon which a new conclusion is being reached. Because all the articles that make the sum total of this thesis are not aimed for a single journal publication but various, such recapitulations have therefore become necessary in order to maintain the overall connectedness and cohesiveness of the thesis.

The driving force for this PhD project stems from a realisation of the need for engagement with the Biblical text and Christian theology in a manner that speaks to the theological framework of African theologians and Christians, while keeping in view the global nature of Christianity.

At the time of submission for examination, three of the articles had been accepted and published, while one is accepted for publication and undergoing final revision based on the comments of the journal editor. The fifth article is undergoing publication review.

### **1.1.3 Synopsis**

**CHAPTER 1:** Research focus, research design and general introduction

**CHAPTER 2:** Analytical investigation into African theology and Biblical studies, outlining the difficulty and complexity of definitions and methodological frameworks as the African theological endeavour seeks to make unique African perspectival contributions

**CHAPTER 3:** Identifying the socio-historical method and proposing it as a suitable interpretive methodological framework

**CHAPTER 4:** Exegetical and analytical exploration of the meaning of Salvation in Acts 16 as a necessary component in identifying critical interlocutors that point to the meaning of the text

**CHAPTER 5:** Exemplification of the use of the socio-historical method in approaching the text of Acts 16

**CHAPTER 6:** The results from interrogating the Acts 16 text and possible implications of the result for African Christianity

**CHAPTER 7:** Research summary, conclusion and recommendation

## **1.2 Clarification of terms**

Traceable to Shirley Jackson Case (1872-1947)<sup>1</sup> and others of the famed Chicago School of Theology in the origin of its usage in the field of Biblical studies, the socio-

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<sup>1</sup> W. J. Hynes, (1981) Shirley Jackson Case and the Chicago School: The Socio-Historical Method. 36-43.

historical method referred to in this research stems from, but should not be confused with the socio-scientific method, where the interpretive task is executed using modern sociological interpretive grid or theories without sufficient sensitivity to the culture and context of the first century.<sup>2</sup> The socio-historical method utilised in this research follows Meeks (2003:2-7) who defines socio-historical study of the New Testament as an interpretive approach that takes the first century social world of the early Christians and the Biblical text seriously, in order to “construct interpretation and to criticise constructions.” The research therefore utilises the Socio-historical framework described by Meeks (1983), Malherbe (1983), and demonstrated by De Klerk and Van Rensburg, (2005) and Janse van Rensburg (2009). It considers the first century context and events that underlie the Biblical text as important to understanding the meaning of the text. It guards against marginalising those events as “background” that is detached from the search for meaning<sup>3</sup>.

### **1.3 The need for the present study and justification for a focused study of Acts**

#### **16**

The aim of this research is to carry out a focused study on the meaning and implications of salvation in Acts 16. Salvation is a concept that is prevalent in all religions. However, the understanding of what it means remains as varied as there are various religions.

In early Christianity, the message of salvation occupied a central place, such centrality can be seen in virtually all the books of the New Testament; furthermore, the centrality of an understanding of salvation remained foundational towards the self-definition and identity of early Christians. Because Christianity did not exist in a vacuum, it was critical that the Christian message of salvation was contextualized in language, imagery and metaphors that was familiar to the early Christians, so that they could properly grasp their new reality and identity (Van der Watt, 2005:1-2).

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<sup>2</sup> Osiek, C (1989) In “The New Handmaid: The Bible and the Social Sciences,” *Theological Studies*, 50(2), pp. 260–278 gives a detailed sketch of the historical development and background of the Socio-historical method. Though there has been further developments ever since, her overview serves to present an important view on the historical origins of the method and its usage within the field of Biblical studies.

<sup>3</sup> For further examples of the usage of this method as described here, see Botha, 1990; Van Rensburg, 2000; See especially the extensive multi-volume commentary on Acts by Keener (2012-2015), which utilises socio-historical data.

Such an understanding of what salvation means remains important in present day Christianity. This understanding is especially important within African Christianity where the Christian faith is definitely not growing in a vacuum, but confronted by pre-existing, non-Christian traditional religions and various cultural and neo-cultural understanding of what salvation entails. Could the word “salvation” from a Biblical perspective carry a different connotation or meaning in such contexts, or can we assume a general similarity in the perceived meaning of salvation?

Acts 16 seems most suited to answer the driving concern of this research and merits a focused study for a number of reasons. Apart from the thread of “salvation” that runs through the narrative, Acts 16 occupies a pivotal place in the entire Acts narrative as marking the beginning of the advance of the message of salvation into a more Gentile and less Jewish territory. This move into new territory was in response to a vision of the Macedonian man who cried out to Paul for help. As Bock (2007:528) rightly observes, considering the biblical fact that a cry for help as indicated by “βοήθησον” could mean a cry for salvation (Gen. 49:25; Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:26; Ps. 9:35 LXX [10:14 Eng]; Isa. 41:10), what the Macedonian man was crying out to Paul could be for Paul to bring the message of salvation.

Worthy of note is the fact that from Acts 16 onwards, Paul enters and encounters a Gentile culture and a different socio-historical climate in comparison to his previous encounters and experiences in the course of advancing the message of salvation. The fact that the narrative context is Greco-Roman makes it highly likely that a word like salvation may carry a very different meaning than it would in a usually majority Jewish context. Acts 16 forms a framework for how the narrative aim of Luke-Acts, which is to show God's purpose of bringing the fullness of his salvation to all men, plays out (Green & McKeever, 1994; Martin & Davids, 1997). This purpose of salvation to all plays out in the fact that the church, going forward from the point of Acts 16, grew and became more Gentile than Jewish, confirming the foray of the Christian faith into non-Jewish cultural contexts. In Acts, the shape and the identity of the people of God has become more and more multicultural and diverse than monoculture and Jewish, and Acts 16 contributes to the unlocking of this new identity for the people of God.

Without a doubt, an understanding of the meaning of salvation from the perspective of the multicultural nature of Acts 16 will add immense value to the understanding and

appropriation of the Biblical meaning of salvation within African Christianity where the Christian message is advancing and encountering various understandings of the meaning of salvation.

#### **1.4 Problem statement and substantiation**

The narrative unity of Luke to Acts has been variously affirmed and demonstrated (Cadbury, 1927; Tannehill, 1986; 1990; Borgman, 2006). This is not to say that the consensus has not been challenged, as can be seen in Gregory and Rowe's, (2010) *Rethinking the Unity and Reception of Luke and Acts*.<sup>4</sup> What this implies is that an interpretation of Acts 16, like the one this study is embarking upon, should take place in light of its counterpart, the Gospel component. This, however, does not discount from an exploration of Acts on its own terms, especially considering the stronger narrative thrust in Acts despite the Luke–Acts coherence. The need to pay closer attention to the book of Acts using a variety of tools and methods becomes more apparent when engaging a specific narrative unit such as Acts 16 in this case.

Conzelmann (1960) in his important work, *Die Mitte der Zeit*,<sup>5</sup> contributed significantly to determining the interpretative direction for Luke–Acts. He not only applied new methods, but also presented the use of these new methods (Bovon, 2006; Green, 2010). By applying the redaction-critical method, Conzelmann challenged the prevalent view of Luke as a historian and concluded that Luke was a theologian who functioned as such by purposefully replacing the early church theology of an imminent *Parousia* proclaimed by Mark. In his view, Luke propounded a salvation history instead, which would change Luke's theme to salvation history. As important as his thesis was, he did not press further with an exploration of what salvation actually means. He did offer though, that salvation has two aspects, from above and from below. Even though subsequent scholars have upturned his conclusions, what Conzelmann achieved was setting up the interpretive agenda for approaching Luke–Acts. Scholars started either from a similar premise or from an opposite premise to him.

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<sup>4</sup> Parsons, M.C. & Pervo, R.I. 1993 In *Rethinking the unity of Luke and Acts* remained prominent in the debate before Rowe revisited it. See also Bird, M.F. 2007. The unity of Luke–Acts in recent discussion. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, (29):425–448.

<sup>5</sup> The title of Conzelmann's work is translated as "The theology of St. Luke" in English, even though the German literally means 'the middle of time.'

Marshall (1971:116 & 157) argues that salvation is the main theme of Luke's writings, and that contrary to Conzelmann, Luke was both a historian and a theologian. He summarises Luke-Acts under the broad ideas of: God as Saviour (chapter 5), Jesus as the one who accomplishes God's salvation (chapter 6), apostles as the witnesses of this salvation (chapter 7), and people as the recipients of God's salvation (chapter 8). Marshall appears to think that Luke wanted his readers to know that Jesus came "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10) and that the means of salvation is to "believe in Jesus" (Acts 3:38)<sup>6</sup> Though Marshall defers to some broad range explanations of what salvation entails<sup>7</sup>, the focus of his thesis was not essentially to define what salvation is, but to rather refute Conzelmann by establishing that Luke was both a credible historian as well as a theologian whose aim of writing was not just Salvation-history, but centrally about salvation. As such, a narrowed down focused meaning was not in his purview.

Majority of Lukan scholars are agreed on the fact that the theme of salvation in Luke stands out as unique compared to Mark and Matthew for instance. His emphasis on salvation and the sustenance of the same theme throughout the Lukan material is largely agreed upon. From the start of his Gospel, Luke articulates the key theme of 'salvation' and the universal scope of the saving work of God (Green, 1989; 1998; Fitzmyer 1981; Marshall 1998; Richard 1990;1983) Salvation as the key theme in Luke-Acts is therefore hardly in dispute. The meaning of what it actually is and how it should be understood in varying contexts however, remain contested. A more specific and focused study that seeks not just to address the question of the existence of the theme, but focused on the meaning is still needed.

An effort towards not mainly asserting the prevalence of the theme of salvation, but also explicating the meaning can be representatively seen in the works of Powell (1992) and Steyn (2005). In a departure from asserting or disputing the prevalence of the Salvation theme in Luke-Acts, Powell (1992) stands out as a key attempt at fleshing out what is salvation in Luke-Acts. Powell makes a significant contribution towards defining what Luke meant by Salvation though not exhaustively. He offers that '*Salvation in Luke-Acts means participation in the reign of God*'. He elaborates further on his definition by outlining 3 aspects that makes up his definition. According to him, the import of the

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<sup>6</sup> See Mchunu, L.N. (2013) for a critical evaluation of Marshall, Conzelmann and Jervell on Salvation in Luke-Acts

<sup>7</sup> Green, 1965:125;

definition is that salvation could be present/future, introduction of positive/removal of negatives and thirdly, no distinction between physical, spiritual or social. The third aspect of his definition becomes problematic as we shall see later. On the basis of salvation in Luke-Acts, Powell mentions Acts 20:28 in passing and makes nothing of it, he moves on it appears, in deference to the view that Luke does not expound any theory of salvation through Jesus's atoning death on the cross. He hesitates to view salvation as Christological and involving Jesus' atoning death on the cross. Though salvation is 'sometimes linked to Jesus', salvation is 'of God' Powell maintains. Though he accedes that salvation is mediated through the name and person of Jesus, he does not attribute it to Jesus' atoning sacrifice. Powell fails to account for the Pentecost address where Peter says, '*This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up....*' (Acts 2.23f); along with Acts 3:12-15, 5.30, 10.39 and 20:28. Perhaps Powell would have seen at the least, the possibility of Christological salvation in Luke-Acts involving Jesus' death on the Cross. We shall return to this at a later stage.

Steyn (2005) does not provide a direct definition as Powell does above; rather, he makes an interesting surmising (Following Marshall, 1998; 1984) and identifies the realm or stretch which salvation in Luke's Gospel stretches into. According to him, Jesus' soteriological work in Luke's Gospel operates along two major lines as follows:

*a) Restoration of physical and mental health and well-being, i.e. the well-being of the physical body. He is the "physician" who, through healings, exorcisms and resurrections, restores the physical body to a previous or to an ideal physical state.*

*b) Spiritual restoration to an ideal spiritual state through the forgiveness/redemption of sins, through atonement and by entering the kingdom to eternal life. This spiritual sense of restoration is clearly present in Matt 1:21 and Mark 10:26, but is most prominent in Luke.*

The observation by Steyn (2005) above which we shall engage much more with at a later stage advances the discussion significantly by way of making the broad range of Lukan salvation clearer and more concise. He follows the observation with a detailed exegetical analysis but limits the investigation more to Luke than a focused attention with how his observation gets fleshed out in Acts, if it does. Understandably, this

limitation is presumably in keeping with the limitation of space allotted to his contribution in the series.

Van Zyl (2005) provides a perspective that is pertinent and focused on the soteriology of Acts. Though he does not provide a singular or concise definition of the meaning of Salvation in Acts, he diligently elaborates what the meaning of salvation entails. His contribution of a Christological perspective to the debate on Salvation in Luke-Acts presents a unique angle that is worth engaging with as we hope to do in the chapter that follows.

As noted with the work of Van Zyl (2005) above, there has been a growing evidence of a focused approach on the text of Acts, though in relation to Luke but on its own terms. There has been an increase in the utilisation of new approaches to Acts in addition to the conventional exegetical modes of analysis. These approaches tend to focus on the Acts component specifically. Neyrey (1991) in *The social world of Luke–Acts: Models for interpretation*, highlights various approaches by scholars who pay more attention to an analysis of the social world of the text. Also, the multi-volume work (5 volumes), *the book of Acts in its first century setting* edited by Winter, (1993) which aims to explore the historical and social context of Acts adds to the evidence of new approaches<sup>8</sup>. The stage has been set for exploring the book of Acts from newer angles.<sup>9</sup> The use of these methods may or may not lead to the same interpretive results reached when using the established interpretive paradigms.

## 1.5 The problem

When the slave girl in Acts 16 proclaims that, “these men are the servants of the most high God who have come to show a way of salvation”, an understanding of the general Greco-Roman and her particular socio-historical situation raises the question as to the meaning of the “salvation” that she speaks about. Similar questions come to mind when one considers the Philippian jailer’s question, “What must I do to be saved?” Is it

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<sup>8</sup> This research notes the extensive multi-volume commentary on Acts by Keener (2012-2015) which utilises socio-historical data. At present, Keener’s work remains the only commentary that evidences extensive attention to socio-historical data in the interpretive task of Acts. Understandably, though sensitive to African perspectives, it does not answer questions that directly relate to the African perspective from Acts 16.

<sup>9</sup> Green (2010) in *Methods for Luke* also highlights a number of approaches recently employed in approaching Luke–Acts. This includes historical criticism, feminist criticism, narrative criticism and a Latino perspective.

possible that their understandings of “salvation” differ from the Lukan salvation theme? These questions does not seem to be sufficiently examined in the surveyed works above

Among African theologians, Mbiti (1986:134) points out that even though the term salvation frequently occurs in talks, writings and preaching in African Christianity, a critical and careful study of salvation remains lacking. The term is very important, but not sufficiently engaged by African theologians. Even though Mbiti’s (1986) observation was over two decades ago, there is no evidence that the situation has changed much. An engagement with the concept of salvation, especially from a socio-historical perspective, remains lacking as shown in some more recent discussions on the concept (Brand, 1999; Adedokun, 2011).

An approach that combines exegetical and socio-historical study to examine the possible meaning of salvation, particularly from the perspective of the relevance of that meaning for the advancement of the message of salvation to non-Christian contexts, especially Africa, remains a gap that a study of this nature could fill.

## **1.6 Key research question**

The question that this research is concerned with can be formulated as follows:

What is the meaning and implication of salvation in Acts 16 in the narrative of Paul’s encounter with the slave girl and the Philippian Jailer?

From the key question, the following related questions arise:

- What is the possible meaning of salvation in Acts 16 from an exegetical and analytical perspective?
- What is the likely meaning of salvation on the lips of the slave girl and the jailer in Acts 16 from a socio-historical perspective of the Greco-Roman world within which they lived?

- What is the convergent or divergent meaning of salvation that emerges from placing Luke<sup>10</sup>, the slave girl, the jailer and Africa in conversation?
- What are the implications of the meaning of salvation for the advancement of the message of salvation, especially in Africa?
- What conclusion and preliminary suggestion flow from this study?

### **1.7 Research aim**

The aim of this research is to study salvation in Acts 16 using a combination of socio-historical and exegetical interpretation to arrive at the meaning of salvation in the passage. The study intends to identify the implications of the Biblical meaning of salvation for the advancement of the Biblical message of salvation among various searches for the meaning of salvation in Africa.

### **1.8 Research objectives**

To achieve the aim stated above, the study has to meet the following specific objectives:

- To Explore and highlight some key contextual issues in African theology and Biblical interpretations including some of its difficulties, limitations and promise of contributing unique African interpretive perspectives
- To offer an exegetical analysis of the meaning of salvation in Acts 16 with reference to the slave girl and the jailer;
- To explore the meaning of salvation in the light of the Greco-Roman allusion identified within the text using the socio-historical method
- To offer an analysis of converging and diverging elements on the meaning of salvation in Acts 16 with reference to Luke, the slave girl, the jailer and the African understanding

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<sup>10</sup> Disclaimer: This study assumes Luke to be the author without going into arguments about the identity of the author.

- To present the implications of the study for the African context where the message of salvation is advancing and encountering pre-existing cultures and varying understandings; and
- To present final conclusion and preliminary suggestions.

## **1.9 Research method and design**

This study follows a qualitative literature-based research design undertaken from the point of view of the Evangelical Reformed tradition. The broad methodological framework is socio-historical as described by Meeks (2003), Malherbe (1983), and Garrett (1992). This methodological framework focuses on the social, economic, legal, cultural and religious factors and how they influence the understanding and meaning of a specific text. The multidimensional nature of this method accommodates a combination of related methods such as exegetical and theological analysis, which shall be utilised in the task of interpretation.

In approaching and interpreting a narrative text, four categories of reading audiences have to be borne in mind (Rabinowitz, 1977:121–141). These are:

- The “actual audience,” such as those physically reading or listening to the text;
- The “authorial audience,” referring to those who the author intended to write for. Even though they may not be physically present and listening to the author, they share common background knowledge presumed in the text;
- The “narrative audience”, referring to the audience that engage with the author’s narration from a perspective of a differing background and lacking in the common knowledge presumed in the narrative; and
- The “ideal narrative audience,” which refers to an audience that accepts the author’s presumed perspective regardless of the perspective of the actual and authorial audience.

Considering the above, engaging with the narrative in Acts 16 today excludes us from being either the actual or the authorial audiences. It forces us to make a choice to function either as a narrative audience or as the ideal narrative audience. Because of

the need for credibility in the process of searching for meaning in the narrative of the passage in question, it follows to reason that the socio-historical approach utilised in this research becomes necessary, especially because it leaves room to engage with the authorial audiences as far back as possible. The socio-historical method validates an analytical approach to understanding salvation in the socio-historical religious milieu of the Greco-Roman world. It gives room for an analysis that will eventually narrow down to the understanding of the meaning of salvation from the perspective of the slave girl and the jailer in Acts 16. This is critical for a credible reconstruction of meaning that takes seriously the perspectives of the actual and authorial audiences, as well as the narrative characters.

While the socio-historical approach enables a credible reconstruction that bears in mind the perspective of the actual and authorial audiences, the theological nature of the material in Acts makes it necessary that an exegetical and theological approach be made part of the process of a search for meaning and implication as a means of accessing and taking into cognisance the perspective of the author of Acts. This explains the need for the multi-pronged methodological approach for this project, bearing in mind that the combined methodologies are interrelated and not mutually exclusive.

In an effort to achieve the stated objectives of this study, the research is carried out using a combination of related methodologies as follows:

- In order to meet the first objective of the study, which is to explore and highlight some key contextual issues in African theology and Biblical interpretations along with some of its difficulties, limitations and promise, a critical review of African theology and a theological analysis of its methodological difficulties will be carried out
- To meet the second objective of the study which is to offer an exegetical analysis of the meaning of salvation in Acts 16 with reference to the slave girl and the jailer, a grammatical exegetical and analytical method will be utilised, with the primary focus of the exegesis being the aspect of the narrative in Acts 16 that pertains to the slave girl, the jailer and salvation

- To meet the third objective which is to study the meaning of salvation in light of the Greco-Roman world allusion identified within the text, a socio-historical methodology as described by Meeks (2003), Malherbe (1983), and Garrett (1992) and exemplified by Van Rensburg (2000) and Keener (2012) was used. This made possible an understanding of the social, cultural and historical context within which the narrative in Acts 16 is located. This method undergirds the research and was therefore utilised extensively to ascertain important aspects relating to some of the key characters in the narrative. Such aspects could have an impact on the search for meaning and the relevance of the passage for the interpretive task.
- To meet the fourth objective which is to offer an analysis and interpretation of the convergent and divergent elements relevant to the meaning of salvation in the passage, especially as it relates to Luke, the slave girl, the jailer and the African understanding, the theological method of interpretation and analysis was utilised (Treier, 2008).<sup>11</sup>
- In other to meet the fifth objective of presenting the implications of the study for the African context where the message of salvation is advancing and encountering pre-existing cultures and varying understandings, the researched data were utilised for an informed analysis that demonstrates both the significance and the implications of the study.
- The final conclusion, preliminary suggestion and recommendations which is the sixth objective are presented based on the result of the study.

### **1.10 Central theoretical argument**

A possible meaning of salvation in Acts 16 must consider the various contextual meanings of salvation that may stand in opposition to the meaning that Luke advocates within the narrative in question. The meaning of salvation as Luke shows in the narrative is spiritual intervention with possible physical ramifications, as opposed to an understanding of salvation that is spiritual only or physical only. Luke shows that

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed introduction to theological interpretation, see Treier, D.J. 2008. *Introducing theological interpretation of Scripture: recovering a Christian practice*. See also Webster (2009:69-94), "Who is the Son: theological reflections on the Exordium to the Epistle to the Hebrews." In Bauckham, R. (eds). (2009).

salvation entails a spiritual and divine act demonstrated in “the setting at liberty” of the slave girl from the oracular burden of the πνεῦμα Πύθωνα as well as economic exploitation. Luke also shows salvation as freedom from the fear of death such as that expressed by the Philippian jailer, all of which is made possible by believing in ‘the Lord Jesus’. This is in line with the salvation mission of Jesus as pointed out by Luke in the fourth chapter of his Gospel component.

### **1.11 Contribution of the study**

This research seeks to contribute interpretation and meaning by utilising a socio-historical method in the interpretive task, a method not commonly used previously in the interpretation of Acts 16. The choice of the socio-historical method which, when applied, leads to new insights and important conclusions regarding the possible meaning and implication of salvation in Acts 16, is essentially the main contribution of this study. As such, the study can serve as a theoretical base for further exploration and application. The socio-historical interpretive paradigm that this research uses is not entirely new, but as Van Rensburg (2000:564-582) notes, it has not been reconciled, integrated or extensively utilised in the field of Biblical studies. His observation finds support in the brief survey above. Through an interpretation of 1 Peter, Van Rensburg (2000) makes a convincing case for the utilisation of socio-historical data in the interpretation of the New Testament text. He also outlines the necessary steps involved in the task. This research intends to make a scholarly contribution by interpreting Acts 16 using this interpretive method that utilises, but improves upon the well-established paradigms of Biblical interpretation. Furthermore, an innovative combination of the Socio-historical, exegetical and theological approaches towards providing a perspectival interpretation with specific implications for African Christianity is another contribution this research makes.

### **1.12 Delineation of the study**

This study involves a focused research on explicating the meaning of salvation specifically in Acts 16:16–34. The focus is therefore on the meaning of salvation from the episode of the slave girl and the jailer in the passage in the light of Luke–Acts. Even though meaning and interpretation drawn from the passage is deducted in the light of the whole Bible, space and methodological limitations does not allow the focus to spread across the entire Bible.

The research makes recourse to other parts of the Bible for clarity where necessary. However, this study is not a comparative study of the concept of salvation in the gospels. The focus is limited to the search for meaning, understanding and significance of the concept as explicated in the passage.

### **1.13 Provisional chapter divisions**

Chapter 1: **Research focus, research design and general introduction**

Chapter 2: **African theology and African Christology: the difficulty and complexity in contemporary definitions and methodological frameworks**

Analytical investigation into African theology and Biblical studies, outlining the difficulty and complexity of definitions and methodological frameworks as the African theological endeavour seeks to make unique African perspectival contributions

Chapter 3: **Salvation in Acts 16: Socio-historical method as a proposed interpretive methodological framework**

Identifying the socio-historical method and proposing it as a suitable interpretive methodological framework

Chapter 4: **Σωτηρία in Acts 16: An exegetical and theological analysis**

Exegetical and analytical exploration of the meaning of Salvation in Acts 16 as a necessary component in identifying critical interlocutors that point to the meaning of the text

Chapter 5: **Salvation in Acts 16:16-40. A socio-historical exploration of the Greco-Roman understanding**

Rigorous exemplification of the use of the socio-historical method in approaching the text of Acts 16

Chapter 6: **Salvation in Acts 16: Meaning and missional implication derived from the socio-historical method**

The results from the use of the socio-historical and exegetical methods in interrogating the Acts 16 text and possible implications of the result for African Christianity

## **Chapter 7: Research summary, conclusion and recommendation**

### **1.14 Possible value of the research**

The value of this research lies in the fact that it contributes a fresh, socio-historical, exegetical and theological understanding and interpretation of the meaning of salvation in Acts 16 and its varying implications, especially for African Christianity. Furthermore, the research aims to serve as a reference tool for the church in Africa and other societal settings where the message of salvation in the Gospel is advancing and where it is experiencing similar questions, cultures or challenges. This research can be a valuable resource towards understanding the meaning of salvation that is inclusive of setting at liberty from exploitation, malevolent spirits and the fear of death as modelled by the salvation encounter of the slave girl and the jailer in Acts 16:11–34.

