

DANGER IN THE WILDERNESS, DANGER AT SEA" (2 COR 11:26)  
PAUL AND THE PERILS OF TRAVEL\*

The apostle Paul is certainly among the most famous of ancient travellers. I first knew the map of the ancient Mediterranean as a backdrop upon which to trace Paul's three daring missionary journeys; I am sure my experience was not unusual. It is therefore all the more surprising to note how superficially New Testament scholarship has sought to understand Paul's travels. The hagiographic tendencies of an earlier era may now be met with some skepticism, but no alternative portrayal of Paul the traveller has been proposed.

Moreover, anachronistic presuppositions about the motivation for and exigencies of Paul's peripatetic lifestyle continue to shape the contemporary *Paulusbild*. Above all, previous attempts to describe Paul's travels have not sufficiently accounted for the precariousness of Paul's position. This is due, in large part, to continuing dependence upon the portrait of Paul provided in the book of Acts. In Acts, travel is a narrative trope that allows Luke to emphasize the superior character of his hero: Paul faces hardship with courage and calmly overcomes the dangers of road and sea. Paul's own letters, however, paint a very different picture. Paul's autobiographical comments suggest that his journeys were fraught with peril—and that Paul did not always emerge unscathed. Moreover, unlike the purposeful travel portrayed in Acts, Paul's own discussions of his travel plans are characterized above all by uncertainty and contingency.

Clearly it will be impossible to exhaust the topic of Paul's travels in this paper. My intent, therefore, is simply to demonstrate that this largely neglected biographical issue poses significant challenges to current portraits of Paul and the so-called Pauline mission. I will begin by briefly surveying descriptions of Paul as traveller from approximately the last one hundred years of scholarship. This discussion will highlight the distorting influence of Acts and demonstrate that the task of understanding Paul's travels on the basis of his own writings remains almost completely untried. I will then survey significant references and allusions to travel in the Pauline corpus. Notably, these references to travel occur primarily in contexts that emphasize the danger and hardship involved in ancient travel and that highlight the uncertainty of Paul's "itinerary." Whereas in Acts Paul's travel is presented as geographic mastery and contributes to Luke's characterization of a self-assured hero, in Paul's writings reference to travel functions as an indicator of hardship, uncertainty, and precariousness.

#### THE LEGACY OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The book of Acts is, of course, littered with references to Paul's journeys. Luke's hero covers vast distances, both by land and by sea. It is therefore surprising to note that Acts contains only one anecdote wherein we actually see Paul on the road—the well-known story of Paul's interrupted trip to Damascus (9:3–8)—and just one episode that takes place at sea—the dramatic

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account of the shipwreck in Acts 27.<sup>1</sup> Paul is always leaving cities and arriving in them—often in the same verse; the miles of travel this requires are never narrated. Whereas the travel narrative in Luke’s Gospel notoriously features Jesus always on the road but never getting anywhere, in Acts Paul travels mile after mile but is never actually on the road.

As Richard Pervo (1987:54–57) has seen, this lacuna helps us appreciate Luke’s utilization of travel as a narrative trope. Travelling holy men were common characters in Greco-Roman literature, and their mastery of foreign lands and people typically functioned as an attestation of their superior character and often of their religious authority as well.<sup>2</sup> John Elsner has noted that Paul’s travels in Acts function much like those of Philostratus’ Apollonius: “Travel—including visits to the cardinal centres of ancient religion, like Athens, as well as to the sites of the new Christian cult which he propagates—establishes a hagiographic superiority which culminates in a triumphant journey to Rome” (1997:35; cf. Alexander 1994:167–87; Luedemann 1984:15–18). That is, Paul’s travels allow Luke to depict the progress of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, and, perhaps equally important, to highlight the courage of his hero in the face of danger.