Such an understanding of salvation as spiritual with possible physical ramifications made possible by believing in 'the Lord Jesus' is tremendously relevant for non-Christian or some Christian contexts where limited or an unclear understanding of the meaning of salvation could lead to seeking salvation in the wrong places.

**Table 1-1: Schematic correlation indicating research cohesion`**

<b>Research question</b>	<b>Aim and objectives</b>	<b>Research method</b>
What is the possible meaning of salvation in Acts 16 from an exegetical and analytical perspective?	Offer an exegetical analysis of the meaning of salvation in Acts 16 with reference to the slave girl and the jailer	This New Testament study is done from the perspective of the Evangelical Reformed tradition using exegetical analysis
What is the likely meaning of salvation on the lips of the slave girl and the jailer in Acts 16 from a socio-historical perspective of the Greco-Roman world within which they lived?	Explore the meaning of salvation in the light of the Greco-Roman allusion identified within the text using the socio-historical method	The socio-historical method (Van Rensburg, 2000; Keener, 2012) is used.
What is the convergent or divergent meaning of salvation that emerges from placing Luke, the slave girl, the jailer and Africa in conversation?	A theological analysis of converging and diverging elements in the meaning of salvation in Acts 16 with reference to the slave girl, the jailer, the African context and Luke.	To identify and interpret the convergent and divergent elements in the meaning of salvation in the passage for relevant application, the theological method of interpretation is utilised (Treier, 2008; Webster 2009).
What are the implications of the meaning of salvation in this study for the advancement of the message of salvation in Africa?	Present the implications of the study for the African context where the message of salvation is advancing and encountering pre-existing cultures and understandings of the meaning of salvation.	The researched data are utilised for an informed analysis that will demonstrate both the significance and the implication of the study.
What conclusion and preliminary suggestions arise from this study?	Synthesise the research findings and present implications, conclusion and preliminary suggestions.	Preliminary suggestions are presented based on the conclusion of the study.

## **CHAPTER 2: ARTICLE 1**

### **African theology and African Christology: difficulty and complexity in contemporary definitions and methodological frameworks**

#### **Abstract**

There is an ongoing challenge in defining African theology because of two important reasons, namely: i) the quest for a definitive African theology is a fairly recent pursuit; and ii) the vastness and diversity of the African continent. Given this, the article presents the complexity of defining African theology and its methodological approaches through a background sketch of the development of African theology. Regardless of many definitions of African theology and its purposes, the paper acknowledges African Christian theology as theology that should be derived from the interplay between Scripture, Christian tradition and African cosmology. In deriving theology from the aforementioned aspects, African theology should also seek to develop contextual African theologies with global relevance. In this way, African theology can claim its space in the universal church. Though we are conscious of the value and challenges associated with the task of doing African theology, we argue for its necessity. We further argue that if the centrality of Scripture is maintained in the African theological endeavour, it will give African theologies some shared reference point with other Christian theologies and global engagement, while contributing unique African perspectives to global theological discourse.

## 2.1 Introduction

There is a considerable amount of research (i.e. Tiénou, 1990; West, 2008; Mashau & Fredricks, 2008; McGlory, 2016) that depicts the difficulty and complexity of the task of describing, defining and accurately assessing African theology. This arises from the fact that the quest for a definitive African theology is a fairly recent pursuit, and the continent is vast and diverse<sup>1</sup>. West (2008) explores key elements found in African Biblical hermeneutics. He places emphasis on the place of the “real flesh and blood African reader” towards appropriating the text. The relevance of the task of African theology and hermeneutics beyond the reader and the continent were not in the purview of his contemplation. Speckman (2016) shows concern about the need for such widening relevance. He emphasises African identity and framework as central, but maintains that African Biblical hermeneutics has moved from a state of liminality into a cul-de-sac. He proposes “celebration of life framework” as the way forward. He elaborates his proposal as based on the teaching of indigenous churches and the traditional (*amaqaba*) people. Both West and McGlory consign Scripture to the margins of the African theological endeavour.

This article presents the difficulties with and complexity of contemporary definitions and methodological frameworks of African theology and links the discussion to African Christology, as an example of a key subset within African theology. The first section sketches the background and development of African theology and provides the definitions and differentiations of African theology. At this juncture, the context and task of African theology is also established. The second section discusses African Christology as the predominant subset and an example of doing African theology. Here, the methodological approaches to African theology and African Christology are discussed with the view to establish the underlying challenge in doing African theology. Once this is done, the article concludes by drawing attention to the centrality of Scripture in the African Christian theological endeavour as a solution towards the construction of African theology that may have global relevance.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the origins and background of African theology, see also Tiénou, T., 1990, 'Indigenous African Christian theologies : the uphill road', International Bulletin Of Missionary Research.

## 2.2 Definition and Differentiation of African Theology

The quest for a definitive African theology only became an academic concern arguably in the late 1950s and 1960s (Bujo 1992:5). In the foreword to Bujo's (1992:5) *African Theology in its Social Context*, Schreier particularly posits that the publication of a volume in 1956 by a group of young African theologians in French titled *Les Pretres noirs s'interrogent* actually marked the beginning of modern African theology. Bujo (1992:2) expands further by pointing out that the first individual African theologian is Mulago, who wrote in 1955 and published in 1956, followed by Kagame (1956) and then a group of Africans referred to by Schreier who published as a group in 1956. What remains obvious here is that published African theological reflections by Africans are fairly recent. Nkansah-Obrempong (2007:140-141) argues that the conceptual framework behind the reflections that led to the emergence of African theology is twofold, namely: African "personality" in Anglophone Africa and the "Negritude" movement of Francophone Africa<sup>2</sup>. In Nkansah-Obrempong's (2007:140-141) view, these concepts functioned as tools of regaining identity and:

*They also motivated theologians to begin to reinterpret the Christian faith in terms that reflect this identity, so [that] Africans can understand and relate to the Christian faith as their own. These cultural and socio-political movements laid the foundation for African theology of indigenization or inculturation that sees the African culture and religion as important sources for theological reflection on the Christian faith. At the same period in the southern Africa region, the black movement contributed to Black theology of liberation. (pp. 140–141)*

These proceedings, according to Nkansah-Obrempong, gave birth to the two major streams of African theologies of inculturation (or contextualisation) and liberation. Inculturation or contextualisation is defined as the effort to take seriously the specific context of each human group and person on its own terms and in all its dimensions — cultural, religious, social, political, as well as economic, and to discern what the Gospel says to people in that context so that people's particular needs and hopes are addressed and met (Mashau & Fredericks, 2008:119).

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<sup>2</sup> Nkansah-Obrempong (2007) defines Negritude as An anti-colonial literary and political movement from the 1930s, expressing pride in being African and black.

The establishment of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT)<sup>3</sup> in 1976 (in Dares-Salaam) is a significant marker in the African theological quest<sup>4</sup>. Before EATWOT, leading African theologians maintained that the existing theology of the African church at the time was “prefabricated” (Idowu, 1965:22-23) and non-existent (Mbiti, 1969:232). This assertion, as Bediako (2004:15) maintains, was unmindful of the already existing African theology at the grass roots. Mbiti (1986:229) decades later acknowledges and confirms the existence of not just written African theology, but oral theology ahead of definitive written theology in Africa. Mashau and Fredericks (2008:10) clarify this point further by maintaining that there is such a thing as *lived* theologies and academically developed theologies, and it goes without saying that *lived* theologies in Africa goes as far back as the advent of Christianity on the continent. While Mashau and Frederic’s observation could be right, the implication however is that if there was any *lived* theology before the advent of Christianity, it remains questionable whether such a *lived* theology could be termed or equated with Christian theology in the sense of biblical Christianity.

Mbiti (1976:164) therefore simply defines African theology as the theological reflection by African Christians. Taking his thought further however, if theology is generally understood as reflection and discourse about God, African theology then is the theological endeavour which is embarked upon mostly by Africans and non-Africans who are familiar with the African milieu, and who are seeking to respond to such issues theologically<sup>5</sup>. This definition recognises that there are non-Africans who have made significant contributions to the growth of African theology either directly or indirectly by stimulating constructive thinking that fed into African theology<sup>6</sup>. Even though African theology is said to have emerged, what remains unclear and debatable is whether the

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<sup>3</sup> Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, henceforth EATWOT, refers to an association formed to create a platform for theological reflections by people of Latin America, Africa and Asia.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that the formation of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEM) in 1966 preceded the formation of EATWOT in 1976. Though EATWOT is a broader ecumenical body, AEM was the first organised body of the Evangelical movement in Africa; and as Nkansah-Obrempong (2010:294) notes, as of today, AEM considers itself as a custodian of evangelical theology or orthodoxy and upholding Christian values and ethos in Africa.

<sup>5</sup> Tite Tiénou 1991:74 agrees with the difficulty that exists in defining African theology.

<sup>6</sup> Mbogu (2012:32) addresses the ‘insider/outsider’ question with regard to African theology and maintains that the foreigner brings with him to the task of African theology his feelings, perceptions, experience and privilege which no matter how small, could distort theology in the other context. However, he admits that to ignore or deny the contributions of outsiders to the development of African theology could amount to academic dishonesty. See also Parratt (1995:19) who makes a strong case for the contribution of non-African contribution to the development of African theology.

methodology can be said to be exclusively African (Mashau & Frederiks, 2008:115). Questions remain as to how totally African such a methodology for doing African theology is<sup>7</sup>. This is not to infer that there have been no efforts towards a methodology that is African. Nyamiti's (2005) recent two-volume work on methods attests to this.

The concept of "African theology" cannot be assumed to refer to African Christian theology exclusively. This can be stated in the light of other African theologies that are not essentially Christian. This raises the question as to what constitutes an African Christian theology. As Mugambi (1989: vi-x) demonstrates, without such a differentiation, "African theology" could generally refer to such theological reflection and discourse as was carried out by Africans before the arrival of both Christianity and Islam on the continent. In his view, "African theology" without distinction could imply African Christian or Muslim theology or even a theology of the African religious tradition that is neither Christian nor Muslim. The differentiator therefore that distinguishes African Christian theology is that it is a reflection and discourse that seeks to relate the African cultural and religious heritage to Christianity. Nyende (2005a:3) rightly clarifies further that African Christian theology is "a theology derived from the interplay of Christian tradition, or any aspect of it, on the one hand, and African cosmology or any aspect of it on the other". Furthermore, Nyende contends that the Bible is central to a theology that seeks to be Christian and "it is incumbent on those who wish to articulate an African theology to use the Bible in dialogue with African cosmologies and culture for it to be a *Christian* theology". We can concur with this observation when we take into consideration the goal and purpose of African Christian theology, which can be summarised as "the building and sustenance of African Christian communities in faith, ethos and *cultus*" (Nyende 2005a:3-4).

### **2.2.1 The context and task of African Christian theology**

In an incisive analysis of the context and development of African theological thought, Bediako (1997:426-443) points out that the context out of which African theology came

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<sup>7</sup> See Kwesi (in Parratt 1995:20), who discusses the presence and possibility of a Western 'methodological straight jacket' that could hamper originality of thought in African theology. Tiénou (1990:76) had earlier expressed doubt as to whether there was yet a fully emerged African theology by stating that, 'genuine African Christian theology is still in the future tense'. He attributes that to the fact that the status of theological education in the continent may contribute, in no small way, to the foreignness of the theological enterprise. Even though Tiénou's position as expressed here was formulated not less than two decades ago, it does not seem to have totally lost validity.

forth is twofold. In his view, the struggle for the social and political transformation of the conditions of inequality and oppression in South Africa gave rise to “Black theology”, which in his view is a theology of liberation in the African setting. On the other hand, the theological explorations into the indigenous cultures of the African peoples gave rise to a different theological strand designated as “African theology”. Though Bediako maintains that “Black theology” and “African theology” are not mutually exclusive<sup>8</sup>, what he concedes is that they are not one and the same thing. Bediako’s differentiation serves to clear the tendency that may exist to assume wrongly that the African theological endeavour is one and the same with the liberationist Black theology<sup>9</sup>.

In concurrence with Bediako, Balcomb (2008:7-10) further sheds light on the contextual and evangelical nature of African theology by maintaining that the Southern African axis “south of Limpopo” as he calls it, have had to deal with issues of democratisation and politics with getting rid of apartheid and transformation of the society as a chief goal, thereby leading to the “theology of bread”, while their counterparts in the Sub-Sahara Africa have had to deal with issues of culture and identity as a chief concern, leading to their focusing on the “theology of being”<sup>10</sup>. Balcomb (2008:7-10) contends further that what characterises and serves as the distinguishing features of African evangelical theology<sup>11</sup> are the nature of its faith, its orthodoxy in relation to foundational doctrines of the Christian faith and its countenance of the powers. He describes faith here not in a soteriological sense or in terms of adherence to the rubrics of a particular church tradition, but rather as “the propensity to believe” primarily in God and also belief in unseen spiritual realities. Such belief in unseen spiritual realities which, according to him, have been long lost in the west through “secularisation”, enables African evangelical theology to engage such issues theologically.

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<sup>8</sup> Bediako (1997:426) following Desmond Tutu describes how Black and African theologies relate as “a series of concentric circles of which Black theology is the inner and smaller circle”.

<sup>9</sup> Mashau and Frederiks (2008:119) identify people at the forefront of Black Theology to include Manas Buthelezi, Gabriel Setiloane, Desmond Tutu, Frank Chikane etc., and note that ‘African theology that emphasised liberation was typified as ‘Black Theology’, though in recent years also other forms of African liberation theologies have developed such as African women’s theologies and theologies of reconstruction’.

<sup>10</sup> Balcomb in using this expression utilises West, G. (2000). In ‘Mapping African biblical Interpretation: A Tentative Sketch’, in M.W. Dube and G.O. West (eds.).

<sup>11</sup> For a historical background of Evangelical theology in Africa, see James Nkansah-Obrempong (2010)

Balcomb's (2008:7-10) categorisation could have highlighted some exceptions and has succumbed to some generalisation as he also admits. In fact, one may choose to argue differently about what constitutes an evangelical African theology. Some even debate whether such further categorisation of African theology in terms of evangelical and non-evangelical is even necessary at all. For example, while Parratt (1997:x) shows approval and welcomes the involvement of "conservative evangelicals" in addressing issues that give shape to African theology and that led to the publication of the *African Journal of Evangelical Theology*, he deplores extending such categorisations to "conservative" and "liberal", which are terms commonly used for categorisation in the West. In his view, such categorisation is unhelpful to the church in Africa. Beyond the question of mere categorisation, our view is that the crucial need for commitment to the essentials of the Christian faith and biblical orthodoxy cannot be overemphasised in the African theological endeavour.

However, Balcomb's analysis gives at least a fair view of what basically underlies the contextual basis of African theology. Furthermore, his pointing out of the distinguishing mark of African evangelical theology as commitment to essential orthodoxy in relation to the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith is important. Its importance lies in the fact that it goes hand-in-hand with the need to maintain the requisite nature of the Bible for a distinctive and authentic African Christian theology, regardless of whether such a theological endeavour is labelled evangelical or not. This view is buttressed by Nyende (2005b:5), who maintains that the place of the Bible is normative and serves as the criterion for what is authentically Christian. This compels all theologies that would wish to be considered Christian, including African theology, to come under scrutiny for validation as Christian theology. This view is not unaware that there are varying opinions and ongoing discussion on the place, the authority and the use of the Bible in African theology<sup>12</sup>. Considering the above, this article maintains the position that the centrality of the Bible in the African Christian theological endeavour should be sacrosanct. This is not to silence other variables in the task of African theology, but as noted at the beginning of this paper, it is an emphasis on the interplay between Scripture, Christian tradition and African cosmology, with Scripture taking the leading role.

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<sup>12</sup> See for example West, G. O., & Dube, M. W. (2000). *The Bible in Africa: transactions, trajectories, and trends*. Leiden, Brill.

The task of African Christian theology has been described as understanding Christian theology within the African context and shaping Christian theology within the African worldview (Balcomb, 2008:8). However, this does not impinge on the vitality and usefulness of such theological reflection beyond the geographical space of such African theologians. This should be the case especially where Bediako's (1997:432) warning is heeded. He maintains that African theology should bear in mind an overall goal of making specifically African contributions to the theology of the universal church. The significance of the task of African Christian theology becomes more heightened in the face of the spread of Christianity in Africa along with the attendant need to remain faithful to the essentials of the Christian faith. Hastings' (1976:16) observation, made many decades ago, thus rings true today when he notes that the challenge faced by the African church is not that of decline (as in the West). Rather, the challenges of the African church:

*...arise instead from the sheer rapidity of growth, from an almost discordant vitality, from the need and often too the determination to reshape the pattern of Church life and thought learnt from European missionaries, directly or indirectly, to accord with the complex religious and secular needs of African society, while remaining faithful to the essentials of Christian tradition (Hastings, 1976:16).*

This makes the task of African theology pertinent as a vehicle for contributing to the needs of the African society and shaping church life by engaging issues from a theological and biblical perspective. African theology in its task must keep as an important goal the creation of possibilities for the Gospel to answer questions raised in the interior of the African worldview, while removing "Western hegemonic structures" to enable a response to the Gospel that is indigenous (Ogbu, 2008:11). Given the considered discussion in this section, African Christian theology refers to a theology that holds to essential orthodoxy in relation to the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith. Having established the meaning of African Christian theology, its context and task, the next section presents African Christology as a leading subset of African theology (Mbiti, 1971:190; Bediako, 1983:110; Mashau and Fredrick; 2008:109; Tiénou, 1990:74; Oborji, 2008:16).

## **2.3 African Christology: its basis and methodological approaches**

### **2.3.1 African Christology: from the margin to the centre of African thought**

Taylor (1963:16), who lived and worked in Uganda, raises the question of the relationship between Christ and African Christians, a matter that has stimulated much thought and Christological reflection among African theologians. Taylor (1963:16) notes that the underlying question in the African church is the following: “If Christ was to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking what he would look like?” His question has remained relevant ever since.

In Banda (2005:2–6) and Potgieter and Magezi’s (2016:1–9) view, this question is relevant because of the perceived foreignness of Christ in African Christianity that stems from the way some early Western missionaries presented the Gospel from a predominantly Western perspective, resulting in some Africans viewing Christ as unrelated to them. The question is furthermore relevant due to the conceptual novelty of the person and place of Christ in African religiosity. That is, Africans are familiar with God, but Christ is an unfamiliar concept (Hood, 1990:145; Potgieter & Magezi, 2016:3-4). The effect of the newness of Christ in African religiosity was exacerbated by the emergence of Christ with the early Western missionaries who presented Christ as a Western saviour interested in the worldviews and problems that arise from the Western world (Banda, 2005:5; Potgieter & Magezi, 2016:4-5; cf. Taylor, 1963:16). This problem was further intensified by the traditional African worldview that requires a blood-related ancestor to meet the African contextual needs of African people (Bediako, 2004:23; Lugira, 2009:48–50; Nyamiti, 2006:3, 9; Oladosu, 2012:160–16). Given these reasons, it is apparent that many African people are not cognisant of how the Christ that the church preaches addresses their existential challenges arising from their traditional African worldview(s) (Potgieter & Magezi, 2016:2-5; Bediako, 2004:23; Pobe, 1979:81; Reed & Mtukwa, 2010:158–161)<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> However, for a detailed discussion on the basis for Africans viewing Christ as unrelated or foreign to them, one should visit Potgieter and Magezi’s (2016:1-9) article titled “A critical assessment of Bediako’s incarnational Christological model as a response to the foreignness of Christ in African Christianity”. This article gives a detailed discussion of the missionary presentation of the Gospel from a predominantly Western perspective, the ancestral worldview and the newness of Christ in African religiosity. These aspects have been explored in detail, hence there is no need to discuss them in detail here.

As a result of these Christological challenges, the ancestral Christological approach surfaces as the predominant African Christological approach that is followed by many African theologians (Oborji 2008:16; Wacheche 2012:27). It is an approach that seeks to completely identify Christ with African Christians by sorting Christ into the category of ancestor. For example, Bediako (1994:93–121), Bujo (1992:79), Nyamiti (2006:24), Pobee (1979:94), Milingo (1984:85), Kwesi (1984:197–198), Kabasele (1991:123–124) and many more approach the subject of Christology from an ancestral perspective. The designation of the ancestral category on Christ has gained popularity in academic literature because it addresses the African traditional worldview of ancestral veneration, which occupies a central place in traditional African religion (Magezi & Magezi, 2017:2). However, viewing Christ as an ancestor has been widely challenged by scholars such as Mkole (2000:1138), Reed and Mtukwa (2010:157), Palmer (2008:71) and Potgieter and Magezi (2016:6-7). In different ways, these scholars acknowledge that the treatment of Christ under the category of ancestor takes the traditional African worldview seriously, but it reveals a tendency to diminish the reality of “Christ as God incarnate” and tends “to encourage syncretism in African Christianity” (Potgieter & Magezi, 2016:6-7). Regardless of the challenges associated with the designation of Christ under the ancestral category, we recognise it appears that Taylor’s concern (1963:16, cf. Appiah-Kubi, 1987; Obaje, 1992:47-48; Udoh, 1988:162) to the effect that African theologians of his time are not sufficiently responding to the crucial Christological question asked by their fellow Africans is now addressed by contemporary African theologians.

In the African theological space, there is a critical need for clarity on the question of Jesus’ identity. As Mbiti (1971) rightly observes, theology falls or stands on how it understands, translates and interprets Jesus Christ in a given time, place or human situation, and therefore, Christian theology ought to be Christology (Mbiti 1971:190). In a similar vein, Bediako (1983), also a prominent African theologian, comments that

*the heart of the encounter of the Good News with our context is Christology; the significance of our faith in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen for our existence in the world. (p. 110)*

In other words, whereas an engagement with the subject matter of Christology was deemed to have failed to generate considerable interest among scholars between 1960

leading up the early 1980s<sup>14</sup> this concern as expressed by Bediako (1983:110), Taylor (1963:16), Mbiti (1971:190), Appiah-Kubi (1987), Obaje (1992:47-48) and Udoh (1988:162) led to a vibrant engagement of African theologians with the subject matter of Christology in African theological scholarship in modern times. Noticeable changes in the present scheme of affairs directed Oborji (2008:16) to assert that Christology at present is perhaps the one aspect of African theology that has received the greatest attention from African theologians. This assertion is similar to a position earlier referred to by Nyamiti, (1998:17) who maintained that, “there is no doubt that Christology is the subject which has been most developed in today’s African theology.” Perhaps, by “developed”, Nyamiti would be right if he is referring to the fact that there is a wide scale engagement with the theme by African scholars at present, causing it to have some shape, as opposed to its former shapeless and almost non-existent form, in which case African Christology can now be considered “developed”. This is different from being “developed” in the sense of completeness without the need for further development. What all of this goes to show, as Akper (2007:225) notes, is that Christology, which was once at the margins of the African theological discourse, now occupies a central position in contemporary African theology. With this in mind, a meticulous examination of the methods and approaches to African Christology is the next and necessary step in the approaching section.

### **2.3.2 African Christology: method and approaches**

#### **2.3.2.1 Method of inculturation**

Nyamiti (1998:17-39) identifies African theology of inculturation and African liberation theologies as the two broad bases undergirding approaches adopted by theologians towards Christologising in Africa. In his view, while those from within the African theology of inculturation make an effort to incarnate the Gospel message in the African cultures on a theological level, those from within the liberation perspective make an effort to find Christ in the socio-political situation of the Africans. As he further points out, among inculturation theologians, there are those whose starting point is the biblical teaching about Christ, after which they proceed to find relevant Christological themes from within the African cultural situation; as well as those within the

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<sup>14</sup> De Jongh (1996:2) rightly observes that prior to 1970; a glance at available literature revealed that very little existed in the form of written Christology by African theologians.

inculturation subset who take the African cultural background as their point of departure for Christological elaboration.

Some African theologians, such as Bediako, takes Scripture as their point of departure. Olsen (1997:258) perceives Bediako's ancestral incarnational Christological concept as grounded in Scripture because he understands that in elaborating on Christology, one has "to be faithful to Jesus and the witness of the Gospels and the Apostles" (Olsen, 1997:258). This seems to be evident in Bediako's (1994:99; 2000:24) critique of John Pobee, his contemporary and a fellow leading Ghanaian theologian who also challenges the traditional African ancestral worldview, seeing Christ as the Great Ancestor. In his critique, Bediako maintains that in contextualising Jesus among the Akan people, Pobee "approached the problem largely through Akan wisdom sayings and proverbs", thus, "he does not deal sufficiently with the religious nature of the question". In this way, Bediako argues that Pobee does not allow the biblical revelation to have a real encounter with the Akan traditional worldview of ancestral veneration (Bediako, 1994:99; 2000:24). Wendland (1995:113-114) agrees with Olsen in his classical evaluation of current contributions in African Christologies, hence he rates Bediako's ancestral Christology as "the best presentation of a context-sensitive Christology" grounded in Scripture. However, although Bediako seems to have commenced his ancestral incarnational Christology based on Scripture, it is unclear whether he fully remains within the biblical framework (Wagenaar, 1999:373). This means that Bediako's methodological framework is problematic, since he appears to follow the Evangelical doctrine of Christ's incarnation, yet introduces Jesus Christ in African cultural trappings (by treating Christ under the category of ancestor), thus deviating from the biblical concept of Christ as one being with God the Father, as opposed to ancestors.

In view of the methodological approach that starts from the African cultural background to Scripture, Wanamaker (1997:282) helpfully points out that this approach, which employs "African cultural background" as the point of departure for Christological elaboration in African theology, is "far more commonly employed" than the method that starts from the biblical teaching about Christ. This fact is evident in the ancestor Christology concept, which Nyamiti (1998:17-39), Bujo (1992:79), Pobee (1979), Wanamaker (1997:282) and many others subscribe to. These African theologians use

the African context as their point of departure for their ancestral Christology. This implies that these African theologians are using the African traditional beliefs in ancestors as their starting point for their contextualised Christology. Concern about contextualising the Christ event in Africa is a shared one for African theology and African Christology, and so is the methodology that utilises the culture as a point of departure. Wanamaker (1997:282) sees validity in such a method by drawing attention to the fact that the early followers of Jesus “those who shared his human existence and became witnesses to his resurrection, began the process of Christological elaboration by interpreting Jesus in terms of the worldview and themes derived from their own cultural experience.” This methodological approach in doing theology is referred by Mashau and Frederiks (2008:116) as “the reverse hermeneutic method” as described below.

### **2.3.2.2 The reverse hermeneutical method**

Mashau and Frederik’s (2008:116) maintain that an identifiable characteristic in the method of doing theology in Africa and other situations of contextual theologies can be termed as “reversed hermeneutics”. This involves the reversal of the hermeneutical cycle, in which case the hermeneutical movement is from the cultural context to the biblical text instead of the other way around. This approach, which focuses on the context, is also known as contextualisation, and in their contention, this methodology that moves from the African contexts to the text has become the distinctive marker of African theology.

Although “reversed hermeneutics” as explained above cannot be said to be the only method African theologians have utilised to engage with the biblical text, its prevalence cannot be overstated. To assert that “reversed hermeneutics” is prevalent and evident in African theology on the other hand confirms that Africans are taking their context seriously and are making efforts to respond theologically to Christological questions Africans are asking. However, the importance of biblical exegesis as foundational for methodology and approach in African theology cannot be overemphasised, as Nkansah-Obrempong (2007:143) rightly observes. According to him, for African theology to yield any lasting fruit for the community of faith, there is the need to:

*make full use of biblical scholarship—sound biblical exegesis and sound cultural exegesis of the contemporary culture in constructing a relevant theology and a theology that will not be sterile and bankrupt. (p.143).*

He adds that creative dialogue between African culture and biblical culture must be ongoing. Further appealing to the African proverb that says, “Wisdom is not found in one person’s head”, Nkansah-Obrempong (2007:143) insists that African theology needs to consider the teachings of the wider Christian community and also to learn from the traditions of the Christian faith developed over many centuries of Christian history. We conclude together with Tiénou’s (1990:76) bold assertion that the “correctness of indigenous African theologies should be judged by the degree to which they are faithful to the Christian Scripture”. According to him, that will make African theologies to have the same reference point as any other Christian theology. He further posits that:

*If we maintain the double concern of relating the totality of biblical revelation to the totality of the situation of African Christians, African theology will truly become a discipline at the service of the church. It will cease being either a footnote on Western theology or an instance of exotic Christian religious product for musicologists interested in Africa.*

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, African Christian theology should endeavour to develop theologies that go beyond the African continent. That is, African theology should make African contributions to the theology of the universal church. The significance of the task of African Christian theology becomes more heightened in the face of the spread of Christianity in Africa, along with the attendant need to remain faithful to the essentials of the Christian faith. The methodological approach of African theology that commences from African cultural context takes the traditional African culture and worldview serious. However, there is need for African theologians to continue to embrace Scripture as the authoritative Word of God, thereby making it central and allowing it to govern the contextualisation endeavour. Ancestral Christology serves as one of the predominant subset of African theology and Christology that is not well received by the popular Christians and academics because it has a tendency of diminishing the reality of Christ as God incarnate and encouraging syncretism in African Christianity. This serves as an example for African theologians to pay close attention to Scripture as their point of

departure in doing African theology, and this can possibly result in African theology contributing to the universal church while paying attention to its African contextual needs. Although we are aware of the challenges associated with the task of doing African theology, we conclude that the centrality of the Bible in the African Christian theological endeavour should not be sacrificed.

We have discussed the difficulty of making relevant perspectival contribution from the angle of African theology and have demonstrated that difficulty through the example of the formulation of the African Christology concept. This difficulty, as we discovered, lies in the need for a suitable method and the need for maintaining the centrality of Scripture among other things. As a broad category, the 'reverse hermeneutics' method has been identified as the method utilised by most exegetes seeking to make African perspectival contribution, within African Biblical studies and hermeneutics. By this method, the exegete moves from the African context into scripture instead of moving from scripture into the context. This approach displaces the central place of the scripture in hermeneutics and shows the inadequacy of the current methodology thereby limiting the value and validity of African perspectival contributions. The Scripture as the starting point and occupying a central place in the interpretive endeavour have been suggested. In the chapter that follows, a methodology will be proposed as the way forward. This is done after analysing the proposed method to show its value and suitability for the task.

## **CHAPTER 3: ARTICLE 2**

### **Salvation in Acts 16: Socio-historical method as a proposed interpretive methodological framework**

#### **Abstract**

This article identifies lacuna in the study and interpretation of Acts 16 and argues that African Biblical scholars as well as some key Luke-Acts scholars have not given sufficient attention to the text of Acts 16, through a suitable method, particularly in the search for the meaning of salvation in the episode of the slave girl and the Jailer. For African Biblical scholars, this lack of sufficient attention becomes acute considering the prevalence of discourses on salvation and the contextual similarities between the narrative of Acts 16 and the African context.

The article challenges the lack of sufficient use of the socio-historical method in the interpretations of Acts 16, insisting on the need for and value of the proposed method towards a multicultural understanding of the text. The article asserts that the method bridges the socio-historical gap between the text and the present-day audience, thereby giving validity to the text and the interpretive process.

The article brings together New Testament studies, African theology and socio-historical method in hermeneutics. It further navigates the intersection between interpretation and implication.

#### **Key terms**

Socio-historical, African context, Acts method, Luke–Acts, slave girl, salvation, methods, Acts 16, jailer

### 3.1 Introduction

Salvation as an important theme is true to most religions. However, the understandings of what the meaning is remain as varied as there are various religions. In Christianity, salvation occupies a central place and an understanding of what it means remains important. This understanding is especially important in African Christianity where the Christian faith is advancing into pre-existing, non-Christian traditional religions with various cultural understanding of what salvation entails. Considering the various contexts that the advancement of the Christian faith is encountering, the possibility of a contestation in meaning consequently exists.

Christianity is showing a notable level of growth in the African context, and in some ways similar to the book of Acts, the message of salvation, which is at the core of the Christian faith, is advancing. In this advancement, it is encountering various pre-existing non-Christian cultures, views, understandings and even contestations in meaning.

Acts 16 occupies a pivotal place in the entire Acts narrative as it marks the beginning of the advancement of the message of salvation into a more Gentile territory, geographically further away from Jewish territories<sup>1</sup>.

From Acts 16 onwards, Paul encounters a Gentile culture with a socio-historical climate very different in comparison to his previous encounters and experiences in the course of advancing the message of salvation. The fact that the narrative context is non-Jewish makes it likely that a word like *σωτηρία* (*soteria*) may carry a different meaning than it would in a predominantly Jewish context. Acts 16 further offers a framework of how the narrative aim of Luke–Acts plays out (Green & McKeever, 1994; Martin & Davids, 1997).

Though scholars generally agree that the theme of salvation is recurrent in Luke–Acts and it is noted as a major theme, explorations of the theme in the light of Acts 16 have been less focused and sustained but rather very general (Bovon, 2006; Marshall, 1971; 1998; Witherington, 1998).

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<sup>1</sup> While it could be argued that the first missionary journey to Asia in Acts 13 was equally into non-Jewish territory, the point being made here is in reference to the possibility of cultural and religious proximity that could exist in the case of the first missionary journey. This proximity is attested to by the account of encounters with Jews and synagogues on the first missionary journey, which was not the case on the second missionary journey.

Apart from the Luke–Acts scholars highlighted above, African theologians have also taken note of the importance of the subject of salvation for African Christianity and the need for a deeper engagement with the subject. Adeyemo (1997) and Mbiti (1986) agree about the importance of a deeper understanding of the concept of salvation, especially in an African context. Mbiti (1986:134) points out that even though the term “salvation” frequently occurs in talks, writings and preaching in African Christianity, a critical and careful study of salvation remains lacking. The term is considered very important, but not sufficiently used by African theologians (Brand, 1999; Adedokun, 2011).

This paper aims to offer an approach that utilises the socio-historical method to explore the possible meaning of salvation; most especially from the perspective of the relevance and implication of that meaning in the advancement of the message of salvation to other pre-existing non-Christian contexts and within the African context.

Van Rensburg (2000:564-582) argues that the socio-historical method has been underutilised in Biblical studies. This article essentially advances the utilisation of the socio-historical methodological approach towards a broader understanding of the meaning of salvation in Acts 16. This serves as a key to a valid appropriation of such understanding, especially within African Christianity. The proposed methodological framework is discussed and the value resulting from the application of such method is presented. A schematic correlation framework is presented in table format as a guide to a study of the meaning of salvation in Acts 16 using the proposed methodology.

### **3.1.1 The state of research and analysis of literature**

#### **3.1.1.1 Luke–Acts**

Luke was considered separately from Acts by scholars until the thesis by Cadbury (1927) after which the narrative unity of Luke–Acts became a scholarly consensus variously affirmed and demonstrated (Cadbury, 1927; Tannehill, 1986; 1990; Borgman, 2006). This is not to say the unity has not been challenged<sup>2</sup> what this unity implies is that an interpretation of Acts 16 should be done in light of its counterpart, the Gospel

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<sup>2</sup> See Parsons, M.C. & Pervo, R.I. 1993. Rethinking the unity of Luke and Acts. Minneapolis, Fortress Press. For a survey of this debate. See also Bird, M. F. 2007. The Unity of Luke-Acts in Recent Discussion. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 29:425–448.

component. Such a study, however, does not stop the need for an exploration of the book of Acts on its own terms, especially considering the stronger narrative thrust in Acts in spite of the Luke–Acts coherence. The need to pay closer attention to Acts becomes more apparent when engaging a specific narrative unit (Acts 16 in this case). In the midst of the scholarly attention that the interpretation of Luke–Acts has enjoyed, Acts 16 seems not to have enjoyed as much attention.

### **3.1.1.2 Setting the interpretive paradigm of Luke–Acts: Conzelmann (1960)**

The interpretative direction for Luke–Acts was significantly impacted by Conzelmann (1960) in his important work, *Die Mitte der Zeit*<sup>3</sup>. New Testament scholars agree that he not only applied new methods to the study of Luke–Acts, but also demonstrated the use of such new methods (Marshall, 1971; Bovon, 2006; Green, 2010). By applying the redaction-critical method, Conzelmann challenges the prevalent view of Luke as a historian and concludes that Luke was a theologian who purposefully replaced the early church theology of an imminent *Parousia* proclaimed by Mark. In his view, this was Luke’s way of dealing with the seething disappointment over the delay of the *Parousia*. Even though subsequent scholars have upturned his conclusions, what Conzelmann achieved was to set up the interpretive agenda for approaching Luke–Acts. His work has affected the starting premise in the interpretation of Luke–Acts, which led to Luke–Acts scholarship being dominated with approaches either from the angle of Luke’s theology or historicity, but not many approaches from a socio-historical perspective.

### **3.1.1.3 Lacuna 1: Marshall (1979); Witherington (1998) and Bovon (1998; 2006)**

Marshall (1979); Witherington (1998) and Bovon (2006) are among key New Testament scholars who have demonstrated that the theme of salvation/conversion is recurrent in Luke–Acts and is indeed a major theme. Marshall (1979) in particular, engage with the views of Conzelmann and concludes that instead of considering Luke as a theologian and therefore not a historian, Luke rather shows evidence of being both a historian and a theologian whose key theme was salvation and not salvation history, which is the view set forth by Conzelmann. He maintained that history and theology do not stand in opposition.

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<sup>3</sup> The title of Conzelmann’s work is translated as “The theology of St. Luke” in English, even though the German literally means ‘the middle of time.’

Though these scholars (Marshall, 1979; 1998; Witherington, 1998; Bovon, 2006) generally agree that the theme of salvation is recurrent in Luke–Acts and they note it as a major theme, their explorations of the theme itself have been insufficient. What is lacking in their works is a focused exploration of the meaning of salvation as portrayed in the narrative of Acts 16 in a sustained manner, utilising a combination of socio-historical approaches and not only conventional methods. The scope and intention of their work limits the value of their contribution as they were not able to provide answers to newer questions and could not meet the need for an understanding and broader appropriation of meaning of salvation that could be achieved by the application of the socio-historical method.

For instance, when the slave girl in Acts 16 proclaims that: “ὅτι οἱ ἄνθρωποι δοῦλοι τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ Ὑψίστου ὁδὸν σωτηρίας” [“These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation”], the abovementioned scholars do not take into account that an understanding of her socio-historical situation raises a question as to the meaning of the σωτηρίας [“salvation”] that she refers to. A similar question comes to mind when one considers the Philippian jailer’s question “τί με δεῖ ποιεῖν ἵνα σωθῶ” [“what is necessary for me to do that I might be saved?”]. Is it possible that their understandings of salvation reflect or differ from the Lukan salvation theme?

#### **3.1.1.4 Lacuna 2 among African Biblical scholars: Manus (1985); Onwu (1988); Isizoh (1998); Speckman (1999)**

African theologians have made several attempts to answer key Biblical questions that touch on the needs of Africans.<sup>4</sup> Though the concept of salvation is noted to be frequent in some writings, talks and sermons, Adeyemo (1997) and Mbiti (1986) agree that a critical and sustained study of salvation remains lacking. What stands out in the examined works of African Biblical scholars is that engagement with the subject of salvation, particularly from the angle of Acts 16 using the socio-historical method, is missing. Though evidence of engagement with the subject of salvation exists within the broader African Biblical scholarship, such engagement has rarely been from the socio-historical angle. In a survey on the ways African theologians approach the subject of salvation, Brand (1999:193-223) categorises the various existing approaches as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed exploration of such efforts, see Igba and Magezi. 2018. HTS 74(1)

- Anthropological (based on human good)
- Social (tending towards salvation as corporate or common good)
- Cultural (salvation as a form of cultural constellation or inculturation)
- Ontological (defining salvation as a transformation of the ontological structures of the world)
- Vitalistic (seeing salvation as a transmission of vital force or life force).

Among the majority of African Biblical scholars that engage in the interpretation of the book of Acts, most focus on Acts 3 and Acts 17 (Manus, 1985; Onwu, 1988; Isizoh, 1998; Speckman, 1999).

Speckman (1999) stands out among the listed authors because he addresses the subject of salvation at length in his thesis.<sup>5</sup> However, his engagement approaches the subject of salvation from the angle of the healing episode of Acts 3:1–10 and not Acts 16. In his thesis, Speckman (1999) focuses on the healing episode of Acts 3:1–10. According to Speckman (1999:14-15), his main concern centres around interpreting the passage in view of its value for proposing a New Testament theology of development with the South African context in mind. This, according to him, is in keeping with the emerging Biblical interpretive trend in South Africa concerned with social and economic issues in the Bible and the relevance of these for today.

The above illustrates is that there is no interpretive consensus on the approach to Luke–Acts, leaving room for more creative approaches to interpretation. Mention must be made of the growing body of literature pointing to the utilisation of approaches to Luke–Acts in addition to the conventional theological and exegetical modes. Though these works do not specifically call for or focusing on the utilisation of the socio-historical method, they are at least pointers to the need for exploring the book of Acts with a newer interpretive lens.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> His thesis raises important points relating to salvation that may need to be further explored.

<sup>6</sup> See Neyrey, (1991) in *The social world of Luke–Acts: Models for interpretation*; Neyrey (1993) (6 volumes), *The book of Acts in its First Century setting* (1993- ); see also Green (2010) in *Methods for Luke*, in which he highlights a number of approaches recently employed in the interpretation of Luke–

### **3.1.2 Socio-historical method: meaning, rationale, audiences, differentiation and relatedness**

#### **3.1.2.1 The socio-historical method: meaning**

Meeks (2003:2-7) defines socio-historical study of the New Testament as an interpretive approach that takes the first century social world of the early Christians and the text seriously, in order to “construct interpretation and to criticise constructions.” The socio-historical method, as argued for here, does not merely consider the first century context and socio-historical data as mere background that is unimportant to the search for the meaning of the text. The method utilises the framework described by Meeks (1983), Malherbe (1983), and demonstrated by De Klerk and Van Rensburg, (2005) and Janse van Rensburg (2009)<sup>7</sup>. By focusing on the social, economic, legal, cultural and religious factors of the narrative audience or characters, the method explores how such factors influence the understanding and meaning of a specific Biblical text<sup>8</sup>. In this method, the social world of the first century readers or narrative audience and not only the author, are explored in the search for meaning and appropriation.

#### **3.1.2.2 The socio-historical method: rationale**

Biblical scholars agree that the starting point of the interpretive process in the search for meaning is asking questions of the text (Koester, 2001:19; Schneiders, 1991:152.). That being so, the key question posed to the text of Acts 16 in this instance is:

“What is the meaning and implication of salvation in Acts 16 in the narrative of Paul’s encounter with the slave girl and the Philippian jailer?”

Approaching the text with such a question could necessarily lead to other related questions. When the socio-historical situation of the slave girl is taken into account, a related question could be asked as to the meaning of the salvation that she refers to. A similar question comes to mind when one considers the Philippian jailer’s question in

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Acts, which includes historical criticism, feminist criticism, narrative criticism and a Latino perspective.

<sup>7</sup> This article notes the extensive multi-volume commentary on Acts by Keener (2012-2015), which utilises socio-historical data.

<sup>8</sup> See Etukumana (2016:26-28), who ascribes the origin of the method to the Chicago School of Theology, though admitting that there were earlier calls for Biblical scholars to take seriously the social reality of early Christians in the search for meaning.

Acts 16:30, “What must I do to be saved?” Will it then be possible that their understandings of salvation reflect or differ from the generally accepted Lukan salvation theme? Though the questions are important and should be sufficiently answered, the quest to answer these questions should be undertaken in a separate paper where the method can be applied to the question extensively. The key issue here is to highlight the fact that the above questions capture the essence of the search for meaning in the passage, which further shows the limitation of previous approaches in the search for meaning in Luke–Acts. The question assumes the quest for meaning as a multidimensional task. It points to Paul, the slave girl, the Philippian jailer and the narrator in the Greco-Roman context. This is so because each of the persons identified in the passage brings their understanding of salvation into the narrative. When meaning is sought using questions such as the above, it shows the need for an approach that may not be part of the interpretive tools frequently utilised. The tools most frequently used in the search for meaning, such as the theological and exegetical approaches, usually seek meaning beyond the author of the text through grammatical and historical analysis and not socio-historical analysis.<sup>9</sup>

After Conzelmann (1960) set the interpretive agenda by concluding that Luke was a historian, the approach to Luke–Acts centred on the person of the author. The search for meaning therefore revolved mainly around the author and his theology. The consequence of this approach is that the depth of understanding and new angles of meaning that the socio-historical situation of the text and the narrative characters could bring to the search for meaning remained unexplored. Though it places the interpretive task in safe waters, non-exploration from newer angles as the socio-historical method raises questions about the credibility of the interpretive process and perpetuates the feeling of distance and dislocation with the Biblical material. When interpretation fails to place sufficient emphasis on the socio-historical context in the search for meaning and rushes forward with the search for meaning from other interpretive angles, it creates perplexity and furthers suspicion, especially in African Christianity where people can

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<sup>9</sup> As Janse van Rensburg (2009) shows, in cases where the historical data is considered in the search for meaning through the frequently used grammatical-historical analysis, the historical part of the data is considered as ‘background only’ and far removed from the search for meaning. Such a meaning is mostly construed to mean what the author or narrator is saying, regardless of what the socio-historical data may suggest.

readily and more easily identify with most of the Biblical contexts<sup>10</sup> and the narrative characters of the Bible<sup>11</sup>. Though in disagreement with the radical suspicion with which post-colonial hermeneutics approaches the Biblical material as exemplified by Dube (2000) and others, the history of the use and abuse of the Bible and missionaries in the establishment of colonialism in Africa cannot be disputed. This reality further calls for the socio-historical method, which reduces the distance between text and the African reality by exploring contextual similarity and shared narratives, thereby stimulating the attitude of trust in the task of interpretation and the appropriation of meaning. Unlike some approaches<sup>12</sup> espoused within African theology and hermeneutics, the socio-historical method keeps the Scripture central to the interpretive task.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.1.2.3 The socio-historical method: social world and audiences

Earlier we emphasised the importance this method attaches to the social world of the text and the narrative audience in the search for meaning. Following Rabinowitz (1977:121-141) and Talbert (2003:14-18), scholars have identified four categories of audiences: 1. The “actual audience,” such as those physically reading or listening to the text; 2. The “authorial audience,” referring to those who the author intends the writing for, even though they may not be physically present and listening to the author, they share common background knowledge presumed in the text; 3. The “narrative

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<sup>10</sup> Ukpong (2000:11–28) and Adamo (2016) are among key African Biblical scholars that have argued for contextual similarity between Africa and the Biblical times. Adamo (2016) goes further and extensively argues for the presence of Africa and Africans in the Bible and concludes that the Bible would have never been in the shape it is now without Africa and African participation in the drama of redemption. He maintains further that African Biblical scholars continue to demonstrate the importance and influence of Africa and Africans in the Bible; and that the Bible is not only an ancient Jewish document, but also an African document (Bailey, 1991:165–186; Copher, 1991:146–164; Felder, 1991:127–145; Wimbush, 2009:162–177). This is not to say that the Bible will cease to be meaningful to a cultural group that fails to identify themselves in the Bible.

<sup>11</sup> In her article on Style, narration, and salvation in urban Kenya, Brummel (2014) demonstrates the transformative power of embedded narrative in which sameness in the narratives (embedding a story within another) led to evident transformation. She maintains that “Biblical stories embedded in contemporary Christian rhetoric, for example, encourage listeners to see a sameness between the here and now and a Biblical space and time.”

<sup>12</sup> See West (1997) and Speckman (2016) for notable exploration of key elements found in African Biblical hermeneutics. While West places emphasis on the place of the “real flesh and blood African reader” towards appropriating the text, Speckman proposes a “celebration of life framework” as the way forward in African Biblical hermeneutics. He elaborates his proposal as based on the teaching of indigenous churches and the traditional (Amaqaba) people. Both West and Speckman fail to place Scripture central to the interpretive task

<sup>13</sup> See Meylahn (2009), who explains the value of reading Biblical narratives alongside modern day narratives as a useful way of not only gaining a better understanding of the Biblical text, but also as an important way of “keeping the affective power of the text to help construct identities and ethical roles.”

audience” as referring to the audience that are engaging the author’s narration from a perspective of a differing background and lacking in the common knowledge presumed in the narrative; and 4. The “ideal narrative audience,” which refers to an audience that accepts the author’s presumed perspective regardless of the perspective of the actual and authorial audience.