Scenes actually set on the road may in fact have detracted from this narrative use of travel. Pervo compares Acts’ depiction of travel to that of ancient novels:

Luke undoubtedly idealizes the travel experiences of his missionaries, eliminating drudgery and erasing hardship, with the exception of the one great shipwreck and rescue (chap. 27). The novels were about the same. There are grand adventures, pirates, storms, or bandits, or else painless and rapid travel. Few apparently wished to hear about the monotonous grind of daily journeys. The glamour of adventure and the romance of distant places were what were required, as Luke well knew. (1987:56)

Indeed, by narrating only the dramatic shipwreck story of Acts 27, Luke places upon this single anecdote much of the weight of his characterization of Paul as traveller. Lacking other stories of Paul on the road, this story of his remarkable courage provides for his readers a lasting image of a man noble and virtuous when tested by the perils of travel. In the words of John Lentz, “Here, Paul exemplifies the classical cardinal virtues. He is shown to be brave, wise, self-controlled, and pious” (1993:94–95; cf. Haenchen 1971:710–11).

Clearly Luke did his work well. Acts’ vivid portrayal of Paul the fearless traveller has firmly imprinted itself upon the imagination of modern readers. The awed homage of William Ramsay in *St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen* demonstrates the influence that Luke’s depiction of Paul’s comportment during the shipwreck of Acts 27 had upon the late nineteenth-century *Paulusbild*:

Paul stood forth in the midst of the helpless, panic-struck crowd. When caution was suitable (v. 10), he had been the prudent, cautious adviser, warning the council of prospective danger. But now, amidst panic and despair, he appears cool, confident, assured of safety; and he speaks in the only tone that could cheer such an audience as his, the tone of an inspired messenger. (1896:332–33)

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<sup>1</sup> Extended itineraries do appear: 16:6–12; 20:13–16; 21:1–3, 27–28; 18:11–13. Even here however, there is no narration of events.

<sup>2</sup> See Anderson 1994:167–87. Of particular interest is Anderson’s discussion of holy men and safe sea travel: “When a voyage ends safely the holy man will take, or at least be given, the credit for the safe arrival” (1994:175).

Even the titles of works from the early twentieth century evince the extent of the fascination with Paul the courageous traveller: *On Roman Roads with St. Paul* (Mathews 1916) and *Paul the Dauntless: The Course of a Great Adventure* (Pope 1939).<sup>3</sup> Though both these books have Paul's account of his travelling hardships in 2 Corinthians 11:25–27 as an inscription, it is clear that danger here means adventure, not suffering. Paul, we are assured, was “physically equal to the strain of exposure to normal and even extraordinary conditions of travel” (Pope 1939:19). He was, after all, “the scout riding on perilous work ahead of the main army; the heroic pioneer missionary” (Mathews 1916:209). We do not fear for Paul, and we do not feel sympathy for the man who faces such hardships. No, the dangers faced by Paul give us, in the words of Basil Mathews,

a still deeper reverence for the sturdy, dauntless daring of this man who was tossed in tempest, drenched with rains, and burned in the summer heat; smitten with fever, robbed, stoned, beaten, and wrecked; and, still undaunted, went on to declare, as he ran his race in the Stadium of the Roman world: “I press on toward the goal, unto the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ.” (Mathews 1916:11)

Notably, this depiction of Paul as adventurer, embraced with such fervour a century ago, fits perfectly with late Victorian religious ideals, in particular notions of “muscular Christianity” or “Christian manliness.” As Norman Vance has shown in *The Sinews of the Spirit* (1985), Christian heroes who embarked on “manly adventures and vigorous activities” were ubiquitous in popular Victorian literature.<sup>4</sup> Both physical prowess and moral fortitude were heroic characteristics possessed by exemplary men of faith (Vance 1985:10–28). The forceful articulation of Jesus' manliness during this era is well documented (DeBerg 1990:92–93); it is not surprising that Paul too was made to conform to contemporary images of Christian heroism. Paul's travels evidently provided fertile soil for this characterization.

And the image of Paul as adventurer is not the only interpretive construct for understanding Paul's travels that depended for its currency upon later Protestant ideals. John Townsend (1986) has shown that the conception of Paul's travels as three discrete “missionary journeys” arose only with the emergence of European missionary societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As the modern missionary movement grew, Paul became the prototypical missionary; not surprisingly, many descriptions of his so-called mission “strategy” were concordant with the strategies adopted by European missionaries.