Approaching the narrative in Acts 16 today excludes us from being either the actual or the authorial audience. It requires us to make a choice of functioning as either a narrative audience or the ideal narrative audience. Because of the need for credibility in the process of search for meaning within the narrative in question, it follows to reason that the socio-historical approach proposed in this research becomes necessary, especially because it validates an engagement as far back as possible with the world of the authorial audiences and not just the author in the search for meaning. The socio-historical method validates an analytical approach towards understanding salvation in the socio-historical religious milieu of the Greco-Roman world. It leaves room for an analysis that will eventually narrow down to the understanding of the meaning of salvation from the perspective of the slave girl and the jailer in Acts 16. This is critical for a credible reconstruction of meaning that takes seriously the perspectives of the actual and authorial audience and the narrative characters.

The main thrust of this article is to show the value of the socio-historical method and not necessarily to apply the method. However, it is important to reiterate that the application of the method allows us to interrogate the broader Greco-Roman context and how salvation was understood. It also allows for interrogating the slave girl and the jailer to understand how they viewed the salvation of which they spoke. This could allow differences in actual understanding to appear, and when placed in conversation with the Lukan definition of salvation in the text, meaning emerges that can be considered credible and not an imposition on the text. The implication of such a meaning could then be appropriated for contexts like the African context that share similar context with the Acts 16 context.

#### **3.1.2.4 Socio-historical method: differentiation and relatedness to other methods**

Though related, the socio-historical method differs from the socio-scientific method. They both are concerned with the social and historical backgrounds of the text, but the

socio-scientific method executes the interpretive task using rigid modern sociological or scientific interpretive grid or theories without due attention to the culture and context of the first century, often in disregard of the theological content of the Biblical text (Botha, 1990; Van Rensburg, 2000)<sup>14</sup>. The multidimensional nature of the socio-historical method as opposed to the socio-scientific method accommodates a combination of related methods such as theological approach in the task of interpretation.

While the socio-historical approach enables a credible reconstruction that bears in mind the perspective of the actual and authorial audiences, the theological nature of the material in Acts makes it necessary that a theological exegetical approach be made part of the search for meaning and implication. Doing so will validate an enquiry into the meaning of the text, not only from the perspective of the authorial audience alone, but also the author of Acts. This reinforces the need for the multi-pronged methodological approach, bearing in mind that the combined methodologies discussed and suggested here are interrelated and not mutually exclusive.

### **3.1.3 The value of the socio-historical method**

The socio-historical method, when applied, leads to new insights and important conclusions regarding the possible meaning and implication of salvation in Acts 16. As noted earlier, it enables the exploration of the text from a new perspective than that which has been in use. The utilisation of the method in the interpretive process of Acts 16 will further validate the interpretive process and serve as a theoretical base for further exploration and application of other Biblical narratives with similar settings.

This is important because approaching the text with such questions as shown above demand a valid means of arriving at needed answers. Furthermore, such questions show the limitation of approaching the text purely from the established angles of interpretation commonly in use by Biblical exegetes.<sup>15</sup> The argument here is that the use of such conventional methods that do not pay sufficient attention to the socio-historical situation may not provide sufficient answers to the question. Though elements of those established interpretive approaches will be useful, the key question being asked of the

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<sup>14</sup> For further detail on the debate regarding the differences between sociohistoric and socio-scientific, see Mbevi (2014:12-13), and Etukumana (2016:24-34).

<sup>15</sup> Marshall (1971); Witherington (1998); Bovon (1998; 2006)

text requires the proposed socio-historical method. Even though not entirely novel, this interpretive paradigm, as Van Rensburg (2000:564-582) notes, has not always been reconciled, integrated or utilised in the field of Biblical studies in an extensive way<sup>16</sup>.

The table below shows the schematic correlation of how an utilisation of the socio-historical method along with other related methods could lead to answering the question of the meaning and implication of salvation in Acts 16.

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<sup>16</sup> This research notes the extensive multi-volume commentary on Acts by Keener (2012-2015) which utilises socio-historical data. At present, Keener's work remains the only commentary that evidences extensive attention to socio-historical data in the interpretive task of Acts. Understandably, though sensitive to African perspectives, it does not answer questions that directly relate to the African perspective from Acts 16.

**Table 3-1: Schematic correlation table**

<b>Research question</b>	<b>Aim and objectives</b>	<b>Research method</b>
What is the possible meaning of salvation in Acts 16 from an exegetical and analytical perspective?	Offer an exegetical analysis of the meaning of salvation in Acts 16 with reference to the slave girl and the jailer	This New Testament study is done from the perspective of the Evangelical Reformed tradition using exegetical analysis
What is the likely meaning of salvation on the lips of the slave girl and the jailer in Acts 16 from a socio-historical perspective of the Greco-Roman world within which they lived?	Explore the meaning of salvation in the light of the Greco-Roman allusion identified within the text using the socio-historical method	The socio-historical method (Van Rensburg, 2000; Keener, 2012) is used.
What is the convergent or divergent meaning of salvation that emerges from placing Luke, the slave girl, the jailer and Africa in conversation?	A theological analysis of converging and diverging elements in the meaning of salvation in Acts 16 with reference to the slave girl, the jailer, the African context and Luke.	To identify and interpret the convergent and divergent elements in the meaning of salvation in the passage for relevant application, the theological method of interpretation is utilised (Treier, 2008; Webster 2009).
What are the implications of the meaning of salvation in this study for the advancement of the message of salvation in Africa?	Present the implications of the study for the African context where the message of salvation is advancing and encountering pre-existing cultures and understandings of the meaning of salvation.	The researched data are utilised for an informed analysis that will demonstrate both the significance and the implication of the study.
What conclusion and preliminary suggestions arise from this study?	Synthesise the research findings and present implications, conclusion and preliminary suggestions.	Preliminary suggestions are presented based on the conclusion of the study.

### **3.1.4 Conclusion**

An approach to Acts 16 that is based on the socio-historical method along with the theological method of analysis and interpretation to ascertain the possible meaning of salvation is necessary to answer the question of the meaning of the text. The proposed method will make the appropriation of the implication of that meaning more plausible and credible in the advancement of the message of salvation into pre-existing non-Christian contexts, especially within the African context. The method bridges the socio-historical gap between the text and the present-day audience and gives validity to the interpretive process. It further contributes to the creditability of both the Biblical text and the interpretive process in the present post-colonial era where the validity of the Bible is questioned and the interpretive process is considered too distant and foreign to the social-historical realities of African Christians.

The application of this method in the wider field of Biblical studies will open new meaning and a fresh understanding of the Biblical text. Considering the fact that the Biblical text is mostly composed of socio-historical narratives, the approach proposed here can enable a presentation of such new understandings of the majority of the Biblical text across various cultures and communities that seek to make meaning of the text of the Bible today. The application of this method on the text of Acts 16 can therefore serve as a theoretical base for further exploration of the book of Acts and other narratives within the Biblical text.

In the introductory part of this thesis, we highlighted the need for a multi-pronged approach in seeking meaning and implication of the text of Acts 16. We specifically argued for the need to combine the socio-historical and exegetical methods in approaching the text. In the chapter above, we have identified the challenges of the lack of sufficient use of the socio-historical method in the interpretations of Acts 16. Having analysed the method, we demonstrated the possible value the method holds towards a multicultural understanding of the text, and bridging of the socio-historical gap between the text and the present-day audience, thereby giving validity to the interpretive process. This is of much importance as we seek to identify implications of the meaning of the Biblical text especially in the African context where the need exists to bridge the distance between the Biblical text and the immediate context within which meaning is to be appropriated. In the chapter that follows, we will first analyse some key issues that

shape the understanding and interpretation of Luke-Acts, and then focus on an exegesis of the text in search of possible meaning.

## CHAPTER 4: ARTICLE 3

### Σωτηρία in Acts 16: An Exegetical and Theological analysis

#### 4.1 Introduction

The stated overall aim of this study is to investigate the meaning of salvation as seen in the narrative of the slave girl and the jailer in Acts 16 through a combination of exegetical and socio-historical interpretation methods. The aim of this chapter is to contribute towards the wider goal of this research, which is, the search for the meaning of salvation and its implication especially for African Christianity. In the chapter that follows, the socio-historical method is utilised to explore the Greco-Roman allusion in Acts 16 towards a multifaceted understanding of the meaning of salvation.

This chapter surveys the broad usage of salvation and its cognate in Luke-Acts. It narrows down to how it appears in the narrative of the slave girl and the jailer in Acts 16. The chapter argues that σωτηρία in Acts 16 have not been exhaustively attended to by Luke-Acts scholars. The contention is that, when σωτηρία in Acts 16 is read in the light of its exegetical meaning along with an awareness of the socio-historical context, a meaning emerges that has particular critical relevance for contexts similar to the Acts 16 context where the message of salvation is newly received. Such exegetical and socio-historical approach highlights the Christological component of σωτηρία as essential. This becomes apparent in the narrative considering the emphasis on the 'Lord Jesus' in both the slave girl and the jailer episodes. Luke shows that, contrary to the slave girl and the jailer, true meaning of Salvation must be rooted in Christology.

This chapter offers some analytical exploration of Luke-Acts, but focuses primarily on an exegetical exploration of the text of Acts 16 as contributory to the search for meaning. This is done with particular emphasis on the section containing the narrative of the slave girl and the Jailer (Acts 16:11-40). The driving question that informs the enquiry is *what possible meaning of salvation emerges from an Exegetical analysis of σωτηρία along with its cognates in the passage of Acts 16?* This is intended on contributing to the multipronged search for the meaning of salvation in this study.

## 4.1.1 Luke-Acts: Literary & historical context

### 4.1.1.1 Narrative unity

*The making of Luke-Acts* by Cadbury (1927) serves as the watershed on the question about the relationship between 'Luke' and 'Acts'. Before the publication, scholars discussed 'Luke' and 'Acts' without placing them together as the current practice is. Cadbury convincingly argued for the unity of 'Luke' and 'Acts' as a single two-volume book that should be read as such in spite of the canonical separation and arrangement in the Bible. The assumption that persisted is that Luke and Acts were written by the same author and that they share a common genre and theological theme, with the Acts component particularly written as a continuation of the Gospel narrative.<sup>17</sup>

Various Luke-Acts scholars have agreed and some have further elaborated on the existence of such unity<sup>18</sup>. Among scholars that have demonstrated the several aspects that establish the unity of Luke-Act, Talbert (1975) goes to great length to demonstrate the unity by calling attention to recurring patterns of parallelism and similarities that are too detailed and extensive to be ignored.<sup>19</sup>

Though most scholars will agree with the fact of unity as far as a single author being responsible for the two-volume work, some have challenged such unity that goes beyond the same author. Questions being asked relate to the theological and narrative unity.<sup>20</sup>

Gregory and Rowe (2010), in *Rethinking the Unity and Reception of Luke and Acts* offer the most recent challenge in the debate. Through a collection of 12 essays, the question was revisited by various scholars. Worthy to note is the fact that the authorial unity seemed not to be the point of contention. The crux of the arguments revolved around pointing out enduring complexities about genre, narrative unity and theological unity, contrary to Cadbury (1927) and reaching conclusions that essentially question such

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<sup>17</sup> Green, J. B. 1997. Acts of the Apostles. (In Martin, R.P. & Davids, P.H., eds. *Dictionary of the later New Testament and its developments* (electronic ed., p. 12). Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press. (Cadbury, 1927; Talbert, 1975; Tannehill, 1986; 1990; Borgman, 2006; Bruce, 1988)

<sup>18</sup> See Talbert (1975) in Literary patterns, Theological themes and the genre of Luke-Acts

<sup>20</sup> Notably, Parsons, M.C. & Pervo, R.I. 1993 in "Rethinking the unity of Luke and Acts". Minneapolis: Fortress Press have sought to counter the said unity. Bird, M.F. (2007) provides a survey of this debate In 'The unity of Luke-Acts in recent discussion' in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, (29):425-448.

claimed unity. When a conclusion for or against the unity or not of Luke-Acts fails to account for the evidence of both volumes, such conclusion remains unconvincing. A conclusion for the narrative unity of Luke-Acts would presuppose that the whole could be examined as the unfolding of one continuous narrative cycle moving from anticipation to narrative possibilities to probabilities to actualities to consequences, serving one primary narrative aim<sup>21</sup>. If we view Luke-Acts on the large canvas of narrative analysis, it is possible to see in its entirety as one narrative aim unfolding in a simple narrative cycle. In it we see the working out of one aim: God's purpose to bring salvation in all of its fullness to all (Green, 1994:62–63).

At the moment, the evidence for the theological and narrative unity of Luke-Acts remains the scholarly consensus yet to be effectively overturned. What this implies, as O'Toole (1985:353) notes, is that it is important to then approach Luke-Acts as a single authored material in order not to 'truncate' Luke's thoughts.

#### **4.1.1.2 Genre: historical narrative with theological intentionality**

The genre of a particular text shapes the reading and interpretation of such text. In the Greco-Roman world, a text was generally considered to be either history, biography or a novel. The book of Acts is noted to be the only surviving work from antiquity to have over time, being ascribed to all three categories<sup>22</sup>. This however does not signify a scholarly consensus in contemporary Luke-Acts scholarship. Cadbury (1927:362) set the pace here by presupposing Acts to be literary history. This has remained a contested consensus that continues to have debatable aspects. Though various sides to the debate agree that Acts is intended to be read as history, the point of disagreement has remained about the historicity or the reliability of the text as credible history. In a historical survey of the genre debate, Phillips, (2006:366) identifies two groups that have defined the debate as those of the 'conservative tradition', represented largely by British scholars who have demonstrated greater confidence in the historicity of Acts and those of the 'less conservative tradition', mostly represented by German scholarship, with little confidence in the historicity of Acts. Phillips (2006) elucidates:

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<sup>21</sup> Green, J. B. 1997. Acts of the Apostles. (In Martin, R.P. & Davids, P.H., eds. *Dictionary of the later New Testament and its developments* (electronic ed., p. 14). Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>22</sup> (Powell, 1991:9)

*In the second half of the twentieth century, the best of the conservative tradition was represented by scholars such as F.F. Bruce (1954; 1960; 1984; 1990), I.H. Marshall (1969; 1970; 1978; 1992; 2003) and C. Hemer (1977; 1989), who often followed the earlier work of the British W.M. Ramsay (1897; 1911) and the American H.J. Cadbury (1927; 1955;1958). During the same period, the other tradition, which had less confidence in the historicity of Acts, was best represented by M. Dibelius (1956), H. Conzelmann (1960; 1966; 1987) and E. Haenchen (1971). In this two-century-long debate over the historicity of Acts and its underlying traditions, only one assumption seemed to be shared by all: Acts was intended to be read as history. (p366).*

Despite the division, the enduring consensus has remained that Acts is intended to be read as history, with further historical sub-genres predicated upon this consensus. The subgenres argued for include Acts as general history (proposed by D. Aune), political history (proposed by D. Balch,) Deuteronomic history (proposed by T, Brodie) or apologetic history (proposed by G. Sterling).<sup>23</sup>

Phillips (2006:384), following Pervo and borrowing MacDonald's term, suggests that the resolution on the genre question is for the book of Acts to be seen through a supposed emerging consensus that accepts Acts as a mixed genre and therefore Acts should be seen as historical *mythomachia* probably containing both fiction and history at the same time. The problem with his resolution is that it most likely does not hold to the narrative unity that sees Luke-Acts together, in which the Gospel component does not fit into the convoluted category, even if Acts fits such conclusion. Also, the conclusion appears to assume the genre debate to be exclusively a scholarly exercise that seems to have no bearing on how the genre shapes the purpose, interpretation and implication of the text, which are issues that are taken seriously, especially in the context of African Biblical Studies within which this research is situated. It is critical to take note of the challenge of the sublimated theological and ideological commitments of scholars from a variety of diverse communities and interpretive frameworks<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Phillips, T. E. (2006) "The Genre of Acts: Moving Toward a Consensus?," *Currents in Research*, 4(3), pp. 365–396.

<sup>24</sup> Penner, T. (2004:265) "Madness in the Method? The Acts of the Apostles in Current Study," *Currents in Research*, 2(2), pp. 223–293.

When Marshall (1971:116 & 157) argued, contrary to Conzelmann (1954), that Luke was both a historian and a theologian, the evidence he offered and discussed in the introductory part of this research, seemed most plausible in resolving the genre question. In accepting Luke as both a historian and theologian, it follows to reason that Luke's writing then becomes historical narrative with theological intentionality. This is important because it points us to the purpose of Luke-Acts.

#### **4.1.1.3 Narrative plot divisions in Luke-Acts**

Scholars have debated the plot divisions in the book of Acts. Some have put forward the argument that Acts 13 seems to be the turning point of the narrative plot in Acts. The narrative progression in Acts shows the geographical and cultural movement of early Christianity (Acts 1:8) and can be plotted along the lines of activity in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12) and in areas northwest of Judea (Acts 13-28). Paul's proclamation to Gentiles in Acts 13-14 appears to be a new development in the plot. Paul thereafter remains the central character for the rest of the book. Thus, the major plot question according to Staley (1999:113) is whether Paul's 'first missionary journey' in Acts 13-14 is a challenge to and an aberration from the apostles' central mission - a mission that begins in Acts 1 and leads to the authoritative pronouncements of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. If Paul's 'first missionary journey' is an aberration, then Acts 15 is the major turning point of the plot. But if, on the other hand, the Jerusalem Council is an aberration - an aberration and a challenge to Paul's missionary activity, then Acts 13 must be the turning point of the plot<sup>25</sup>. Despite possible disagreement about the turning point of the plot in Acts, Paul's 'second missionary journey' (Acts 16.6ff.) is held in consensus by scholars as charting a dramatic new course for the spread of Christianity which made some to describe Acts 16 as the 'Christianity entering Europe'.<sup>26</sup>

As explained in the earlier part of this research, the context of Acts 16 particularly adds weight to the possible conclusion that Acts 16 is a decisive marker in the narrative plot

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (trans. J. Limburg, A.T. Krabel and D.H. Juel; ed. E.J. Epp with CR. Matthews; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. xlii; M. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (trans. J. Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 101; R.I. Pervo, *Luke's Story of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 53.

<sup>26</sup> See Staley, O. (1999:114), footnote 2, In the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 73 (1999) who elaborates further on this.

as a point that earmarks the advent of Christianity into new territories that were more Gentile and less Jewish in cultural expression and identity. From Acts 16, Christianity was encountering Greco-Roman socio-cultural contexts on a wider scale. The apostles were confronted with different worldviews and faced with new sets of questions and understanding. This, along with other factors, contributed to the choice of this section of the narrative as a place to closely study and understand the meaning of salvation as Luke and some of the narrative characters understood it. This has implications that can be of vital importance in places like Africa where traces of contextual similarity<sup>27</sup> with the Greco-Roman context of Acts 16 are identifiable.

#### **4.1.1.4 Purpose: σωτηρία as the driving purpose in Luke, worked out in Acts**

Considering our position above on the narrative unity of Luke-Acts, two suppositions follow: Firstly, whatever purpose is arrived at as the purpose of Luke has a bearing on the purpose of Acts. Secondly, seeking to know the purpose of Luke-Acts assumes that there is inseparableness between the author's identity and why he wrote what he wrote. In that regard, scholars have grappled with whether to consider Luke the presumed author as a historian or a theologian. In other words, is the account reliable purposed history or a theological redaction? Some have argued that Luke was a theologian and therefore not a reliable historian, others show that Luke was a credible historian who wrote with theological intentionality, thereby making him both a historian and a theologian.<sup>28</sup> This is important because how we define Luke impacts on how we conceptualise the purpose of his writing. A summary of proposals as to the purpose of Luke-Acts is presented below along with their key proponents<sup>29</sup>:

*Acts is 1. A defense of the Christian church to Rome (e.g., Bruce). 2. Acts is a defense of Rome to the Christian church (Walaskay). 3. Acts is an apology for Paul against Judaizers who have sided with non-Christian Jews against Paul's notion that Christianity is the true*

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<sup>27</sup> In chapter 6 of this thesis, we explored and identified contextual similarity between the Greco-Roman contexts of Acts 16 and the African context. We have shown that in both contexts, there exists the prevalence in the issues of divination, fear of death, Spiritism and an understanding of the meaning of salvation that seems to be at variance with what Luke shows in Acts as the meaning of salvation and how to obtain it.

<sup>28</sup> Conzelmann (1960) and Marshall (1971) represent the two sides of the argument. This was discussed in the introductory section part of the thesis

<sup>29</sup> Green, J. B. (1997). Acts of the Apostles. (In R. P. Martin & P. H. Davids E eds., *Dictionary of the later New Testament and its developments* (electronic ed., p. 17). Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press).

*successor to Judaism (see Mattill and Mattill). 4. Acts is a work of edification designed to provide an eschatological corrective for a church in crisis (Conzelmann). 5. Acts is written to reassure believers struggling with the reliability of the kerygma—either with regard to its truth and relevance (e.g., van Unnik) or with respect to its firm foundation in the story of God’s people (e.g., Maddox). 6. Acts was intended to assist the Christian movement in its attempts to legitimate itself over against Judaism (Esler). 7. Acts is written to encourage among Christians a fundamental allegiance to Jesus that called for a basic social and political stance within the empire (Cassidy). (p17)*

Another way that the purpose of Acts has been summarised is to consider it as Irenic, polemical, apologetic, evangelistic, pastoral or theological.<sup>30</sup> Having considered the various evidences, it is convincing that Luke could fit into an overlap of these purposes, but not bound into one specific purpose. It is clear that Luke pays attention to historical details in presenting a theological narrative about salvation and its effect. In line with writings at the time, he states what his purpose is explicitly in the prologues as the communication of historical information (Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1) about salvation. This purpose is further linked to the genre of the book. But further than just a carefully researched historical account, the thematic dominance of ‘Salvation’ which is made explicit in the beginning of the material and weaved throughout the material further delineates the purpose. Salvation remains an identifiable theme throughout Luke’s Gospel, which is sustained and articulated in the book of Acts.

The book of Acts occupies a unique place as a vital source intended and purposed by the author to, among other things, document the historical development of early Christianity and its message of salvation and the outworking of that message of salvation. It is its occupation of such a pivotal place that continues to make it a relevant source for understanding key issues in early Christianity and the consequent implication for present day Christianity. This is not to say that the historicity of the book of Acts has not been challenged by Luke-Acts scholars. As discussed above, scholarly debate about the historicity of Luke-Acts and related questions has not abated. It suffices to say at this point however, that the place which the book of Acts occupies as a key source in understanding early Christianity and the outworking of the message of salvation Luke and the first Christians proclaimed remains sacrosanct. As shown below, the author of

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<sup>30</sup> See Powell (1993:13-20) who gives more details about each category and what it entails.

Luke-Acts shows intentionality and purpose in the usage and prominence of the σωτηρία term and its cognates in both the Gospel and Acts components.

#### 4.1.2 Σωτηρία: Usage and prominence in Luke-Acts

Σωτηρία as a unifying theme is noted to be dominant in Luke-Acts, and the emphasis is considered to be more prominent in Luke-Acts than can be seen in the Gospel of Mark and Mathew. This soteriological tone is set by Luke at the very beginning in the *Sondergut Lukas* (SLk) material and it becomes the framework upon which Luke builds his narrative. An ‘Christological story, cloaked in soteriological robe’ aptly describes Luke-Acts (Steyn, 2005:67-68).

Luke’s salvation language revolves around the word group ‘σωτήρ’ ‘σωτηρία’ ‘σωτηρίον’ and the verb ‘σώζω’<sup>31</sup>. A brief lexical analysis will help towards narrowing down to Luke’s contextual meaning which was part of the aim of this study.

##### i. Σωτήρ: Savior, preserver, deliverer

The Greek New Testament (SBL 2011-2013) indicates 24 occurrences with four of those occurrences found in Luke-Acts. Liddell and Scott (1968)<sup>32</sup> give the following possible range of meanings summarised as a saviour, preserver, deliverer, Lk. 1:47; 2:11; Acts 5:31:

*1.a saviour, deliverer, preserver , c. gen. subjecti, τῆς Ἑλλάδος saviour of Greece, [5th BCE]; also c. gen. objecti, ζ. νόσου, κακῶν a preserver from disease, ills, [5th BCE, 5th BCE] 2. epith. of protecting gods, esp. of Ζεὺς Σωτήρ, [5th BCE, var. dates Tragica Adespota: to him the third cup of wine was dedicated, τρίτον Σωτήρι σπένδειν [5th BCE], etc.; proverb., τὸ τρίτον τῶ σωτήρι the third (i. e. the lucky) time, [5th/4th BCE]; of other gods, as of Apollo, Hermes, [6th/5th BCE]; even with fem. deities, Τύχη σωτήρ, for σώτειρα, [6th/5th BCE] 3. in [1st CE] the Saviour. 4. in Poets, as an adj., saving , [6th/5th BCE]; with fem. Subst., σωτήρες τιμαί the office or prerogative of saving , of the Dioscuri, [5th BCE]*

What stands out from LSJ’s range of meaning above are actually the contextual usage and timing which indicate a usage that predates Christianity and actually reflects a Greco-Roman understanding. Could this be an indication of Lukan

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<sup>31</sup> Powell, M.A. (1992) Van Zyl, H.C. (2005:133); Steyn, G.J. (2005:69).

<sup>32</sup> Liddell, H. G. and Scott, R. 1968. *A Greek-English lexicon*. Edited by H. S. Jones, R. McKenzie, and E. A. Barber. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (Hence forth, LSJ).

contextual awareness in using the term? Is this an indication of some linguistic acculturation by Luke?

**ii. Σωτηρία: preservation, rescue, deliverance, the state of not being in grave danger and so being safe**

The Greek New Testament (SBL 2010) indicates 46 occurrences in the Bible with 10 of those occurrences located within Luke-Acts alone, indicating more usage of the term than other Biblical authors. The term appears in Luke 1:69; Luke 1:71; Luke 1:77; Luke 19:9; Acts 4:12; 7:25; 13:26, 47; 16:17; 27:34. Possible range of meanings according to LSJ is as follows:

1. a saving, deliverance, preservation, safety , Lat. *salus*, [5th BCE], *attic*; ζ. *τινὶ διδόναι, φέρειν* [5th BCE]; *σωτηρίαν ἔχειν* [5th BCE], etc.
2. a way or means of safety , [6th/5th BCE, 5th BCE], etc.
3. a safe return , ἡ ἐς τὴν πατρίδα ζ. [5th BCE]; ἡ οἴκαδε σωτηρία [4th BCE]; also, νόστιμος ζ. [6th/5th BCE]
4. of things, a keeping safe, preservation , τινός of anything, [5th BCE, 6th/5th BCE], etc.
5. security, guarantee for safety, ζ. ἔστω τινός guarantee for the safe keeping of a thing, *ap.* [4th BCE]; *σωτηρίαιτῆς πολιτείας* ways of preserving it, [4th BCE]
6. security, safety , [5th BCE]

Again the pre-Christian usage stands out. But here, Louw and Nida (1988)<sup>33</sup> provide more clarity by indicating that the meaning could indicate a state of being or a process and it is sometime problematic determining whether it refers to a state or a process of being. The fact that LN places σωτηρία under semantic domain 21E<sup>34</sup> could probably indicate an envisaged scholarly meaning of salvation here as a state or process that may not necessarily be religious in nature.

**iii. Σωτηρίον: imparting salvation, saving, delivering**

The Greek New Testament (SBL 2011-2013) indicates 5 possible occurrences Lk. 2:30; 3:6; Acts 28:28; Eph. 6:17; Tit. 2:11. More Lukan usage is again apparent. LN gives meaning ranging from the means, manner or message by which salvation is experienced. LSJ include imparting salvation, saving and delivering in the possible range of meaning.

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<sup>33</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., 1988. Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains. New York: United Bible Societies. (Henceforth, LN).

<sup>34</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., 1988. Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains (New York: United Bible Societies,). Domain 21: E Cause To Be Safe, Free from Danger (21.17-21.24)

#### iv. σῶζω (σῶζειν)<sup>35</sup>: rescue from danger and to restore, deliverance

According to LN, the range of meaning of the root verb refers to rescue from danger and to restore to a former state of safety and well-being - 'to deliver, to rescue, to make safe, deliverance.'

As indicated above, in comparison to the rest of the Gospels, Luke-Acts contains the most usage of Salvation term in its varying forms. The way Luke utilizes the verb σῶζω stands out as unique and different from other synoptic writers. The same unique usage is noticeable in the thirteen times the verb is utilised in Acts only, which together goes to show the centrality and importance of the theme of salvation to Luke<sup>36</sup>.

In the tables that follow, Powell (1992) illustrates, even though not exhaustively, the range of usage and occurrence of salvation and its cognates in Luke-Acts. Powell itemised the verses in the text where the word occurs, and he identifies the beneficiary of salvation, what salvation means to such a beneficiary at that point, who brings the salvation and by what agency the salvation is to be received. Though Powell's interpretation of the meaning of salvation is arguable at points, the importance of his table below is that it provides a picture of how prominently the term was used along with the varying though related understanding of the term. Powell also highlights places of occurrence within Luke-Acts.

##### 4.1.2.1 Table of occurrence in Luke (Powell, 1992)

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<sup>35</sup> The verb appears in Heb. 5:7 and 7:25 as in its Present Infinitive Active form as σῶζειν

<sup>36</sup> Van Zyl (2005:133-134)

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**USE OF *SŌTER*, *SŌTERIA*, *SŌTERION*, AND *SŌZEIN* IN LUKE**

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Who is to be saved?</i>	<i>What does salvation mean?</i>	<i>Who, what brings it?</i>	<i>How received?</i>
1:47	Mary	blessedness (1:42, 48)	God	faith (1:45)
1:69, 71	Israel	rescue from enemies	God	_____
1:77	the Lord's people	forgiveness	John (1:76)	_____
2:11	shepherds	peace (2:14)	Christ the Lord	_____
2:30	all people	revelation, glory	Jesus (1:27)	_____
3:6	all flesh	forgiveness (3:3)	John	baptism
6:9	man with infirmity	healing	word of Jesus	_____
7:50	sinner (7:37)	forgiveness (7:48)	word of Jesus	faith
8:12	ones along the path	_____	word of God	faith
8:36	demoniac	exorcism	command of Jesus	_____
8:48	woman with infirmity	healing	power of Jesus	faith
8:50	Jairus' daughter	resurrection	word of Jesus	faith
9:24	whoever	_____	_____	self-denial
13:23	a few	feasting in God's reign	_____	effort
17:19	leper	being made clean	Jesus	faith
18:26	who?	entering God's reign	God	_____
18:42	blind man	reception of sight	word of Jesus	faith
19:9, 10	Zacchaeus	being child of Abraham	Jesus (19:10)	renunciation

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#### 4.1.2.2 Table of occurrence in Acts (Powell, 1992)

Taken from: Powell, Mark A. "Salvation in Luke-Acts." *Word & World*. (Saint Paul, MN: Luther Seminary, 1992).

<b>USE OF <i>SŌTER</i>, <i>SŌTERIA</i>, <i>SŌTERION</i>, AND <i>SŌZEIN</i> IN ACTS</b>				
<i>Verse</i>	<i>Who is to be saved?</i>	<i>What does salvation mean?</i>	<i>Who, what brings it?</i>	<i>How received?</i>
2:21	everyone	escape from apocalypse	the Lord's name	calling
2:40	Jews from many nations (2:36)	forgiveness, Holy Spirit	exalted Jesus (2:33)	repentance, baptism (2:38)
2:47	numbers	————	the Lord	————
4:9	lame man (3:2)	being made to walk (3:8)	name of Jesus (3:15)	faith (3:16)
4:12	people	————	name of Jesus	————
5:31	Israel	repentance, forgiveness	exalted Jesus	————
7:25	Israel	rescue from enemies	Moses	————
11:14	gentiles	Holy Spirit (11:15) repentance (11:18)	God (11:17)	faith (11:17)
13:23, 26	Israel, godfearers (13: 17, 26)	forgiveness, freedom (13:38-39)	risen Jesus (13:32-39)	faith (13:39)
13:47	gentiles	eternal life (13:46)	————	————
14:9	lame man	being made to walk	word of Paul	faith
15:1, 11	Jews, gentiles	————	the Lord Jesus	grace
16:30, 31	jailor, family	————	the Lord Jesus	faith
27:20, 31,34, 43	sailors, Paul	survival (27:23, 34, 44)	God (27:23)	obedience (27:31)
28:28	gentiles	(spiritual) healing	God	listening

It is worth noting that in the table above, Powell included the Jailor and his family as beneficiaries of salvation but left out the slave girl. What becomes obvious is that Powell portrays here what this study has noted from the onset, which is the fact that Luke-Acts scholars do not give sufficient attention to the meaning of and other related issues involving the salvation proclaimed by the slave girl. Some Luke-Acts scholars have concluded that the passage is about exorcism which the slave girl experienced, and they make nothing more of the narrative. Such conclusion remains debatable if one

takes into account the Lukan way of showing the effect and outworking of salvation. We shall return to discuss this point at a later stage. At this point, we will pay attention to an exegesis of the episode to be followed by a summary of the findings.

### **4.1.3 Σωτηρία in Acts 16: Exegetical analysis**

#### **4.1.3.1 Introduction: Focus on Acts 16: 17-18 and 30-31**

As indicated earlier, the aim of this study was to investigate the meaning of salvation especially as it is found in the narrative of the slave girl and the jailer. Exegesis narrows down on verses 17-18 and 30-31. The socio-historical method which is the accompanying method used in this research has been vigorously applied on the other verses to explicate meaning from other aspects of the text. This is done in Chapter 5 through a careful identification of key words that have particular significance in the Greco-Roman context and which may contribute to the overall search for meaning.

The argument for isolating the particular section of the text for the task of exegesis has been made to the effect that, among other features, there exists a direct narrative causal link (Powell, 2010:245)<sup>37</sup> that primarily connects the section together. The proclamation of 'salvation' by the slave girl initiated the action that led to the jailing of Paul and companions followed by the events that led to the subsequent question by the jailer on how to obtain 'salvation'.

Next, an exegetical exploration and consideration of the possible meaning of salvation in the Lukan context within the passage are provided.

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<sup>37</sup> Powell 2010. *Narrative criticism* In Green, Joel B. *Hearing the New Testament: strategies for interpretation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2nd ed. (p239-255)

#### 4.1.4 The text

##### 4.1.4.1 Acts 16:17 The Greek Text and English translation

Greek Text <sup>38</sup>	English translation <sup>39</sup>
αὕτη κατακολουθοῦσα τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ ἡμῖν ἔκραζεν λέγουσα	She having followed Paul and us, was crying out saying:
Οὗτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι δοῦλοι τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου εἰσίν,	" These men_ are slaves of the highest
οἵτινες	God <sup>41</sup>
καταγγέλλουσιν ὑμῖν ὁδὸν σωτηρίας <sup>40</sup> .	who proclaim to you [a] way to salvation"

##### 4.1.4.2 Acts 16:30 The Greek text and English translation

Greek Text <sup>42</sup>	English translation <sup>43</sup>
καὶ προαγαγὼν αὐτοὺς ἔξω	And having brought them out
ἔφη· Κύριοι, τί με δεῖ ποιεῖν ἵνα σωθῶ <sup>44</sup> ;	He was saying Sirs what is necessary for me to do <sup>45</sup> that I may be saved

<sup>38</sup> Holmes, M. W. (2011–2013). The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition (Ac 16:17). Lexham Press; Society of Biblical Literature.

<sup>39</sup> The translation is mine, guided by lexical understanding

<sup>40</sup> NGSF: Noun, genitive singular feminine. The genitive form and a derivative of σωτήρ.

<sup>41</sup> We have expounded on the possible significance and meaning of the Theos upsistos from the available evidence of the possible understanding of the term from a Greco-Roman perspective\*\*\*\*

<sup>42</sup> Holmes, M. W. (2011–2013). The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition (Ac 16:30). Lexham Press; Society of Biblical Literature.

<sup>43</sup> My translation as guided by lexical understanding

<sup>44</sup> VAPS1S: Verb, Aorist passive subjunctive 1<sup>st</sup> person singular. The subjunctive indicating a wished possibility, what he maybe to be told to do in this case, though the presence of δεῖ + infinitive in the sentence structure creates a sense of heightened necessity

<sup>45</sup> The probable meaning and possibilities of 'what to do' was extensively discussed in the chapter that follows, taken into account not merely the Greek language meaning of the verb, but the reconstructed Greco-Roman perspective of the jailer

#### 4.1.5 Exegetical findings

This section is demarcated to be from Acts 16:11-40 which contains the narrative in Philippi. The text presents a narrative with three vignettes<sup>46</sup>, with each of the vignettes featuring a Gentile business woman, a slave girl and a Roman official. As explained earlier, the focus of this study was on Acts 16:17 and 30. The utterance of the slave girl about a way of salvation and the jailer asking about what is necessary for him to do so as to obtain salvation create the narrative causal link that warrants the focus on the verses. Furthermore, as discussed above regarding the plot divisions in Acts, scholars agree that Paul's 'second missionary journey' (Acts 16.6ff.) charts a dramatic new course for the spread of Christianity, thereby resulting in some describing Acts 16 as 'Christianity entering Europe'.<sup>47</sup> Even if the geographical description is contested, what remains clear is that Acts 16 clearly marked the spread of Christianity into new territories, thereby containing lessons for where Christianity encounters new territories of similar socio-cultural climate.

##### 4.1.5.1 ACTS 16:17 a way of salvation (the slave girl vignette)

αὕτη κατακολουθοῦσα τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ ἡμῖν ἔκραζεν λέγουσα Οὗτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι δοῦλοι τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου εἰσὶν, οἵτινες καταγγέλλουσιν ὑμῖν ὁδὸν σωτηρίας.

(She having followed Paul and us, was crying out saying: "These men\_ are slaves of the highest God who proclaim to you [a] way to salvation".)

This section falls within a delineable thought unit in the second missionary journey spanning Acts 16:6-40. The thought unit consists of two parts: (1) a commissioning account (16:6-10) and (2) a narrative about the mission to Philippi (16:11-40). This second part of the unit is bracketed by references to Philippi (vv. 11-12 and v. 40b) and to Lydia and the other believers/brethren (vv. 13-15 and v. 40a). Within the inclusion, vv. 16-39 are built out of two miracle stories (vv. 16-24, 35-39 and vv. 24-34).<sup>48</sup> Our task falls within the second section of the thought unit and our analysis is informed by an

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<sup>46</sup> See Arnold, 2002:368

<sup>47</sup> See Staley, (1999:114), footnote 2, In the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 73 elaborated more on this.

<sup>48</sup> See Talbert (2005:138)

awareness of the larger though unit as specified above. A number of points arise from this episode that remains vital towards an understanding of meaning in the passage.

**i. πνεῦμα Πύθωνα (Python spirit)**

The slave-girl in question, her marginal status or identity, having several physical owners (Acts 16:16) who got angry for loss of income resulting from her exorcism, as well as her being 'owned' by a πνεῦμα Πύθωνα (Python spirit), therefore possibly a *Pythia* (Acts 16:16).

**ii. Θεος Ὑψίστος (the highest God)**

Another important point that draws exegetical attention could be found in her proclamation that designates Paul and his companions as slaves of the Θεος Ὑψίστος (the highest God). Though a Lukan and Jewish term for Yahweh, could we assume such an understanding by a non-Jewish slave girl and her for non-Jewish listeners<sup>49</sup>?

**iii. Ὁδὸν σωτηρίας (way of salvation)**

The third point of interest for exegesis is again found in her proclamation of the Apostles' preoccupation as proclaimers of (a) way of salvation.

Points 1 and 2 are the subjects of a focused inquiry through a socio-historical method in the chapters that follow next. What must be discussed here is that, based on the textual indication of her being a *Pythia* along with the possible ambiguity that her proclamation portends, the question of the meaning of salvation she was referring to in context becomes acute. In other words, what is the meaning of σωτηρία within the context of her proclamation? Some views are here presented:

1. Most Lukan interpreters approach the episode without seeking to take into account the meaning of salvation which the slave girl is talking about. They rather approach the text with considerations of whether it conforms to Lukan exorcism stories where

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<sup>49</sup> When the slave girl pointed to Paul and his companion as slaves of the Θεος Ὑψίστος (God Most High) who proclaim a way of σωτηρία she here presents details that may be strange to us, but not within here Greco-Roman context. Trebilco (1989), among others, shows that the word ὑψίστος is used of Yahweh in the Septuagint, the New Testament, in Jewish Pseudepigrapha and by other Jewish authors. He also points out that the same word is also used in classical literature and inscriptions of pagan deities, most frequently of Zeus Ὑψίστος. This has made scholars to question the origin of the notion in order to reconstruct the slave girl's understanding in her usage of the word. We shall attend to this difficulty in the chapter that follows with an exploration of the Greco-Roman understanding of salvation

unclean spirits do acknowledge Christ and are thereafter expelled. The traditional view that interpreters have adopted maintained that the point of the episode is the exorcism which took place and it must then mean that the girl had an evil spirit.<sup>50</sup> Though some take note of the possible ambiguity in the slave girl's proclamation of salvation, the question of the meaning of salvation she talks about is hardly asked. Therefore, the assumption is that, in her proclamation of salvation, what she meant is nothing different from the Apostles' proclamation, save for a bit of ambiguity.<sup>51</sup> Schnabel, (2012:672-682) agrees with other interpreters that the Philippi episode narrates the exorcism of a spirit of divination from a slave girl (vv. 16- 18). However, he goes further to point out that the phrase she used "way to salvation", with no definite article, could be understood by pagans in Philippi in terms of Paul proclaiming one path to salvation among many possibilities. This point is significant because it refers to the girl's definition of salvation that is potentially faulty, though not apparent.

2. Salvation in the proclamation of the slave girl could mean deliverance, safety, health or a better state of being. Though it may sound vague, it can be supported and embraced as sufficient by her listeners. Her proclamation in the past through her spiritual power of divination has mustered some credibility, such that she made so much money for her owners according to the passage. The fact that σωτήρια also has been so interpreted in pre-Christian era [5th BCE]<sup>52</sup> and within her context further supports the possibility. The suggestion is that, without interpreting with Christian presupposition, the meaning of salvation in Acts 16:17 remains as vague as the slave girl makes it to be. 'Deliverance', 'health', 'safety' or a path to a better state of being are all possible definitions. All of the above definitions fit into already pursuable goals

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<sup>50</sup> E.g. Ernst Haenchen *et al.*, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (1971), pp. 495-96; Hans Conzelmann, *Acts* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 131; Bruce, *Acts* 1988, p. 361; Johnson, 2006. *Acts*, pp. 297-98 and C.K. Barrett, *Acts* (1998), II, 784-88.

<sup>51</sup> See for an example of dealing with other questions in the text without asking questions about what she meant by salvation, Talbert (2005:138-147); Arnold, 2002:364-376); Barret, 1998:(774-785) indicates that the possessed girl provided much profit to her owners, and by the exorcism, Luke, disapproved of profit made by the abuse of spiritual agencies.

<sup>52</sup> See σωτήρια in Liddell, H. G. and Scott, R. 1968. *A Greek-English lexicon*. Edited by H. S. Jones, R. McKenzie, and E. A. Barber. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

within Greco-Roman religion<sup>53</sup>. Her ability to tell fortunes and her proclamation had no negative connotations within her context. There was nothing seemingly wrong, but Luke narrates Paul's reaction which indicates visible displeasure. Was it a disapproval of her vagueness of proclamation or was Paul trying to challenge their understanding and belief? The perplexity became heightened when Paul invoked the name of 'Jesus Christ' against the spirits and silences the proclamation. 'Jesus Christ' surely has not an existing category in their pantheon of gods. Will that be the missing piece in the contextual understanding and definition of salvation by the slave girl and her listeners? The passage explains no further, but it is open for all to see that an encounter or a confrontation that challenges an age-long belief in the 'goodness' of receiving guidance from the divination spirits and pursuing goals of salvation defined as 'deliverance' 'health' or 'safety' outside of a new understanding of 'Jesus Christ' had taken place. Such speculation stretches outside the current pursuit for understanding the possible meaning in context. This line of thought is further explored in the next chapter.

#### **4.1.5.2 Acts 16:30 what is necessary for me to do to for salvation (The Roman official)**

καὶ προαγαγὼν αὐτοὺς ἔξω ἔφη· Κύριοι, τί με δεῖ ποιεῖν ἵνα σώζω;

And having brought them out he was saying Sirs what is necessary for me to do that I may be saved

In this episode, we have earlier noted a direct causal link that connects the episodes. The jailer experienced an earthquake and thought the prisoners had escaped. He was filled with fear from the experience of the earthquake and the possible repercussion of execution in case the prisoners had escaped under his watch. Fear of death from his superiors or from the wrath of the gods was evident, as it was the common belief that phenomena like earthquakes indicated the displeasure of the gods.<sup>54</sup> If his question was

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<sup>53</sup> Keener, (2015:2458) discusses primary evidence to this effect. Peterson (2009 462) notes further that the term was also used in pagan literature, so that 'a resident in Philippi, with no first-hand knowledge of Judaism, might well identify the one Jewish God with the highest god in his own pantheon'. Salvation in material and spiritual ways was the object of vows and prayers to many gods in the Greco-Roman world, and it was 'the desired object set before initiates in various mystery cults'. Barrett 1998, 786. Cf. Bruce 1990, 360. Witherington 1998, 494-95, all insists that the utterances of the slave girl should be seen in their 'proper polytheistic and pluralistic context'.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas, D. W., (2011). Acts. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.

driven by fear of death and impending danger, which was highly likely, then the meaning of salvation for him did not differ much from that of the slave girl, namely deliverance from death and the fear of it, especially in his case. Though it may not be possible to fully reconstruct the jailer's knowledge about the meaning of salvation, what he said reveals a lot. Whatever it was that he believed salvation was, he expressed his readiness to embrace salvation. Some indicators point to his understanding.

**i. Κύριοι (Lords)**

The earthquake, the near suicide, the trembling call for lights all indicate existential fear, provoked perhaps by the realization that he must be under some divine offence<sup>55</sup>. The jailor turned to the prisoners for answers (thus attributing the dramatic events to or related to them). The Jailor addresses them as *Κύριοι* (Lords). This reference to the prisoners as *Κύριοι* (Lords) especially in the vocative, indicates that he was employing the term in a divine or semi-divine sense, thereby looking to Paul and his companions as 'lords' that could offer him salvation. They however pointed him to "the Lord Jesus" for the salvation he desired<sup>56</sup>.

**ii. δεῖ ποιεῖν (must do)**

The jailer's formulation betrays his classical Greco-Roman perspective about how to obtain salvation: he wanted to know what he "must do" (δεῖ ποιεῖν). In a pagan context, the answer would point the jailer to sacrifices that he should offer to the gods in order to appease their wrath or obtain the needed salvation (Schnabel 2012:691). But the answer Paul and Silas provided succinctly summarised the "way to salvation" (v. 17). They informed the jailer that only faith in or believing "in the Lord Jesus" and an acknowledgment that he is Lord could save him. It is highly likely that Paul provided a more elaborate answer to the jailer's question and would have referred to Jesus' death on the cross as the event in which God atoned the sins of sinners and that acknowledging Jesus as Lord presupposed the belief that God raised Jesus from the dead; otherwise the crucified Jesus could not be Lord<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>55</sup> Stenschke, C. (1998:130)

<sup>56</sup> Keener, (2015:2509)

<sup>57</sup> Schnabel,( 2012:691).

### iii. σῶζω (rescue, heal)

Lexical evidence above showed that Lukan special usage of σῶζω stands out in comparison to the other Gospel accounts. Its connotation of meaning in relation to physical rescue or healing is also evident in Luke. Such meaning is also not outside the purview of the Jailer and his Greco-Roman context within which the word had such connotations of meeting physical need. There is little doubt as to the fact that the Jailer conceived of salvation in terms of physical safety or rescue. To this, Van Zyl (2005:151-152) points out that Salvation is concrete, touching the physical and non-physical realms as Jesus shows in meeting human needs as a way of offering salvation. However, salvation according to Luke is more than this. It does include, but is not restricted to the alleviation of physical needs. The alleviation of human need becomes the “symbol” for total redemption. Yes, salvation does include physical healing, but is more. Van Zyl adds:

*This is well illustrated in the events surrounding the jailer of Philippi (Acts 16:25–34). His initial cry: “What must I do to be saved?” (16:30), is first and foremost a cry to be delivered or rescued from the present calamity of the earthquake, and—the notion concomitant to it—from the manifestation of the supernatural in this “natural” disaster (so Witherington 1998, 153–154). To be more specific, in all probability the jailer’s cry is one for help to escape the wrath of the gods. The supernatural events that led to the jail doors flying open were enough proof to him that he was party to the incarceration of innocent people, which is punishable by the gods.*

Though the jailer shows an understanding of salvation in terms of physical need and was actually looking for salvation based on his felt need of physical protection<sup>58</sup>, what was offered to him as salvation was more. It involved the total redemption of the jailer and his household (Van Zyl, 2005:151-152)

#### 4.1.5.3 Summary of findings

1. Salvation according to the slave girl is a path to safety and deliverance to a better state of being (among other existing paths).