Clearly, interpretations of Paul's peripatetic lifestyle that depict him as a bold adventurer must be viewed with suspicion, and the tidy Sunday school idea of programmatic missionary journeys is manifestly anachronistic. In fact, Leif Vaage (2006:16) has recently suggested that to speak of Paul as a “missionary” at all may be misleading. My assessment of Paul's own description of his travels would suggest that we must take Vaage's proposal seriously.

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<sup>3</sup> Works of the same ilk continued to appear for some time: e.g. Bradford 1974; Bulmer-Thomas 1975. See also Brian Rapske's (1994) recent discussion of Acts 27, wherein Paul is a “professional traveller.”

<sup>4</sup> See also DeBerg 1990:86–98; Hall 1994. I am indebted to Valerie G. Rempel for these bibliographic suggestions.

## RECENT SCHOLARSHIP

Twentieth-century scholars have not been quite as eloquent in their praise of Paul's courageous travel as were their Victorian forebears, yet their depiction of Paul the traveller is surprisingly similar. Though the Pauline itinerary in Acts has been subjected to various criticisms, few have thought to question Luke's depiction of Paul as a courageous travelling hero; that is, although the where and the when of Paul's travels have been the subject of careful examination, very little has been said about why Paul travelled nor how his trips were funded. Most striking are the ostensibly biographical treatments that simply do not address the concrete questions raised by Paul's travels.<sup>5</sup> Apparently because it is almost invariably taken for granted that Paul is adequately described as a missionary, no further comment is deemed necessary. Even the venerable John Knox does not see Paul's travels as worthy of discussion; he simply concludes that Paul was "at heart the itinerant, the pioneer" (1987:89).

Those who do discuss travel generally take one of two routes. Some comment on the relative ease with which travel was possible for Paul due to Roman roads and the *pax Romana*. Others take the hardships involved in ancient travel seriously; however, this almost invariably becomes an opportunity to praise Paul's endurance and resolute commitment to his mission.

Udo Schnelle's *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology* contains a single paragraph under the heading travel. His conclusion is representative: "Paul's mission work was made easier by the excellent possibilities for travel available in the Roman Empire of the first century CE" (2005:140). Wayne Meeks is more emphatic: "The people of the Roman Empire traveled more extensively and more easily than anyone before them did or would again until the nineteenth century" (2003:17).<sup>6</sup> Meeks is undoubtedly correct; despite Roman roads, however, travel certainly remained a daunting ordeal. Indeed, it was precisely the danger involved in travel that made it such an exciting trope for readers of Acts and the ancient novels.

Unfortunately, dependence on imperial rhetoric and elite travel narratives for information about travel in the ancient world obscures the realities of travel for those, like Paul, who were not assured of access to elite resources.<sup>7</sup> By far the most frequently cited work on travel among biblical scholars is Lionel Casson's *Travel in the Ancient World* (1974). Casson's wide-ranging work is derived almost entirely from literary—that is, elite—sources: depictions of travellers are drawn from fictional works like Petronius' *Satyricon* and the poems of Virgil; evidence is adduced from the travels of Cicero and Augustus; other data is gleaned from the writings of Pliny and Celsus. This is not particularly surprising, since the record we have of elite travel is much more

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<sup>5</sup> Works that fall into this category are simply too numerous to list: e.g. Bornkamm 1971; Bruce 1977; Hengel and Schwemer 1997; Roetzel 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Hock 1980:27–29; Riesner 1998:307–17; Metzger 1955:13–14. Others note the importance of Roman roads as a medium for Christianization more generally: Gibbon 1909:2.60; Clark 2004:5.

<sup>7</sup> Paul's social status remains disputed. Although I cannot adequately defend my position here, I work from the assumption that Paul belonged to the sub-elite social strata. Paul was a manual labourer (see Hock 1978; 1980), and the notion that he had an aristocratic contempt for his work is unfounded (Still 2006; contra Hock 1978). Even if Paul did originate from "a background infinitely superior to that of the average artisan" (Murphy-O'Connor 1997:40; cf. Neyrey 2001), during the period in question his social location clearly did not reflect such a background—he suffered deprivation, beating, and imprisonment (cf. Friesen 2004:350). There is simply no indication that Paul had access to elite resources.

accessible than extant data on the mobility of artisans and labourers. It does, however, result in a skewed conception of ancient travel that is not particularly helpful for understanding the exigencies faced by the likes of Paul. Casson addresses complaints of bedbugs in roadside inns; Paul complains about exposure (2 Cor 11:27).

Those interpreters who do address the difficulties of ancient travel tend to move with ease from the concrete perils of Paul's travels to the heroism of his missionary travails. After presenting a litany of dangers and hardships that Paul would have faced—robbers, cold winds, vermin, storms at sea, and exhaustion—Adolf Deissmann expressed his “inexpressible astonishment at the purely physical achievement of Paul the traveller, who could truly say, not without ground, that he buffeted his body and brought it into subjection like a slave” (1957:64–65; cf. Farrar 1891:190–91). For Deissmann, Paul's feat exemplifies the “strength in weakness” of which he himself speaks; the hardships Paul endured become evidence of his unquenchable determination.

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor concludes a discussion of the dangers Paul faced on the road with the following moralizing interpretation:

His conversion had made him a follower of Jesus who had given his life for the salvation of humanity. That totally other-directed mode of existence became Paul's ideal. . . . Yet every road he travelled forced him to worry about his personal safety. Every inn he visited obliged him to consider others as potential thieves. . . . Circumstances conspired to push the self to the centre of his consciousness, whereas he wanted to be totally focused on the other. His life became a perpetual struggle against the insidious miasma of egocentricity. (1996:100; cf. 1985:47)

Physical danger has become spiritual struggle; informed perhaps by “the introspective conscience of the West,” (Stendahl 1963) concrete peril has morphed into moral temptation.

Eduard Lohse discusses travel under the heading “The Sufferings of Paul”:

Although the transport routes of the Roman Empire offered better possibilities for travel than they had ever given before, it remained an arduous venture to cover long distances by foot and in all sorts of weather, and, what is more, to be exposed to raids by bandits or harassment from enemies. And if one availed oneself of a ship, then one could be caught in a storm and be shipwrecked. Heat and cold, hunger and thirst could cause trouble for the traveller.<sup>8</sup> (1996:80–81)

But for Lohse too Paul's theology allows his suffering to be easily endured: “But the cross that he carried for the sake of Christ brought Paul to the realization that the sufferings of his much afflicted path changed miraculously into blessings” (1996:83).<sup>9</sup> This is surely a misunderstanding of what Jennifer Glancy has called “Paul's corporal hosting of the abased and crucified slave Christ” (2007:205). Indeed, as David Clines notes regarding texts like 2 Corinthians 12:9–10, “Paul is more interested in power, which he likes, than in weakness, which he does not like—and he has thought of a way in which weakness can be seen as power” (2003:184).

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<sup>8</sup> My translation: “Die Leiden des Paulus: Obwohl die Verkehrswege im Römischen Reich bessere Reisemöglichkeiten boten, als sie je zuvor gegeben hatte, blieb es ein mühevolleres Unterfangen, weite Strecken zu Fuß zurückzulegen und dabei Wind und Wetter, aber auch Überfällen durch Räuber oder Nachstellungen von Feinden ausgesetzt zu sein. Und begab man sich auf ein Schiff, so konnte man in Sturm geraten und Schiffbruch erleiden. Hitze und Kälte, Hunger und Durst konnten dem Reisenden zu schaffen machen.”

<sup>9</sup> “Das Kreuz aber, das er um Christi willen zu tragen hatte, brachte Paulus eine Erkenntnis ein, die die Leiden seines von vielen Gebrechen gezeichneten Weges in wunderbarer Weise zum Segen wandelte.”