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<sup>58</sup> Stenschke (1998:130) comments further in relation to the Jailer episode: ‘Salvation is here connected to an action or state from which salvation is necessary. The answer shows that salvation has a more comprehensive scope than what is immediately related to this action or state’

2. Salvation according to the jailer is deliverance from physical harm and from the anger of the gods.
3. Salvation according to Luke is neither a vague path nor simply deliverance from the harm and anger of the gods. It is much more than that. Salvation is a person, 'Lord Jesus', who falls outside of the pantheon of Greco-Roman gods as not just another *Theos upsistos*. He is presented to the jailer as 'The Lord Jesus'. The command "in the name of Jesus Christ" establishes for the citizens of Philippi (and for Luke's readers) that the source of salvation is Jesus, Israel's Messiah and Saviour (cf. 2:21, 40). An order "in the name of Jesus" is a command of Jesus himself (Schnabel, 2012:684).

#### **4.1.6 Chapter conclusion**

In this chapter, we set out to investigate the meaning of salvation according to the episode of Acts 16. Luke shows salvation as affecting both spiritual and physical realms. Because of its impact in the spiritual realm, it shows signs of the effects of such salvation beyond present realms of life. Because salvation frees one from physical fear of death, it also shows signs of the physical impact in the here and now. It may not be farfetched to assume that one of the physical effects of the salvation encounter in Acts 16 is a new community, "The new people of God<sup>59</sup>" which is multi-racial, containing a former marginalised slave girl, a Roman military official and probably some Jews, a new community united by salvation in the person of the Lord Jesus. Luke shows the meaning of salvation that is Christological.

An implication that equally emerged along with the meaning is that, within the episodes, the obligation of clarifying the true definition of salvation lay with those who proclaimed the message of salvation. Those who proclaim the message of salvation need to firmly grasp the importance of Christological soteriology.

In the next chapter, we further explore the meaning of salvation from the Greco-Roman perspective. It will give us opportunity to explore other aspects of the text that have

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<sup>59</sup> Seccombe (1998:371-372), explains that the movement of the Gospel of salvation from Jerusalem encountered and embraces outcast Samaritans them as well as Gentiles. Luke showed not only their conversion but their becoming part of Christian fellowship, particularly, table fellowship comprising of Jews and Gentiles.

Greco-Roman allusion, so that our understanding of meaning from the text will be well rounded.

## CHAPTER 5: ARTICLE 4

### Salvation in Acts 16:16-40. A socio-historical exploration of the Greco-Roman understanding

#### Abstract

This article highlights the importance of understanding the cultural background of a specific time by utilising the socio-historical method in the search for meaning and understanding of the concept of salvation in the narrative about the slave girl in Acts 16. Substantial integration of the understanding of words and concepts at the time of writing the text and the cultural and social background is relevant and leads to deeper understanding of the Biblical text and is therefore essential for thorough New Testament studies.

*Theos upsistos* [Most High God] and the Lukan usage of *πνεῦμα Πύθωνα* [python spirit] in relation to the slave girl in Acts 16, are explored in the light of their Greco-Roman allusion.

The article argues that Luke's point in the narrative is to expose, engage, challenge and counter long-held assumptions about the meaning and means of salvation. The article contributes an exemplification of the use of the socio-historical method towards broader and deeper understanding and credible meaning-making of the Acts 16 text.

The article shows interdisciplinarity through an engagement with a theological concept through the utilisation of the socio-historical method in generating meaning and understanding of a New Testament text. It challenges assumptions about the meaning of the text in the narrative and opens possibilities to further interpretation that could be found meaningful to modern-day interpreters of the text.

## 5.1 Introduction

Kauppi (2006:8) opines that in some contemporary New Testament scholarship it is not uncommon to find the practice where Greco-Roman religion is either altogether ignored or misinterpreted in the task of interpretation, especially when dealing with texts that are situated within the Greco-Roman context. He therefore sets out to remedy that. His monograph, *Foreign but familiar Gods* published in 2006<sup>1</sup> stands out as a thorough attempt at investigating what he refers to as “overlooked references” to Greco-Roman religion in Acts. In a significant way, Kauppi advances similar attempts earlier made by scholars who studied Luke's use of Greco-Roman religions, such as Tremel (1981), Wildhaber (1987), Grant (1986), Soffe (1986), Klauck (1994) and Gill (1994).

In his work, Kauppi pays attention to various concepts in Acts that may be foreign to the modern-day reader, but are familiar to Greco-Romans within their religious experience. In the monograph, Kauppi focuses his investigation on places that are mentioned, or with allusion to oracles and divination, the imperial cult, the Greco-Roman sacrificial system, Athenian civic-foundation mythology, as seen in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, the Artemis cult, votive offerings, *Διοπετής* objects, snakes in Greek religion, *Δίκη*, personified abstractions, and the *Διόσκουροι*.

Though extensive, Kauppi's monograph fails to consider the important discussion on the origins of some important concepts like the *Theos upsistos* [Most High God] in Acts 16. He also did not account for the nuanced meaning that could emerge from understanding the origin of the concepts, which could impact upon the Lukan meaning of salvation in the text of Acts 16.

The *Theos upsistos* [Most High God] draws significant attention from scholars who are interested in the study of Greco-Roman notions in Luke–Acts, especially Acts 16. This is so because of the proclamation by the slave girl that Paul and his companion are slaves of the *Theos Hypsistos* who proclaim a way of *σωτηρία* (*Soteria*). While Cook (1925), Roberts *et al.* (1936), Trebilco (1989) and others argue that the notion finds its origins in the syncretic and henotheistic<sup>2</sup> nature of the ancient Greco-Roman religion in which

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<sup>1</sup> Kauppi, L.A. 2006. *Foreign but familiar Gods*. London: T & T Clark.

<sup>2</sup> This notion fundamentally differs from monotheism in the sense that it holds to the belief in a supreme God without excluding belief in or the legitimising of the existence of other deities.

there exists belief in a supreme deity along with other deities, other scholars (Levinskaya, 1996) argue that the origins should be attributed to the theological influence of the early Jewish diaspora. The question of the origins of the concept has remained largely unresolved among most scholars whose works were reviewed. The question of the origin of the concept remains important as it affects the understanding and meaning of the text that this research is concerned with.

In the study of the meaning of salvation in Acts 16, investigation into the Greco-Roman religious context is therefore necessary towards a credible reconstruction of the meaning of the text under consideration. This approach considers the fact that behind the Luke-Acts narrative there is a shared social, cultural and religious knowledge and assumptions between the author and the first audience. This is important especially for a modern audience seeking to interpret the text. The investigation here will help to avoid the charge by Kauppi as noted above. This is important for this research because the narrative in Acts 16, which is the focus here, took place within the broader Greco-Roman context.

This investigation aims to show the Greco-Roman understanding of salvation and Luke's point in the narrative of Acts 16.

### **5.1.1 Methodology**

The formulation and usage of the socio-historical method within Biblical studies is traceable to Shirley Jackson Case<sup>3</sup>, though subsequently further developed and defined by others. Meeks (2003:2-7) defines socio-historical study of the New Testament as an interpretive approach that takes the first century social world of the early Christians and the Biblical text seriously and is useful towards constructing interpretations and challenging established constructions.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Case, S.J, 1914. *The Evolution of Early Christianity*. Chicago: University of Chicago; *The Social Origins of Christianity* (ibid. 1923); *The Social Triumph of the Ancient Church* (New York: Harper, 1933).

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed historical background sketch of the formation, development and usage of the method within the field of Biblical studies, see Osiek, C (1989) In "The New Handmaid: The Bible and the Social Sciences," *Theological Studies*, 50(2), pp. 260–278. See also W. J. Hynes, (1981) *Shirley Jackson Case and the Chicago School: The Socio-Historical Method*. 36-43.

Scholars (Schwartz, 1955:134-154; Mannheim, 1953; Gerth & Mills 1954)<sup>5</sup> are all in agreement that the fundamental assumption underlying the socio-historical method that drives this project is that social structures determine the behaviour of the individual within such structures. An exploration of the understanding of salvation from the viewpoint of the socio-historical milieu within which the Acts 16 narrative occurred would therefore serve the broad overall purpose of this research, which is the search for the full extent of meaning, significance and implication of salvation in this Biblical narrative.

### **5.1.2 Salvation in the Greco-Roman context in view of Acts 16**

As noted earlier, the narrative of Acts 16 is set against the backdrop of the wider Greco-Roman world of the first century. The Christian religion in the first centuries grew within the Greco-Roman context and actively engaged the cultures of its context (Hubbard 2013:103; Neufeld & DeMaris, 2010). The difference between the ancient Mediterranean world of the New Testament and the modern world within which the interpretative task is carried out creates a scenario in which it becomes common place to find New Testament studies that do not adequately take this reality into account. Paying attention therefore to the conceptual understanding that exists within that cultural context does justice to a more robust approach to the quest for understanding the meaning of any narrative that finds its origins in that context. Bearing that in mind, the quest for an understanding of the socio-religious and cultural milieu of the Greco-Roman world in order to trace the conceptual understanding of salvation becomes imperative to this section of the research. Such an understanding, as Hubbard (2013:104) notes, makes possible an interpretation of the text that can clearly identify “where and how the New Testament writers actually were engaging, and often challenging, the everyday assumptions of the world around them.”

### **5.1.3 Greco-Roman religious landscape and salvation**

#### **5.1.3.1 Greco-Roman religious landscape**

Of the many legacies attributed to Alexander the Great (334–323 BC) in his conquests, the legacy of a permeating influence of Greek culture and religious ideas in the ancient

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<sup>5</sup> See Karl Mannheim, 1953, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, New York, Oxford University Press. See also Gerth & Mills (1954), *Character and Social Structure: The Psychology of Social Institutions*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company.

Greco-Roman world is noted as outstanding. Even though there was no imposition of a singular religious belief, the said influence brought forth a “Panhellenic religious framework that continued to honour the classical pantheon of ancient Athens, yet without excluding the multitudes of regional deities, local mythologies, and wide spectrum of beliefs and practices among the scores of ethnic groups that composed Hellenistic antiquity.”<sup>6</sup> The fact that the narrative of Acts 16 that this research focuses on specifically finds its occurrence within such a broad-based religious climate, necessitates an understanding of that broader religious climate.

As broad-based as the Greco-Roman religious landscape was, key markers have been identified by scholars (Hubbard, 2013:105-106; Garland, 2001: ix). These markers point to an identifiable system of religion that highlights the difference between religion in the Greco-Roman world of the era under review and contemporary religion as understood and subsumed as bedrock of some interpretive assumptions today. Such differentiation as Hubbard (2013:105-106) shows deserves to be recast as follows:

- Religion and divinities were not exclusive. Many divinities could be worshiped by individuals or community. This was both expected and encouraged.
- There was no need for conversion from one faith or deity to another, nor were there proselytising or evangelistic tendencies.
- It was primarily concerned not with ethics – how one ought to live – but with how to earn material blessings from the gods and how to avoid their wrath.
- There was no centralised cult, temple, or priesthood with trans-local authority, nor were there sacred texts to study for training in “orthodox” dogma.
- It was not experienced as a personal faith in the modern sense of deeply affecting the emotional life or character development of the worshiper.

As shown above, therefore, it becomes clear that ancient Greco-Roman religion differs substantially from the modern understanding of religion. What this implies for the interpretation of the narrative that concerns this research is that proper attention should

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<sup>6</sup> Hubbard, 2013:105

be paid to the socio-historical and cultural milieu that undergirds the religious views and beliefs as expressed in the narrative of Acts 16.

### **5.1.3.2 Greco-Roman concept of salvation**

When speaking of salvation in the Greco-Roman world, the assumption that such a notion is analogous to the Christian concept of salvation is further brought into question when one considers the view of Adluri (2013:1-26). From the perspective of Greek philosophy, Adluri asks: “What if Greek ‘salvation’ bespoke a radically different experience than the one we, influenced by over two millennia of Christian upbringing, have come to expect and associate with the term?” Without a doubt, his question has weight even if one disagrees with Adluri on his insistence on the need to separate philosophy from theology in order to understand Greek notions of salvation. However, this insistence is less applicable to the claim about Greek notions of salvation being radically different from such notion in the Biblical perspective. As he later concedes, his idea that theology must be separated from philosophy in order to understand Greek notions of salvation is simply inconsistent with the Greco-Roman thought in which theology was inseparable with philosophy. The importance, however, of Adluri’s question lies in the fact that it challenges wrongly held assumptions that salvation in Greco-Roman thought and Christianity may refer to one and the same thing. This brings to the fore the important fact that a Greco-Roman understanding of salvation must not be assumed to speak of one and the same experience as in Christian theology.<sup>7</sup>

### **5.1.4 Greco-Roman religion, the pantheon of deities and salvation**

Greco-Roman religion has been defined as not being a monolithic entity, but instead as being comprised of Greek and Roman ritual practices, personnel (priests, temple attendants, oracles, etc.), individual behaviours (“magic” and so-called “popular religion”), schools of thought (philosophy and mystical metaphysics such as Orphism),

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<sup>7</sup> Adluri further speaks of Greek notions of salvation divided into philosophical, theological and religious, but maintained that since the Greeks had no exact equivalent of the Christian notion of God, salvation in the Greco-Roman conception are best understood when such notions are set aside (2013:9).

and localised cults. Greco-Roman religion is therefore described as the sum total of religious practices encountered by a Greco-Roman in the daily course of civic life.<sup>8</sup>

The religion revolved around cults and a pantheon of gods who had points of beginning in existence and possessed particular endowments and attributes for which their beneficiaries looked to them to provide. Even though they are portrayed in idealistic terms, their interconnectedness in practical terms depicted disparate accounts of discord and power play. Depending on the attribute ascribed to a certain deity, benefactors expected such assistance from the deity. Hubbard (2013:109) posits that, “in many ways, the mythology of the ancient Greeks represents a kind of primitive animism organised in a hierarchy and presented with a genealogy.” In essence, whether it was help, deliverance, a desired state of being or whatever was needed by a benefactor within the Greco-Roman religious framework, such a person would petition or look to any of the pantheon of gods that possessed the necessary attribute or endowment that could answer to such a need. Salvation was therefore understood to be available from a plurality of gods. In that setting, salvation is benevolence from the gods that could take the form of rescue, care or healing, among many other things. Hubbard (2013:108) provides the following illustration of some of the gods and the scope of their salvific activity towards their clients:

#### Principal Pan-Hellenic Deities<sup>9</sup>

**Aphrodite** Goddess of beauty, sexual love, and fertility

**Apollo** God of music, prophecy, healing, and archery

**Ares** God of war

**Artemis** Goddess of fertility, the wilderness, and hunting

**Asclepius** God of healing

**Athena** Patron deity of Athens; goddess of wisdom, arts and crafts, and war; helper of heroes

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<sup>8</sup> Kauppi, 2006:16–18.

<sup>9</sup> Moyer, V.H., 2013 Greek Religion In Green, J. B., & McDonald, L.M. The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts. Pp105–123.

**Demeter** Goddess of grain

**Dionysus** God of wine, merriment, and nature

**Eros** God of love

**Hades** God of the underworld and the dead

**Hecate** Goddess of the underworld and sorcery; also associated with crossroads

**Hephaestus** God of fire; blacksmith of the gods; disfigured and banished from Olympus

**Hera** Goddess of marriage; wife of Zeus

**Hermes** Messenger of the gods; helper of travellers and merchants

**Hestia** Goddess of hearth and home

**Persephone** Daughter of Zeus and Demeter; queen of the underworld; associated with spring and the fruits of the field

**Poseidon** God of the sea and earthquakes

**Uranus** God of the sky; father of the Titans

**Zeus** Ruler of the gods

#### 5.1.5 Θεός Ὑψίστος among Greco-Roman deities

*Οὗτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι δοῦλοι τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ Ὑψίστου ὁδὸν σωτηρίας:*

*These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.*

Among the pantheon of pan-Hellenistic deities of prominence in the Macedonian region and of direct importance to this research is the *Theos Hypsistos* [Most High God]. As pointed out in the introduction, the *Theos Hypsistos*, or its variable *Theos upsistos* [Most High God] has maintained a place of interest among scholars who are interested in the study of Greco-Roman understandings of salvation in Acts 16. The proclamation by the slave girl that Paul and his companion are slaves of the *Theos Hypsistos* who proclaim

a way of *σωτηρία* (*soteria*) bears direct consequence for this interest. The deity is known to be worshipped in the area where the incident in Acts 16 occurred.

The cult of this deity, sometimes referred to as *Zeus Hypsistos*, is believed to have originated in the Philippi region as a high concentration of archaeological evidence shows. Dedicatory inscriptions found throughout Macedonia attest to the worship of this deity in the larger area. When the slave girl declared Paul and Silas to be the slaves of the *Theos upsistos* [Most High God] who have come to show a way of salvation (Acts 16:17), a background understanding of the origin of the *Θεός Ὑψίστος* and the cult of its worshipers would put her assertion in perspective.

To place the historical background of the *Θεός Ὑψίστος* in perspective, the key question that arises is whether the concept had its origins in the influence of the Jewish diaspora, or in pagan Greco-Roman origins? Scholarly views differ on the question of the historical origins of the notion. Some scholars (Cook, 1925; Roberts *et al.*, 1936; Trebilco, 1989) argue that the notion finds its origin in the syncretic and henotheistic nature of the ancient Greco-Roman religion in which a belief in a supreme deity along with other deities existed.<sup>10</sup> Others (Schürer, 1897; Levinskaya, 1996) argue that the origins should be attributed to the theological influence of the early Jewish diaspora. Emil Schürer (1897), who is well known for his work on the history of the Jews, was among the earliest to propose that the *Theos Hypsistos* understanding and eventual cult originated from the influence of the Jewish diaspora and the God-fearers.

Tsalampouni (2011) utilises an archaeological and epigraphic data analysis of the *Theos Hypsistos* cult in Thessoliki. She attempts to show that a possible connection between the *Theos Hypsistos* cult and the Jewish or Christian presence in the city might have existed. However, she disagrees with Schürer (1897) and proposes that instead of maintaining and upholding the assumption that the understanding originated from the influence of the Jewish monotheistic cult and was the preparatory factor to the Christian message, it should rather be understood the other way round in that “the Jewish synagogue with its monotheistic cult was not the only factor that prepared the pagan world for the acceptance of the Christian message (but) the pagan world itself had got the potential, too, to grasp such ideas and incorporate them in a creative way in its own

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<sup>10</sup> This notion fundamentally differs from monotheism in the sense that it holds to the belief in a supreme God without excluding belief in or the legitimising of the existence of other deities.

religious traditions.” She therefore concludes that the *Theos Hypsistos* notion, cult and its worshippers predated the advent of Jewish communities and Christianity in the Greco-Roman world, and the cult had already possessed such a notion of the *Most High God* as could possibly function as a potential bridge between the Gentiles and the Jewish or Christian communities<sup>11</sup>. However, contrary to Schürer (1897), what Tsalamponi does show that the *Theos Hypsistos* notion was of pagan conceptual origin and in fact predates the advent of the Jewish and Christian communities.

Having demonstrated the interchangeability in the usage of the title *Theos upsistos* [Most High God] and *Zeus Upsistos*<sup>12</sup> and having shown such usage as a norm in the Greco-Roman sphere, Roberts *et al.* (1936:55-72) proceeded to refute the Jewish diaspora notion of the origin of Θεός Ὑψίστος as follows: “We must therefore attach some importance to Zeus Hypsistos as a native Greek concept, similar to Zeus Hypsistos who was worshipped in half a dozen places” (1936:60).

Considering the nature of evidence by Roberts *et al.* (1936) and others above, it is plausible to safely draw the conclusion that the Θεός Ὑψίστος notion is of a non-Jewish origin. Even though it bears some similarity in reference to the Jewish God, its ambiguity of usage by the slave girl in Acts 16 and its reflection of the Greco-Roman henotheistic tendency as pointed out earlier<sup>13</sup>, which is in opposition to the Jewish unambiguous monotheistic ideas of God, strengthens the argument for a non-Jewish origin. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that the actual and authorial Greco-Roman audiences would associate the slave girl’s Θεός Ὑψίστος with the Jewish God. An understanding of Delphi (with whom the slave girl is associated) and the Delphic oracular activities as set out below further buttress the above conclusion.

### 5.1.6 Delphi in Greco-Roman oracular activities

“The oracle neither conceals, nor reveals, but indicates”  
—Heraclitus in Plutarch, *Moralia* 404D<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The importance of finding a bridge in proclaiming the message of salvation into unknown contexts have been well argued by Stoker (2017:192). Using 2 Corinthians 10:3–5, Stoker discusses basic aspects of apologetics that could be utilised.

<sup>12</sup> “where Zeus Hypsistos and Theos Hypsistos exist side by side, the Zeus form is the earlier and Theos Hypsistos may be an un- official synonym for him (as elsewhere for other gods)” (Roberts *et al.*, 1936:59).

<sup>13</sup> See discussion in ‘Introduction’.

<sup>14</sup> See Scott, M 2014 In Delphi, a history of the centre of the world.

Prominent activities in the practice of religion in the Greco-Roman world included the consultation of oracles in the temples, divination, astrology and magic.<sup>15</sup> Among the key places with temples where such oracular activities were carried out was Delphi. In antiquity, Delphi was well known as the central oracular place for seeking divine revelation and guidance. Consulting the oracle on various issues concerning or relating to military campaigns, diplomacy, disputes or other personal issues was common practice.

In a narrative history of Delphi, Scott (2014) claims that the oracle and sanctuary of the Greek god Apollo at Delphi were known as the "omphalos" – The "center" or "navel" – of the ancient world for more than 1000 years. According to him, individuals, city leaders, and kings came from all over the Mediterranean and beyond to consult Delphi's oracular priestess; to set up monuments to the gods in gold, ivory, bronze, marble, and stone; and to take part in athletic and musical competitions. The oracular function at the Delphi sanctuary was usually a role reserved for a female priestess, known as the *Pythia*, who had to be a native of Delphi otherwise known as a *Delphian*. The Greek god Apollo was known as the *Supreme Being* behind the oracular utterances with the *Pythia* as the mouthpiece. Questions were put to the god Apollo and answers were received through the *Pythia*. The god Apollo was reputed for ambiguity in the response that came through the *Pythias*<sup>16</sup>.

Among a number of accounts, the one that stands out about how the Delphic oracular temple became known as *Python* is that the god Apollo had to slay the snake called *Python* to enable him to set up his temple in Delphi. The killing of the *python* led to the naming of the temple *Python*, with the female priests known as the *Pythia*.

Hubbard (2013:117) confirms that *Python* was the earliest name for Delphi, which points to a connection with the slave girl in Acts 16 who was reported by Luke to have the spirit of *Python*, the Delphic oracle. What strengthens the connection of the slave girl with the oracle of Delphi is confirmed by the common practice at the time where the oracle was consulted for a price and the indication in the narrative of Acts 16 that points to the fact

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<sup>15</sup> Moyer V. Hubbard, 2013:105-123 'Greek Religion' In Green, etal.

<sup>16</sup> For more details on the selection, preparation and the operations of the Pythia and other oracular activities in the Delphic region, see Scott, M. 2014. Delphi, a history of the centre of the world. pp 7-30

of the slave girl making money for her owners. Whether she was making money for her owners in other ways than divination remains a question unanswered by the text. What the passage clearly shows is that she was making money for her owners through oracular divination activities.

Evidence earlier provided established that even though some similarity in reference to the Jewish God and the *Theos Hypsistos* exists, the Greco-Roman henotheistic tendency is in opposition with the Jewish unambiguous monotheistic ideas of God. This refutes the argument that roots the origins of the *Theos upsistos* [Most High God] in the Jewish diaspora notion. Furthermore, the established link between the slave girl in Acts 16 with the Delphic oracular actives discussed above goes to show the likely distance in meaning and understanding of salvation between Luke as the narrator of the Acts 16 event and the slave girl along with the Greco-Roman audience. Luke's use of the *πνεῶνα Πυθωνα* discussed below furthers this line of the argument.

#### **5.1.7 Πνεῦμα Πύθωνα (Python spirit) and the Delphic oracular divination**

In Acts 16:16, Luke narrates that the girl who met Paul and his companion had a *πνεῦμα Πύθωνα* [Python spirit] by which she was able to tell fortunes and through which she brought monetary gain to her masters. While the use of *πνεῦμα* may not have particular resonance, the case is different with the use of *Πύθωνα* (*spirit*). The ensuing act of exorcising the *πνεῦμα Πύθωνα* (*Python spirit*) further raises the interest of interpreters of this text. Without subjecting the text to a socio-historical reading, some interpreters see the mention of the *πνεῦμα Πύθωνα* [Python spirit] and the resultant “exorcism” as clear confirmation that the girl was possessed by an evil spirit, which probably explains the displeasure expressed by Paul and the eventual exorcism. The traditional view that interpreters have adopted maintained that an exorcism took place and it must then mean that the girl had an evil spirit.<sup>17</sup> This view has been challenged as seen below.

We have discussed the *Delphi Pythia* and established the possibility of the girl being part of a group of people that are of the Delphi-related Greco-Roman oracular activities.

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<sup>17</sup> E.g. Ernst Haenchen et al., *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (1971), pp. 495-96; Hans Conzelmann, *Acts* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 131; Bruce, *Acts* 1988, p. 361; Johnson, 2006. *Acts*, pp. 297-98 and C.K. Barrett, *Acts* (1998), II, 784-88.

The question therefore that arises when this text goes under consideration is whether the Greco-Romans saw the *πνεῦμα Πύθωνα* [Python spirit] as a bad thing from which the girl needed salvation or rescue through exorcism. One could even ask if the slave girl saw herself in that light. The answer to this question has bearing on the implications that could come out of an interpretation of this text, especially for a modern reader.

In all likelihood, Luke's usage of the word *Πύθωνα* may not be a new or strange concept to grasp or understand among the Greco-Roman audience. As Lightfoot (2014:219) notes, Luke could rather be seen as using a language that connects to popular belief and culture, a belief within which she would have been popularly known as a *πυθωλεπρος*. Kauppi (2006:19-41) further adds from his study of Greco-Roman religions in Acts that the usage of the terms *πνεῦμα Πύθων*, especially in Acts 16, which translates as a python spirit possibly alludes to the general oracular divination notions of the Greco-Romans. This could form a basis of assuming that the Greco-Romans would have no problem seeing the action of the girl as originating in their well-known Greek inductive oracles and oracles of possession or inspiration because of this presence of technical kleromantic vocabulary.

The view that draws the conclusion that the event of the slave girl was indeed an exorcism of an evil spirit therefore becomes contentious, at least from the socio-historical point of approach. Admittedly, there was an expelling of a *νευμα*, but as Theissen (1983:87-89) argues, Luke is narrating the expulsion of a *νευμα* and not a demon that was hurtful towards the girl it possessed. To this, Kauppi (2006:28) adds that the slave girl was not demonically possessed by a malevolent spirit, even though her situation was maleficent (at least to modern sensibilities), because she was a slave. From the perspective of the Greco-Roman audience and other Lukan exorcism narratives, one could argue that there is vast difference with the demonic beings in Luke's Gospel, who make their victims impure and ill, and the spirit in the narrative which is characterised chiefly by its routine inspiration of oracular pronouncements, such that it would have been understood as either beneficial or neutral. Luke's contemporaries would have associated the *Πύθωνα* with a completely legitimate and beneficial form of religious activity, namely the provision of oracles. The reality of cosmic conflict between two powers comes into focus through the reaction of Paul that leads to the departure of the *Πύθωνα*. The reality of the term *Πύθων* in particular is

stretched and torn between its long history of positive meaning in pagan divinatory practice and its negative contextualisation in the present narrative<sup>18</sup>. Acknowledging this tension validates the interpretive process, which could lead to credible understanding, resolution and definition especially in places with similar contextual realities.

What the above suggests is that in the mention of the *πνεῦμα Πύθωνα* (*Python spirit*) and the ensuing exorcism, the focus was not just the exorcism. Luke was rather, engaging and challenging the understanding and everyday assumptions in the Greco-Roman world around him about the notion of salvation and where it comes from. This does not detract from the reality of cosmic conflict between two powers. It rather brings it sharply into focus, as Klutz (2004:243-246) points out. According to him, through the reaction of Paul that led to the departure of the *Πύθωνα* (spirit), the reality of the term Πύθων (python) in particular is stretched and torn between its long history of positive meaning in the prevalent culture of pagan divinatory practice, and its negative contextualisation in the present narrative.

### 5.1.8 Conclusion

It may be concluded here that the *Θεός Ὑψίστος* [Theos upsistos – Most High God] notion is of a non-Jewish origin. Despite the fact that it bears some similarity in reference to the Jewish God, this conclusion is reached considering the ambiguity of its use in respect to the slave girl in Acts 16. Also, its reflection of the Greco-Roman henotheistic tendency stands in opposition to the Jewish unambiguous monotheistic ideas of God. Such a faulty notion of the *Most High God* consequently meant faulty understanding of salvation by attributing it to the deity.

Furthermore, the evidence presented links the slave girl to the *Delphic Pythia*. The Greco-Romans had no reason to see the *πνεῦμα Πύθωνα* [Python spirit] as something bad from which the girl needed salvation or rescue through exorcism; neither did the slave girl see herself in that light. Expelling the *Πνευμα* [spirit] was therefore a confrontation against what they thought was good. As Klutz (2004:243-246) suggests, the reality of the term *Πύθων* [python] in the narrative faced being stretched and torn

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<sup>18</sup> Klutz (2004:243-246)

between its long history of positive meaning in the prevalent culture of pagan divinatory practice, and its negative contextualisation in the present narrative.

Though other interpreters continue to interpret the passage under the assumption that the *πνεῦμα Πύθωνα* (*Python spirit*) in reference to the slave girl is problematic in the narrative, causing the reaction of Paul, thereby making the point of the narrative in Acts 16 about the exorcism of an evil spirit from a slave girl, rather, the case was made that the use of *Πύθων* [*python*] was Luke's way of using popular language to link the slave girl to the Delphic *Pythia*. There are therefore indications that suggests that Luke was engaging and challenging the understanding and everyday assumptions in the Greco-Roman world around him about the notion of salvation and where it comes from.

## CHAPTER 6: ARTICLE 5

### **Salvation in Acts 16: Meaning and missional implication derived from the socio-historical method**

#### **Abstract**

In Acts 16:17, a slave girl proclaims: “these men are the servants of the Most High God who have come to show “a way of salvation!” The Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30 asks, “What must I do to be saved?” What do they have in common regarding their understanding of the meaning of salvation? How is it similar or different from the understanding of salvation in Africa? Are these in line with the salvation narrative aim of Luke in Acts 16?

Through the socio-historical method, this paper explores the Greco-Roman context of the slave girl and the jailer. In this process, a contextual similarity between the Greco-Roman context and the African context is identified and the impact of these contexts on the understanding of the meaning of salvation is examined. Placed in conversation with the Lukan meaning of salvation in the passage, an alternative meaning of salvation emerges, along with implications for the Greco-Roman and African contexts.

**Key Terms:** Acts 16, African context, salvation, socio-historical method, mission, apologetics, Greco-Roman

## 6.1 Introduction

When the slave girl in Acts 16 proclaims that “these men are the servants of the Most High God who have come to show ‘a way of salvation’,” an understanding of the general Greco-Roman and her particular socio-historical situation raises the question as to the meaning of the salvation that she spoke about. Similar questions come to mind when one considers the Philippian jailer’s question: “What must I do to be saved?” Is it possible that their understandings of salvation reflect or differ from the Lukan salvation theme? Are there implications that could be drawn from the discovered meaning, especially for the growing communities of Jesus followers in the African context?

In recent years, several examples of the use of approaches to Luke–Acts that differ from the conventional exegetical modes of analysis emerged among scholars studying the book of Acts. Neyrey (1991) in his book, *The social world of Luke–Acts: Models for interpretation*, highlights various approaches by means of which scholars pay attention to the analysis of the social world of the text. Another example is the multi-volume work (6 volumes), *The book of Acts in its First Century setting* (1993- ). Its major feature is to explore the historical and social context of Acts. This has set the stage for exploring the book of Acts from newer angles<sup>1</sup>.

Marshall, (1971; 1998); Witherington, (1998) Bovon, (2006); among others, generally agree that the theme of salvation is recurrent in Luke-Acts and that it is noted as a major theme. What remains lacking in these works, however, is an in-depth exploration in a focused and sustained manner by utilising the socio-historical approach to the meaning of salvation as portrayed in the narrative of Acts Chapter 16.

Apart from the key Luke–Acts scholars highlighted above, African theologians have also taken note of the importance of the subject of salvation to African Christianity and the need for a deeper engagement with the subject.

Adeyemo (1997) and Mbiti (1986) agree about the importance of a deeper understanding of the notion of salvation, especially in an African context. Mbiti (1986:134) points out that even though the term salvation frequently occurs in talks,

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<sup>1</sup> Green (2010) in *Methods for Luke* also highlights a number of approaches recently employed in approaching Luke–Acts, which includes historical criticism, feminist, narrative criticism and a Latino perspective.

writings and preaching in African Christianity, a critical and careful study of salvation remains lacking. The term is considered very important, but not sufficiently used by African theologians. An engagement with the concept of salvation, especially from a socio-historical point of view, remains lacking as shown in some more recent discussions by African theologians on the concept (Brand, 1999; Adhlakun, 2011).

In a recent study, Igba and Magezi (2018) point out the difficulty and complexity African theologians face in engaging Biblical texts from African perspectives. They attribute it largely to lack of clear methodological frameworks. They also note the need for the African perspectival approach to be more rooted in the Bible and explore methodological frameworks that situates African perspectival approaches in conversation with global theological or Biblical discourse. A consideration of how African Biblical scholars have engaged with the interpretation of the book of Acts confirms the difficulty and reveals that a significant number of African Biblical scholars that engage in the interpretation of the book of Acts have left out Acts 16, especially from a socio-historical perspective. There is evidence of focused engagement by African scholars, mostly with Acts 3 and Acts 17, as seen from the work of Manus (1985), Onwu (1988), Isizoh (1998), and Speckman (1999), without substantially engaging with the subject of salvation according to Acts 16. Speckman (1999) stands out among the listed authors since he engages the subject of salvation substantially in his thesis.<sup>2</sup> However, his engagement approaches the subject of salvation from the angle of the healing episode of Acts 3:1-10 and not Acts 16.

In his thesis, Speckman (1999) focuses on the healing episode of Acts 3:1-10. According to Speckman (1999:14-15), his main concern centres around interpreting the passage in view of its value for proposing a New Testament theology of development, with the South African context in mind. This, according to him is in keeping with the emerging Biblical interpretive trend in South Africa concerned with social and economic issues in the Bible and the relevance of these for today. In this sense, Speckman's thesis differs with the driving concern of this article. Though his views remain important to engage with at points, it does not sufficiently address the concern of this paper.

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<sup>2</sup> His thesis raises important points relating to salvation that may need to be further explored.

The validity of interpreting the passage and drawing out implication for African Christianity lies in the contextual similarity between the trend of growing communities of followers of Jesus in Acts and in Africa.

The proverbial shift in the centre of gravity of Christianity from the West to the global South continues to dominate missiological and theological discussion and is well accounted for in the works of Walls (2002), Jenkins (2002), Balcomb (2011) and others; this growth has been variously attested to in Africa. Similar in some ways to the book of Acts, the advance of Christianity in Africa is encountering various pre-existing cultures, understandings and possibly long held views about salvation.

The narrative of Acts 16 in particular also indicates some contextual similarity with the African context in which the expression of the fear of death by the jailer in Acts 16 is also not strange in the African religious experience where the fear of death and dying is widespread<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, oracular divination such as carried out by the slave girl are not strange occurrences. As the passage about the slave girl indicates, her owners are displeased by the encounter which made them lose the power and proceeds of divination from the slave they own. They see nothing wrong in what she has been doing, but sees everything wrong with countering her oracular abilities. The socio-historical method seems most suited for the aim of this article as discussed below.

## **6.1.1 Methodology**

### **6.1.1.1 Justification for approaching the text**

The broad framework of the socio-historical method as described by Meeks (2003), Malherbe (1983), and Garrett (1992), is utilised in this article. The method focuses on the social, economic, legal, cultural and religious factors and how they influence the understanding and meaning of a specific text. As Meeks explains, socio-historical study of the New Testament is an interpretive approach that takes seriously the first century social world of the early Christians and the Biblical text, in order to “construct interpretation and to criticise constructions.” Because of the multidimensional nature of

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<sup>3</sup> See Owuor (2006) who discussed the pervasive nature of the fear of death among the Luo of Kenya and how such fear is widespread among Africans. See also Adeyemo (1997:60) who asserts that within African communities, it is common for people to believe that death ushers one's spirit into the spiritual world of the living-dead.

this method, it accommodates and complements a combination of related methods such as the theological method in the task of interpretation of a Biblical text. The method therefore suits the overall objective of this paper. The socio-historical approach enables a credible reconstruction of the meaning of the text bearing in mind the perspective of the author as well as the actual and authorial audiences. Following Rabinowitz, (1977:121-141) and Talbert (2003:14-18), four categories of reading audiences for a text have been identified: 1. The “actual audience,” referring to those initially reading physically or listening to the text; 2. The “authorial audience,” referring to those who the author intends the writing for initially. Even though they may not be physically present and listening to the author, they share common background knowledge presumed in the text; 3. The “narrative audience” as referring to the audience that are engaging the author’s narration from a perspective of a differing background and lacking in the common knowledge presumed in the narrative; and 4. The “ideal narrative audience,” which refers to an audience that accepts the author’s presumed perspective regardless of the perspective of the actual and authorial audiences. In most cases, the fourth category audience hardly pays attention to the other perspectives and lacks the benefit of the possibility of an enriching or differing insight.

#### **6.1.1.2 Validity for the African context**

An engagement with the narrative in Acts 16 today excludes us from being either the actual or the authorial audience. It places upon us the burden of making a choice to function either as a narrative audience or the ideal narrative audience. Because of the need for credibility in the process of search for meaning in the narrative of the passage in question, it follows to reason that the socio-historical approach becomes necessary, especially because it gives room to engage as far back as possible with the authorial audiences. The socio-historical method validates an analytical approach towards understanding salvation in the socio-historical religious milieu of the Greco-Roman world. It gives room for an analysis that places the author of Acts 16, together with the slave girl, the jailer and the present interpretive context into a conversation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This approach must not be confused with the ‘reader response theory’ of interpretation in which the modern day reader or reading communities determine meaning with little or no careful regard to the author, the actual and authorial audiences.

Though it is possible to approach the text as the ideal narrative audience of the fourth category above and place the interpretive task in safe waters, it could create further interpretive difficulties. Non-exploration from newer angles as the socio-historical method suggests raises questions about the credibility of the interpretative process and perpetuates the feeling of distance and dislocation with the biblical material. When interpretation fails to place sufficient emphasis on the socio-historical context in the search for meaning and rushes forward to the search for meaning from other interpretive angles, it creates perplexity and furthers suspicion especially in African Christianity where people can readily and more easily identify with most of the Biblical context<sup>5</sup> and the narrative characters of the Bible<sup>6</sup>. However, in disagreement with the radical suspicion with which post-colonial hermeneutics approaches the Biblical material exemplified by Dube (2000) and others, the history of the use and abuse of the Bible by some missionaries in the establishment of colonialism in Africa cannot be disputed. This reality further calls for the socio-historical method which reduces the distance between text and the African reality through exploring contextual similarity and shared narratives, thereby stimulating the attitude of trust in the task of interpretation and the appropriation of meaning. In a departure from some existing approaches espoused within African theology and hermeneutics<sup>7</sup>, the socio-historical method keeps the Scripture as central to the interpretive task<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Ukpong (2000:11–28) and Adamo (2016) are among key African Biblical scholars that have argued for contextual similarity between Africa and the Bible times. Adamo (2016) goes further and extensively argues for the presence of Africa and Africans in the Bible and concludes that the Bible would have never been in the shape it is now without Africa and African participation in the drama of redemption. He maintains further that African biblical scholars continue to demonstrate the importance and influence of Africa and Africans in the Bible; and that the Bible is not only an ancient Jewish document alone but also an African document (Bailey, 1991:165–186; Copher, 1991:146–164; Felder, 1991:127–145; Wimbush, 2009:162–177). He usefully caveats his conclusion though, that this is not to say that the Bible will cease to be meaningful to a cultural group that fail to identify themselves in the Bible.

<sup>6</sup> In her article on Style, Narration, and Salvation in Urban Kenya, Brummel (2014) demonstrates the transformative power of embedded narrative in which sameness in the narratives (embedding a story within another) led to evident transformation. She maintains that ‘Biblical stories embedded in contemporary Christian rhetoric, for example, encourage listeners to see a sameness between the here and now and a biblical space and time’.

<sup>7</sup> See West (1997) and Speckman (2016) for notable exploration of key elements found in African Biblical hermeneutics. While West places emphasis on the place of the ‘real flesh and blood African reader’ towards appropriating the text, Speckman proposes ‘celebration of life framework’ as the way forward in African Biblical hermeneutics. He elaborates his proposal as based on the teaching of indigenous churches and the traditional (amaqaba) people. Both West and Speckman fail to place Scripture as central to the interpretive task

<sup>8</sup> See Igba & Magezi (2018), Nyende (2005) who all argued about the normative place of the Bible in serving as the criterion for what is authentically Christian, which compels all theologies that would

## **6.1.2 Salvation in Acts 16: Greco-Roman and African contextual similarities**

### **6.1.2.1 Greco-Roman context and salvation**

The narrative of Acts 16 is set against the backdrop of the wider Greco-Roman world of the first century. The Christian religion in the first century grew within the Greco-Roman context and actively engaged the cultures of its context (Hubbard, 2013:103, Neufeld & DeMaris, 2010).

Kauppi (2006:16-18) describes the Greco-Roman religious context as a non-monolithic entity comprising of Greek and Roman ritual practices, priests, temple attendants, oracles and comprises of individual behaviours (“magic” and so-called “popular religion,” schools of thought (philosophy and mystical metaphysics such as Orphism), and localised cults). According to him, Greco-Roman religion could be described as the sum total of religious practices encountered by a Greco-Roman in the daily course of their civic life. It is within this religious context that their view of salvations must be understood. Greco-Roman religion revolved around cults and a pantheon of gods who had points of beginning in existence and possessed particular endowments and attributes for which their beneficiaries looked to them to provide. Depending on the attribute ascribed to a certain deity, benefactors expected such assistance from such a deity. Hubbard (2013:109) points out that “in many ways, the mythology of the ancient Greeks represents a kind of primitive animism organised in a hierarchy and presented with a genealogy.” In essence, whether it was help, deliverance, a desired state of being or whatever was needed by a benefactor within the Greco-Roman religious framework, such a person would petition or look to any of the pantheon of gods that possessed the necessary attribute or endowment that could answer to such a need. Salvation was therefore understood to be available from a plurality of gods. In that setting, salvation is benevolence from the gods that could be displayed in rescue, care or healing among many other things. These benefits could be obtained by offering sacrifices and appeasements to the deities.

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wish to be considered Christian, including African theology, to inevitably come under the authority of the Bible for validation as Christian theology. Maintaining that that the centrality of the Scripture in the African Christian theological endeavour should be sacrosanct. See also Meylahn (2009) who further explained the value of reading Biblical narratives alongside modern day narratives as a useful way of not only gaining better understanding of the biblical text, but also as an important way of ‘keeping the affective power of the text to help construct identities and ethical roles.

The assumption that the notion of salvation in the Greco-Roman world is like the Christian concept of salvation is brought into question by Adluri (2013:1-26). From the perspective of Greek philosophy, Adluri asks: "What if Greek 'salvation' bespoke a radically different experience than the one we, influenced by over two millennia of Christian upbringing, have come to expect and associate with the term?" Adluri's question bears weight. However, his claim that there is need to separate philosophy from theology in order to understand Greek notions of salvation fails to bear similar impact. The fact that Greek notions of salvation were radically different from the Biblical perspective is well supported, but he fails to find support in the line of argument that seeks to separate Greek philosophy and Greek religion. The idea that theology must be separated from philosophy in order to understand Greek notions of salvation is simply inconsistent with the Greco-Roman thought in which theology was inseparable with philosophy. However, the importance of Adluri's question lies in the fact that it challenges wrongly held assumptions that salvation in Greco-Roman thought and Christianity may refer to one and the same thing. This brings to the fore the important fact that Greco-Roman understanding of salvation must not be assumed to speak of one and the same experience as in Christian theology.

Approaching a text such as Acts 16 therefore needs to be without the wrong assumption of similarity in meaning of such texts within their Greco-Roman settings and within Christian thinking, bearing in mind that there could be a divergence in meaning and understanding. Where such divergent meaning exists, it is important to explore and acknowledge such divergent meaning in the interpretive task. Exploring and acknowledging such divergent meaning makes room for credible reconstruction or making new meaning from the text. The converse is that where such pre-existing meaning of concepts is not explored and engaged in a credible way, the new meaning proffered could be an imposition that may be spurned sooner or later.

#### **6.1.2.2 African context and salvation**

Maluleke (2005:486) cautions that one should not pretend to speak comprehensively about Africa or the African context as if it is a single country. Admittedly, Africa is a vast, complex and widely diverse continent. There are however, spectrums of belief and practices that spread across the continent though with variations and particularities. A world of spirits and deities is one of such beliefs. According to Nyende (2007:372) the

religious cosmology of Africa is encompassed by spirit beings comprising of ancestors, spirit-ancestors, spirits and deities. He explains that while some African communities like the Shona's of Zimbabwe may have a simple hierarchically ordered spirit world beginning with humans to ancestors and to the supreme deity, others like the Yoruba's in South-West Nigeria have very complex hierarchically ordered spirit world with humans, ancestors, a horde of deities and the supreme deity at the top. Whether it is the simplified and straightforward belief and configuration of the spirit world among the Zimbabweans, or the complicated format found among the Yoruba's of Nigeria, the spirit world is common to Africa, though particularities in beliefs and practices relating to the spirit world might differ. Because of this widespread belief in the spirit world in Africa, sacrifices and appeasement of spirits in seeking individual and community wellbeing from the spirits, ancestors or deities is also commonplace.

Turaki (1999:257) further notes that salvation, immortality and human well-being are all tied to the ancestors and ultimately to the community in traditional Africa. Mbiti (1969:58-73) popularised the concept of "the living dead" by theorising that such are dead or departed ancestors who are alive and have assumed a life that enables them to occupy the ontological position between spirits, men and God. The spirit-ancestors, according to him, are considered indispensable intermediaries in Africa. They are believed to be an integral part of the traditional African religious and social structure. Bujo (1992:22-25) particularly points out that the ancestor spirits are part of a mystical society and they possess the "inalienable responsibility for protecting and prolonging the life of the community in all its aspects." He adds that "communion with the ancestors has both an eschatological and a salvation dimension." He therefore notes that good health, numerous progeny, healthy cattle and abundant crops are all signs of the presence and the blessing of the ancestors. What Bujo attempts to do here is to attribute salvific and existential blessing to the mediation of the spirit-ancestors. One can infer that Bujo, in carefully couched words, attributes not only the mediation, but the availability of salvific and existential blessing from and through the spirit-ancestors.

Essentially, salvation within such context can be summarised as individual or communal wellbeing, tied to spirits, ancestors, deities and the intermediary priests. Within African traditional religious framework therefore, salvation is understood in some similar way to the Greco-Roman context where salvation is known as benevolence or wellbeing received from a deity, whereby the deity is the source, and the needed salvation is

obtainable through sacrifices, appeasement and ensuring harmony with the gods and spirits.

### 6.1.3 Lukan contextual awareness?

We have examined the understanding of salvation within the Greco-Roman context and alongside the Africa contextual understanding about salvation. The question that remains is, how does Luke show contextual awareness in the narrative of Acts 16? This is important as we progress towards understanding his meaning of salvation that emerges from the narrative.

In Acts 16:16, Luke narrates that the girl who met Paul and his companion had a *πνεῦμα Πύθωνα* (python spirit) by which she was able to tell fortunes as an oracle and through which she brought monetary gain to her masters. Such contextual facts in the Greco-Roman world find semblance in the African world as discussed above. In narrating the incidence, was Luke reporting an exorcism of an evil spirit as some interpreters have affirmed<sup>9</sup> or was Luke showing an awareness and an engagement with the Greco-Roman culture and context in a specific way?

Luke's use of *πνεῦμα* (spirit) may not have particular significance, but the case is different with the use of *Πύθωνα* (Python). In the Greco-Roman context, the practice of religion included the consultation of oracles in the temples, divination, astrology and magic<sup>10</sup>. Among the key places with temples where such oracular activities were carried out was *Delphi*. In antiquity, Delphi was well known as the central oracular place for seeking divine revelation and guidance. Consulting the oracle on various issues concerning or relating to military campaigns, diplomacy, disputes or other personal issues were a common practice.

In a narrative history of Delphi, Scott (2014:7-30) claims that "The oracle and sanctuary of the Greek god Apollo at Delphi were known as the 'omphalos' – The 'centre' or 'navel' – of the ancient world for more than 1000 years." Scott further state that, "Individuals, city leaders, and kings came from all over the Mediterranean and beyond

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<sup>9</sup> E.g. Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), pp. 495-96; Hans Conzelmann, *Acts* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 131; Bruce, *Acts*, p. 361; Johnson, *2006 Acts*, pp. 297-98 and C.K. Barrett, *Acts* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), II, 784-88.

<sup>10</sup> Moyer V. Hubbard, 2013:105-123 'Greek Religion' In Green, et al.

to consult Delphi's oracular priestess; to set up monuments to the gods in gold, ivory, bronze, marble, and stone; and to take part in athletic and musical competitions.” The oracular function at the Delphi sanctuary was usually a role reserved for a female priestess, known as the *Pythia*, and she had to be a native of Delphi, otherwise known as a *Delphian*. The Greek god Apollo was known as the Supreme Being behind the oracular utterances with the *Pythia* as the mouthpiece.