Other discussions of travel are occasioned by the question of Paul's alleged mission strategy. The central text here is Paul's claim in Romans 15 that "from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum" he has "fully proclaimed the good news of Christ" (v. 19) and his stated intention to pass on through Rome to Spain (vv. 23–24). In what sense Paul can claim to have fulfilled (πεπληρωκέναι) the gospel is not immediately apparent; however, it has become common to claim that Paul thought in terms of major cities—themselves perhaps representative of nations—within an eschatological master plan.<sup>10</sup>

The most detailed arguments for this position are those of Roger Aus (1979) and Rainer Riesner (1998:241–55). Following Johannes Munck's suggestion that the Isaianic motif of an eschatological pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem forms the background of Paul's statement concerning the "full number of the Gentiles" (τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν) in Romans 11:25,<sup>11</sup> Aus argues that Paul's apparent preoccupation with Spain in Romans 15 is derived from his interpretation of Isaiah 66 as a summary of his own vocation. According to Aus, the eschatological geography of Isaiah 66:18–19 provided Paul with an itinerary for his missionary enterprise; specifically, Isaiah's Tarshish would allegedly have been interpreted by Paul as equivalent to Spain. Rainer Reisner questions Aus' identification of Tarshish with Spain, but agrees that Isaiah 66 stands behind Paul's itinerary: "Paul read this text as being fulfilled in his own activity, and traces of this exegesis stand behind Rom. 15:16–24" (1998:246).

John Knox (1964) also sees this text as the key to understanding Paul's missionary project; however, he reads Romans 15:19 differently, positing that Paul's claim to have fulfilled the gospel from Jerusalem "around" (κύκλω) to Illyricum implies that his mental map contained a complete circle around the Mediterranean. According to Knox, "It is at least possible that this rather casual κύκλω reflects Paul's hope and expectation of making a complete circuit of the nations, both north and south of the Sea, planting the gospel where it had not been planted by another" (1964:11; cf. Scott 1995:5–56; Jewett 2006:911–15).

The assumption common to all these proposals, of course, is that Paul was able to imagine moving about the Mediterranean more or less at will. This assumption is convincingly refuted by Terry Donaldson's recent study of Pauline geography (2006). Donaldson retains the idea of a grand Pauline vision, but perceptively notes that Paul's movements were contingent on a variety of more concrete factors, including the exigencies of travel and the receptivity of his audience (2006:132–36). In short, the "gritty realities" restricted Paul's movements such that texts like Romans 15 must be understood as Paul's attempt, "by sheer will and rhetoric, to force the untidy contingencies of reality to fit the grand pattern of the vision" (2006:136). As our reading of Paul will demonstrate, Donaldson's emphasis on contingency must be the starting point for any further discussion of Paul's travels.

## TRAVEL AND HARDSHIP IN THE PAULINE CORPUS

Paul seldom refers explicitly to his experiences on the road. Tellingly, when he does speak about what his peripatetic life involved, he invariably does so amidst a catalogue of apostolic

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<sup>10</sup> The classic argument is that of Johannes Munck (1959:49–55). See also Bornkamm 1971:52–55; Peerbolte 2003:250. For a synopsis of the arguments, see Donaldson 2006:114–16.

<sup>11</sup> Munck 1959:47–49. Peerbolte (2003:248 n. 151) argues that this tradition was mediated for Paul by its interpretation in *Ps. Sol.* 17.

hardships. Though the Roman Empire may have facilitated relatively secure mobility, the fact that Paul credibly lists travel hardships alongside stonings and whippings testifies to the currency of the notion that travel was still both dangerous and laborious.

The immediacy of Paul's most explicit invocation of travel hardship has been buried beneath ongoing discussions of the acceptability of Paul's boasting and the background of his so-called *peristasis* catalogues:

Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. (2 Cor 11:23–27)

Since the influential commentary of Hans Windisch (1924:315–17), Paul's apology in 2 Corinthians 11–12 has been seen as an ironic "Fool's Speech" (*Narrenrede*) in the tradition of Greek comedy or mime.<sup>12</sup> Despite very little evidence that this genre could transcend the bounds of the theatre, Windisch argued that in this passage Paul has put on the mask of the braggart, a stock character in Plautine comedy (1924:316).<sup>13</sup> Although the text has been thoroughly mined for hints about Paul's opponents (e.g. Georgi 1986; Winter 2002:234–37) and Pauline theology of strength in weakness (Savage 1996:62–64; Barnett 1997:535; Forbes 1986), this emphasis on irony has dissuaded interpreters from taking seriously the biographical data that Paul presents.