The question therefore that arises is, did the Greco-Romans see the *πνεῦμα Πύθωνα* as something bad from which the girl needed salvation or rescue through exorcism; furthermore, did the slave girl see herself in that light? The answer to this question will have a bearing on the implications that could come out of an interpretation of this text especially for a modern reader. Suffice it to say here that in all likelihood, Luke's usage of the word *Πύθωνα* may not be a new or strange concept to grasp or understand among the Greco-Roman audience. As Lightfoot (2014:219) points out, what Luke was doing in the narrative was using a language that connects to popular belief and culture.

Kauppi (2006:19-41) further adds from his study of Greco-Roman religions in Acts, that the usage of the terms *πνεῦμα Πύθων* especially in Acts 16, which translates to a python spirit, possibly alludes to the general oracular divination notions of the Greco-Romans, and could form a basis of assuming that the Greco-Romans would have no problem seeing the action of the girl as originating in their well-known Greek inductive oracles and oracles of possession or inspiration.

Luke's contemporaries would have associated the *Πύθωνα* with a completely legitimate and beneficial form of religious activity, namely the provision of oracles. The reality of cosmic conflict between two powers however comes into focus through the reaction of Paul that led to the departure of the *Πύθωνα*. The reality of the term *Πύθων* in particular being stretched and torn between its long history of positive meaning in pagan divinatory practice and its negative contextualisation in the present narrative, also comes into sharp focus<sup>11</sup>. In the mention of the *πνεῦμα Πύθωνα* and the ensuing exorcism, Luke's focus was not just the narration of an exorcism event. By invoking the name of Jesus over the *πνεῦμα Πύθωνα* (python spirit), as well as urging the jailer to

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<sup>11</sup> Klutz (2004:243-246)

believe in “the Lord Jesus” for salvation, Luke was actually showing contextual awareness, engaging and challenging the understanding and everyday assumptions in the Greco-Roman world around him about the meaning and means of salvation.

#### **6.1.4 Salvation in Acts 16: The slave girl, jailer, Africa and Luke in conversation**

##### **6.1.4.1 The slave girl and salvation**

Οὗτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι δοῦλοι τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ Ἐψίστου ὁδὸν σωτηρίας:

(These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation)  
(Acts 16:17)

The assertion made by the slave girl that Paul and his companion are slaves of the *Theos Hypsistos* (God Most High) who proclaim a way of *σωτηρία* (*Soteria*), presents a familiar detail especially within Greco-Roman context which has drawn much debate among scholars. As Trebilco (1989) shows, the word *ὑψιστος* is used of Yahweh in the Septuagint, the New Testament, in Jewish Pseudepigrapha and by other Jewish authors. The same word is however, also used in classical literature and inscriptions of pagan deities, most frequently of Zeus. This has made scholars to question the origin of the notion in order to reconstruct the slave girl’s understanding in her usage of the word.

While Cook (1925), Roberts *et al.* (1936), Trebilco (1989) and others argue that the notion finds its origins in the syncretic and henotheistic<sup>12</sup> nature of the ancient Greco-Roman religion in which there exists belief in a supreme deity along with other deities, other scholars (Schürer, 1897; Reimer, 1995; Levinskaya, 1996) argue that the origins are to be attributed to the theological influence of the early Jewish diaspora.

Through archaeological and epigraphic data analysis of the *Theos Hypsistos*, Tsalampouni (2011) rightly concludes that the cult of this deity, sometimes referred to as *Zeus Hypsistos* originated in the Philippi region as a high concentration of archaeological evidence shows. Dedicatory inscriptions found throughout Macedonia attest to the worship of this deity in the larger area of the Greco-Roman context. Therefore, when the slave girl declared Paul and Silas to be the slaves of the *Theos*

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<sup>12</sup> This notion fundamentally differs from monotheism in the sense that it holds to the belief in a supreme God without excluding belief in or the legitimising of the existence of other deities.

*upsistos* who have come to show a way of salvation, she would not have contemplated the Jewish God, neither would her hearers.

Even though the title bears some similarity in reference to the Jewish God, its ambiguity of usage by the slave girl in Acts 16 and its reflection of the Greco-Roman henotheistic tendency as pointed out earlier, which is in opposition to the Jewish unambiguous monotheistic ideas of God, strengthens the argument for a non-Jewish origin. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that the actual and authorial Greco-Roman audiences<sup>13</sup> would associate the slave girl's *Θεος Ὑψίστος* with the Jewish God.

As Rowe (2009:24) notes, there was every probability of the misidentification of the God of Israel with the highest god in the pantheon of local gods in the incidence of Acts 16:17, especially because such fusion, and interchangeability of the divine were common place in Greco-Roman antiquity at both the popular and philosophical levels. Though Christian readers of the Acts narrative then, and even now I may add, would be under no illusion as to the polytheistic nature of the slave-girl's proclamation, it is within reason to imagine that the Gentile audience would have heard the slave girl's proclamation as "polytheistic interpretation of Christian proclamation," a way of conscripting the identity of God into the local religious tradition. The ensuing ambiguity, it appears, is what causes exasperation and the way of solving the exasperation, as verse 18 shows, is an invocation of the name of Jesus, unrelated to any of the known pantheon of divinities.

#### **6.1.4.2 The jailer and salvation**

...τί με δεῖ ποιεῖν ἵνα σωθῶ?

"What is necessary for me to do that I might be saved?"

Acts 16:30

As a direct consequence of the slave girl's episode, Luke narrates that Paul and his companion were thrown into prison where the jailer experienced an earthquake and thought the prisoners have escaped. He was apparently filled with fear from the experience of the earthquake and the possible repercussion of execution for letting

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<sup>13</sup> See a discussion on the type of audiences and the difference between actual and authorial audience among others in the introduction

prisoner escape under his watch. Luke narrates that the jailer was restrained by Paul from taking his life, which prompted his question about being saved. The jailer's question presents at least three possibilities that reflect his meaning and understanding of salvation. Firstly, it is possible that he views Paul and his companion as representatives of the gods, who can offer him salvation or deliverance, (all implied in the same Greek word). In such a case, his question about salvation could mean a way of escape or deliverance from the apparent divine judgment signalled by the earthquake because of the common belief that an earthquake might disclose that the gods were displeased<sup>14</sup>. The displeasure of the gods and the fear of death was a reality in his Greco-Roman context, similar to the African context as shown earlier.

Secondly, it is likely that he was familiar with Paul's teaching on salvation since it was actually the reason behind the imprisonment.<sup>15</sup> Polhill (1992:355) suggests that probably he had heard Paul's preaching or reports of his preaching but had not fully understood until then; or maybe he had fallen asleep to the sound of Paul and Silas's hymns to God and was now ready for understanding<sup>16</sup>

The third and more likely possibility could be seen in the answer he received to his question from Paul. The answer seems a converse to the expectation of the jailer. The expected answer to "What must I do?" should logically be followed by a list of things to do, an instruction to offer sacrifice to the gods would not be out of place. This expectation fits well with the Greco-Roman contextual background of salvation being available from the plurality of gods through offering sacrifices and appeasements. The answer was therefore unexpected and counter to the preconceived idea of the means of salvation. The jailer was pointed to a hitherto unknown "the Lord Jesus." No sacrifices or offerings for appeasement were required. In this portion of the narrative, Paul challenges the jailer's pre-existing view of salvation. It is not benevolence from the gods that could be displayed in rescue, care or healing, neither could it be obtained by offering sacrifices and appeasements to the deities. Paul's challenge to him was, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." His concern about death was a

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas, D. W., (2011). Acts. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.

<sup>15</sup> Keener, C. S. (1993). The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament (Ac 16:29–30). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>16</sup> Polhill, J. B. (1992). Acts (Vol. 26). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

spiritual concern as much as it was also a physical or temporal concern. Salvation by believing in Jesus answers to both concerns.

#### **6.1.4.3 Africa and salvation**

In showing the contextual similarities that warrants the inclusion of Africa in this conversation, we have earlier discussed the contextual framework and the emerging understanding of the meaning of salvation in Africa and may not rehash the details here<sup>17</sup>. Suffice to recap that within African traditional religious framework, salvation is known as individual or communal wellbeing. It is received from a deity, whereby the deity is the source and the needed salvation is obtainable through intermediaries by offering sacrifices, appeasement or ensuring harmony with the gods and spirits.

Brand (1999:193-223), helpfully categorises notions of salvation found within African Christianity as follows:

- Anthropological (based on human good)
- Social (tending towards salvation as corporate or common good)
- Cultural (salvation as a form of cultural constellation or Inculturation)
- Ontological (defining salvation as a transformation of the ontological structures of the world)
- Vitalistic (seeing salvation as a transmission of vital force or life force).

From Brand's categorisation and the earlier discussion on the contextual understanding in Africa, it is apparent that a pre-existing notion of salvation is present, such notions however, similar to notions found in the Greco-Roman understanding, are faulty, not necessarily in the expectation of what salvation entails, but in the means of salvation that accommodate sacrifices and appeasements to gods and spirits as the source of the desired salvation.

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<sup>17</sup> See discussion on African context and salvation above

#### 6.1.4.4 Luke and salvation: “In the name of Jesus Christ” and “Believe in the Lord Jesus”

The concern here is not to get into the scholarly debate about Lukan salvation.<sup>18</sup> It is enough to say that Lukan salvation theme is inter-related between the Gospel and Acts components, which makes it multifaceted. Within the facet of Acts 16, Luke defines salvation through the two incidences of the slave girl and the jailer. During the encounter with the slave girl, Luke narrates an invocation of the name of Jesus Christ. In answer to the jailer’s question, believing in the Lord Jesus was put forward in response. Without speculation, Jesus is central to Luke’s salvation. Luke defines salvation by showing that salvation is spiritual intervention with possible physical ramifications; as opposed to an understanding of salvation that is spiritualised only. This view does not discard the eschatological reality of Lukan salvation; rather it accommodates that reality in the spiritual dimension of Luke’s definition of salvation. For the Philippian jailer in particular, some have noted<sup>19</sup> the eschatological reality of salvation in joy experienced and expressed as a result of being saved.<sup>20</sup>

Luke shows that salvation entails a spiritual and divine act demonstrated in “the setting at liberty” of the slave girl from the oracular burden of the πνεῦμα Πύθωνα as well as economic exploitation. Luke further shows salvation as freedom from the fear of death such as expressed by the Philippian jailer. The jailer and the slave girl’s need for salvation were both spiritual and temporal. Luke’s definition of salvation is in line with the salvation mission of Jesus as pointed out by Luke in the fourth chapter of his Gospel component. This speaks directly into the worldview of Luke’s audience. It also speaks into the worldview of Africans. By showing this meaning, Luke challenges the understanding about the means of obtaining salvation. Money is not involved, and neither is material sacrifice to the gods or God. It is also not obtainable from sacrifices to the plurality of gods as the unexpected response to the question of the jailer about what needs to be done to receive salvation shows. What Luke essentially does in defining salvation in this way is challenging prevailing thinking.

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<sup>18</sup> Mchunu (2013) engages some Luke-Acts scholars and presents a concise discussion on arguments about Lukan salvation that lies outside the scope of this chapter.

<sup>19</sup> See Krodel (1986:313) In Acts. Philadelphia, Pa, Fortress Press

<sup>20</sup> A further discussion on the eschatological reality of Lukan salvation falls outside the confines of the narrative.

Luke makes it clear that salvation is synonymous with Jesus. Jesus is salvation. Salvation is not from their *Theos upsistos* or from the gods. Further, salvation is not related to money nor any humanly offered sacrifice to be obtained. It is by invoking and believing in the name of Jesus. This is new to Greco Romans and Africans. It is new to every culture where the message of salvation is advancing into pre-existing notions about the meaning and means of salvation.

### **6.1.5 Missional and apologetic implications**

Stoker (2017:192) describes different apologetic methods suitable for different circumstances. He points out two basic approaches as defence and attack. He shows how both approaches were used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Both apologetic approaches are evident in Acts 16 in Paul's confrontation of the spiritual and temporal powers and the defence of the Gospel through his proclamation of the message of salvation. Earlier on, we have shown the contextual similarity between the African context and the Greco-Roman context (including the slave girl and the jailer) which Luke addresses. It falls within reason, therefore, to suggest the following as the missional and apologetic implications drawn from Acts 16 into the African context:

### **6.1.6 Missional implication**

#### **6.1.6.1 Transformational mission**

The narrative of Acts 16 presents a missionary vision that displays the transformative power of the message of salvation. For the slave girl, though we do not hear more of her, it is safe to assume that from being an exploited slave who made money for her owners, she became at least free from the oracular burden of the spirits and probably became part of the growing numbers of believers. For the jailer, from being a man bound by the fear of death from the wrath of the gods, to a joyful member of the growing community of believers. Luke points us to mission that is transformative in the lives of individuals and breaks down barriers of class and race with the example of a nameless slave girl and possibly a Roman high military official who all demonstrate how God

breaks down dividing barriers and can unite people of very different kinds as a result of Salvation in Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup>

#### **6.1.6.2 Transcendental mission**

Transcendental here is not used in the eastern meditation mystical sense. Rather, it is used in the etymological sense of the word. Luke in Acts 16 points us to the need for mission that is aware of the spirit world of Africans. Such mission does not shy away from invoking the name of Jesus against such deceptive spirit voices where need be. Indeed, such mission must make clear to the community of Christ followers that there is no need to be afraid of those powers because salvation in Jesus entails the derivative authority of Jesus. Paul's authority was derived from Jesus who has all authority and makes it available to his followers.

#### **6.1.6.3 Transcultural mission**

Closely related to the transcendental implication is the transcultural implication. Luke shows the vision of mission that is very aware of what is generally accepted and considered a harmless part of culture. Oracular divination for instance, had become part of the culture and was not perceived in any wrong way. The message of salvation must aim to transform culture through worldview change. The message of salvation should take root in the culture, but transcend and transform the culture into a new culture, a culture tied to Jesus, through his word today. Whereas transformational mission aims at individuals, transcultural mission should aim at transforming cultural norms that reinforce wrong understanding of salvation. Another implication for mission is the need to proclaim the message of salvation that reflects Lukan definition in Acts 16, which is, salvation that is spiritual with possible physical ramification. Salvation that can answer to temporal fears, like the fear of death or fear of spirits speaks into the pre-existing religious framework of Africans. When Africans are presented with salvation that answers to their spiritual need and leaves out their temporal fears and concerns, it creates room for the search of an alternative means that will answer to those fears, leading to syncretism. Presenting salvation as Luke defines it does not detract from the eschatological fullness of salvation, as we have argued earlier.

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<sup>21</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1994:262). *The message of Acts: the Spirit, the church & the world*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

## **6.1.7 Apologetic implication**

### **6.1.7.1 Confronting legal barriers**

Mission must not turn a blind eye to injustice and illegality. Luke shows this through the insistence of the missionaries in Acts 16 on their legal right to fair trial. To leverage on the legal system in the advance of the message of salvation in Acts 16:34-40 is another implication that can be drawn. Legal avenues must be explored more actively, for instance, by way of insisting on the freedom of speech for citizens, especially in parts of Africa where this is not the case. Constitutional provision for the freedom of speech and the practice of Christian religion must be defended especially among minority Christian communities. Legal provisions that unjustly limit the expansion of the message of salvation must be challenged.

### **6.1.7.2 Confronting intellectual barriers**

According to Rowe (2009:21), Luke's call through the mouth of Paul is not simply an admonition to tweak a rite or halt a ceremony. It contains, rather, the summons that simultaneously involves the destruction of an entire mode of being religious. The missionaries in Acts 16 challenged the philosophical and intellectual foundations of the culture, bearing in mind that Greco-Roman religion was tied to philosophy. In the advance of the message of salvation, there must be readiness to confront intellectual barriers in whichever form it presents itself against the advance of the message of salvation.

### **6.1.7.3 Confronting deceptive barriers**

In Acts 16, the deceptive barriers were represented by a *Pythia* who offered divination for money. In present day Africa, it is false prophets who offer divination as prophecy, for monetary gain. Luke shows the need to challenge such deception even if it is one slave girl at a time. Luke shows the need for mission that is perceptive and able to respond appropriately to the proclamation of salvation that is deceptive, possibly confusing and monetary driven. True proclaimers of the message of salvation need to be ready for such a worldview confrontation. Effective apologetic methods to counter and combat such activities need to be developed.

### 6.1.8 Conclusion

Luke defines salvation by showing that salvation is spiritual intervention with possible physical ramifications; as opposed to an understanding of salvation that is spiritualised only. This speaks directly into the worldview of Luke's audience. It also speaks into the worldview of Africans. In obtaining this salvation, money is not involved and neither is material sacrifice to the gods involved. What Luke essentially does in defining salvation in this way is challenging prevailing thinking. Luke challenges the faulty Greco-Roman understanding of salvation and by extension, the faulty African understanding of salvation, and he provides an alternative.

Luke makes it clear that salvation is synonymous with Jesus. Jesus is salvation. Salvation is not from the *Theos upsistos* or other plurality of gods. It is by invoking and believing in one name, the name of Jesus. This is new to Greco Romans and Africans because Jesus is not listed among their pantheon of deities. It is new to every culture where the message of salvation is advancing into pre-existing notions about the meaning and means of salvation.

## **CHAPTER 7: RESEARCH SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The need for a credible methodological framework, the centrality of Scripture in the African theological endeavour, the global nature of Biblical studies and theology, as well as the need to engage with the context of African theologians and Christians, all formed the larger motive for the study.

The overarching question that drove this research was: “What is the meaning and implication of salvation in Acts 16 in the narrative of Paul’s encounter with the slave girl and the Philippian jailer?” The key question led to the formulation of the study aim, which was to study salvation in Acts 16 using a combination of socio-historical and exegetical interpretation to arrive at the meaning. The intent was to identify the implication of such meaning for the growing communities of followers of Jesus, especially in Africa. The research set and achieved the following objectives:

- The study highlighted some key contextual issues in African theology and Biblical interpretations and showed limitations and promise
- The study carried out an exegetical analysis of the meaning of salvation in Acts 16 with reference to the slave girl and the jailer;
- The study also explored the meaning of salvation from the Greco-Roman perspective
- Analysis of converging and diverging elements in the meaning of salvation in Acts 16 with reference to Luke, the slave girl, the jailer and the African understanding was carried out.
- The implications of the study for the African context was presented. The final conclusion and preliminary suggestions are presented here below.

## 7.2 Research summary

### CHAPTER 1

#### Introduction

This chapter introduced, outlined the research frame work and argued for the need for a study on the subject of salvation within the context of Acts 16. The problem statement and the key research question were established and the research methodology identified.

### CHAPTER 2

#### **Article 1 – African theology and African Christology: Difficulty and complexity in contemporary definitions and methodological frameworks**

This article set the tone for the entire research project as a contribution that shows awareness and appreciation of African theology, its methodological difficulties and the limitations in African Biblical studies. It is a preliminary analytical investigation that brings to the fore the need for African theologians to make scholarly contributions that are multidisciplinary, spanning African theology, New Testament studies, Biblical interpretation as well as setting forth or utilising methodological frameworks that would benefit both the field of Biblical studies in general and African theology in particular. The paper deals with the complexity of defining African theology and its methodological approaches and points out the need to develop contextual and Biblical African theology with global relevance. This should give African Christian theology a shared reference point with other Christian theologies while contributing unique African interpretive perspectives to global theological and Biblical discourse. The article has been accepted for publication by *HTS Teologiese Studies Theological Studies*.

### CHAPTER 3

#### **Article 2 – Salvation in Acts 16: The socio-historical method as a proposed interpretive methodological framework**

This article situates the research within New Testament socio-historical studies by identifying a methodological lacuna in the interpretation of Acts 16. The paper engages

both African and non-African Biblical scholars and shows how they fail to engage the subject of salvation in the passage from the angle of the socio-historical method. The article shows the value of the proposed method as contributory to a multicultural understanding of the text and concludes by asserting that the method bridges the socio-historical gap between the text and the present-day audience and gives validity to the interpretive process. The article has been accepted for publication by *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology* (SABJT).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Article 3 – Σωτηρία in Acts 16: An exegetical and theological analysis**

This paper utilised the original languages and lexical aid as well as the views of other Luke-Acts commentators for an informed exegesis and theological analysis of the key texts, towards finding the possible exegetical meaning of the passage in the context of Luke-Acts and the episodes of the slave girl and the jailer. The article is undergoing review for publication.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Article 4 – Salvation in Acts 16:16-40. A socio-historical exploration of the Greco-Roman understanding**

The article exemplifies a rigorous use of the socio-historical approach to explore the meaning of salvation in Acts 16. The paper explores the Greco-Roman religious landscape and focuses on the Θεος Ὑψίστος, “The Most High God,” to ascertain relatedness to the Jewish God, Θεός or otherwise. The paper also examines the use of the term πνεῦμα Πύθωνα [“python spirit”] against the backdrop of its origin and use within Greco-Roman oracular divination. The article has been submitted and accepted for a forthcoming publication. It is currently undergoing final review for.

## CHAPTER 6

### **Article 5 – Salvation in Acts 16: The meaning and missional implications derived from the socio-historical method**

This article shows the possible meaning of salvation in Acts 16 through the lens of the socio-historical method. The paper also discusses the contextual similarities between Acts 16 and the African context and concludes with a consideration of the implications of the meaning of salvation in Acts 16 for Christian mission and apologetics, especially in the African context. The article draws the research to a close by putting forward the Lukan definition of salvation and the implications for Christian mission and apologetics in Africa. The article has been accepted for publication by *Verbum et Ecclesia*.

#### **7.3 Research conclusion**

The initial hypothesis was that salvation, as Luke shows in Acts 16, is spiritual with possible physical ramifications. This research finds that this hypothesis stands. Luke demonstrates this definition in “the setting at liberty” of the slave girl from the oracular burden of the πνεῦμα Πύθωνα, as well as economic exploitation. Luke further shows salvation as freedom from the fear of death expressed by the Philippian jailer. The jailer and the slave girl’s need for salvation was both spiritual and temporal. This speaks directly to the worldview of Luke’s audience. It also speaks to the worldview of Africans. By showing this meaning, Luke challenges the prevalent understanding of the means to obtain salvation. It cannot be through money or material sacrifices to the gods or God. It can also not be obtained through sacrifices to the plurality of gods, as the unexpected response to the question of the jailer shows. Luke’s definition speaks strongly to the Greco-Roman religious framework and the African religious framework by showing the meaning of salvation that is Christological, with the Lord Jesus as central.

Salvation, especially in the case of the Jailer was connected to an action or state from which salvation is necessary. Salvation seemingly comes into play from the place of a realisation of some need, as we saw in the exegetical part previously. The Jailer’s need seemed temporal, but the answer he received shows that salvation has a more comprehensive scope than his immediate state or need. This point is important especially in helping proclaimers of the message of salvation to realize that it is possible to encounter people that are not clear about the fullness of Salvation, though they know

their need of it. Such knowing of the need for it may be linked to some felt need within the limits of their knowledge of what salvation entails. For many within the context of poverty and fear of spirits in Africa, it may be all too common to come across people like the Jailer and the slave girl. They may not be able to formulate the right questions, nor will their proclamation or expression of what they know about salvation be accurate. Salvation for such people must then necessarily proceed from felt need to the real need. From fear of the temporal (or whatever fear) to the fullness of salvation that portend the forgiveness of sin, the gift of the spirit as the seal of eternal life and the joy of being part of 'a new people of God' comprising of all who have encountered salvation.

Within the episodes, the obligation of clarifying the clearer definition of salvation lay with those who proclaimed the message of salvation. They need to firmly grasp the importance of Christological soteriology. The uniqueness of this salvation is that it is centred on Christ. Because it is centred on Christ, the event of His sacrificial death becomes part of the message of salvation so as to generate understating. Admittedly, Acts 16 does not elaborate on that aspect and it remains a contested conversation within Lukan studies. It is important to say however that, especially for proclaimers of the message of Salvation within African Christianity, consideration must be given to the wider Lukan and Gospel narrative (beyond Acts 16) to further shed light on salvation being rooted in the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus.

#### **7.4 Recommendations**

It is recommended that each of the highlighted implications be studied and expanded upon outside the limits of the scope of this study.

Also, an independent investigation into the receptivity and socio-ethical nature of salvation and how that understanding can be appropriated into African Christianity is hereby recommended. The research could assume a multidisciplinary approach. However, it should be contained within New Testament Biblical frameworks of Lukan passages that discuss the broader conceptual understanding and receptivity of salvation and the socio-ethical implications from which new meaning and understanding could be derived. This can contribute to the theory and practice of present-day Christianity in general and African Christianity in particular.

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