But is Paul's boasting in weakness really ironic? In a cogent critique of such interpretations of Paul's apology, Lee A. Johnson (2002:218–20) reminds us that irony, by definition, excludes overt expressions of the author's intent. In 2 Corinthians, of course, Paul repeatedly interrupts himself to remind his audience of his discomfort with the boasting into which he has been forced (11:17a, 23b, 30; 12:5). As Johnson explains, "Paul's series of asides belie [the] claim to irony and serve as sober reminders of Paul's disgruntled participation in an enterprise of self-commendation" (2002:220). Paul's boasting in weakness may be paradoxical, but it is not ironic. In fact, it is the very straightforwardness of the boasting that Paul finds necessary which engenders his profound discomfort (see Johnson 2002:27; Furnish 1984:532).

John T. Fitzgerald's *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel* (1988) has set the parameters for the discussion of Paul's autobiographical references to suffering.<sup>14</sup> Fitzgerald reads the relevant texts in the context of the hardship catalogues of suffering but resolute Cynic-Stoic sages. According to Fitzgerald, "Paul's depiction of himself in 2 Corinthians in terms typically used to describe the ideal philosopher . . . [is] grounded in the fact that he is concerned with showing the Corinthians that he is a person of integrity in whom they may have both confidence and pride" (1988:206). But Jennifer Glancy's recent study of 2 Corinthians 11:23–25 (2004) calls this assertion into serious doubt. Glancy has convincingly demonstrated that Paul's beatings simply cannot have been adduced as evidence of virtue. Though the presentation of a chest scarred by war wounds

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Welborn 1999. Assertions of Pauline irony here are ubiquitous: e.g. Danker 1991; Forbes 1986; Holland 1993; Watson 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Welborn (1999) argues that Paul wore the masks of five different stock characters.

<sup>14</sup> Fitzgerald's monograph does not address 2 Cor 11–12, but his reading of these texts appears in the dissertation on which it is based (1984:364–93).

was indeed “a standard move in Greco-Roman self-presentation,” a back marred by whippings was irrevocable evidence of “humiliating corporal vulnerability” (2004:104, 101). Even when such beatings were clearly unjust, the innocence of the victim could not efface the ignominy of surrendering masculine self-determination (2004:123). As Scott B. Andrews has argued more generally, in 2 Corinthians 11, “The apostle boasts of hardships that reveal his weak status and not of the fact that he has overcome or endured the hardships” (1995:272).<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, Fitzgerald’s decision to restrict the domain of his comparison to Cynic-Stoic hardship texts is not explained. After listing a number of other suggestive types of hardship catalogue, including catalogues of occupational hardships, punishments, and “woes of the wanderer,” Fitzgerald simply informs us: “For the purposes of this investigation, the most important of the various types is *the wise man*” (1988:49).<sup>16</sup> Since Paul’s boasting in 2 Corinthians 11 consists precisely of occupational hardships, beatings, and travelling woes, this decision surely requires more justification. A brief look at the “woes of the wanderer” tradition, the relevance of which Fitzgerald dismisses in passing, will demonstrate that comparison with a different set of texts places Paul’s boasting in a very different light.

The association of travel and suffering had deep roots in Greek culture. Particularly prevalent in Homer, the notion that the wanderer suffers a dire fate pervaded ancient tragedy as well.<sup>17</sup> In these traditions, far from an indicator of virtue, wandering is a symptom of the hostility of the gods who have afflicted the wanderer with madness (Montaglio 2000:88; Padel 1995:108–14).<sup>18</sup> As such, wandering is necessarily disgraceful. As Ruth Padel notes: “For us, wandering has a depth charge of glamour”; for the Greeks, wandering was “a shameful, misery-dark state” (1995:111, 110).<sup>19</sup>

Paul does not believe himself accursed of the gods; yet it is interesting to note that he does see his homelessness as the result of divine compulsion:

For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world . . . To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless . . . We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things. (1 Cor 4:9–13)

Contra Fitzgerald, perhaps Paul presents his travel hardship not as noble courage but rather as the fate of a man stricken with a shameful divine vocation.

<sup>15</sup> As Andrew’s notes (1995:273 n. 43), this is a striking change from 1 Cor 4:9–13, 2 Cor 4:7–12, and 6:3–10, where Paul speaks of being “afflicted in every way, but not crushed.”

<sup>16</sup> Of course, Fitzgerald stands within a growing tradition of those who find comparison to contemporary philosophers useful. See, e.g., Engberg-Pederson 2000; Mahlerbe 1989.

<sup>17</sup> See Montaglio 2005:24–61; Padel 1995:109–19. E.g. Homer, *Il.* 2.667; 24.532; *Od.* 7.152; 10.463–65; 13.418; 14.362; 15.176, 343–5, 401; 16.205; 19.170; 21.284; Aeschylus, *Ag.* 1273–74; *Prom.* 565, 576, 585, 622, 784; *Suppl.* 16–17, 307–9, 524–49; Euripides, *Orest.* 55–56.

<sup>18</sup> Wanderers are also proverbially deceitful: “As outsiders, and most often in need, they are likely to dress up stories in order to please their audiences and to receive sustenance” (Montaglio 2005:92).

<sup>19</sup> This conception of wandering as a shameful activity, rooted in archaic Greek life, persisted. The Sophists were mocked for their shameless mercenary mobility; “The Stoics’ rejection of homeless wandering matches their social propriety”; the Cynics embraced homelessness—without necessarily travelling extensively—precisely because of its social stigma (Montaglio 2005:105–17, 210, 180–203). As late as the third century C.E., Greek novelists depicted those who left home as “foreigners and suppliants without a city, alienated from everything” (Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 4.18.2; cited in Montaglio 2005:226).

Of course, Cynic philosophers like Diogenes took pride in being homeless wanderers: Diogenes, exiled by the citizens of Sinope, “converts his punishment into a blessing” by insisting that only the homeless have freedom (Montaglio 2000:100). But there is no hint in Paul’s list of travel woes that he is rewarded with freedom; on the contrary, in addition to all his suffering, he is burdened with daily anxiety (2 Cor 11:28). Paul does “convert his punishment into a blessing,” but he does so by insisting that weakness is the mark of an apostle in whom Christ’s power truly dwells (2 Cor 12:9).

The possibility must be entertained, then, that in 2 Corinthians 11 Paul presents himself at his most devastatingly vulnerable: Like his shameful beatings, Paul’s travel hardships reflect ignominious suffering rather than courageous adventure. Indeed, Paul elsewhere describes his fate as humiliating homelessness. In 2 Corinthians 7:5, Paul admits his fearful precariousness: “For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted in every way—disputes without and fears within.” To borrow the words of Homer, Paul “wanders honored neither by gods nor by mortals” (*Il.* 24.529–33 [Murray 1925]). Similarly, Paul laments his “homelessness” (ἀσπατέω) in 1 Corinthians 4:8–13. As Fitzgerald notes, “the verb ἀσπατεῖν is a frequentative verb that expresses incessant movement. It depicts the life of the wanderer, constantly moving from place to place” (1988:134). Plutarch uses the word to describe the endless motion of the restless sea (*Crass.* 17); when used of moral character, it denotes inconstancy (e.g. Vettius Valens, 116.30).

The repetition of this theme throughout the Corinthian correspondence should be kept in view when we read Paul’s admission in Romans 15:23 that his plans to visit Rome and eventually Spain result from his having “no further place in these regions” (μηκέτι τόπον ἔχων ἐν τοῖς κλίμασι). The possibility that Paul is indeed talking about displacement here has been largely ignored, in large part due to untenable absolutization of Paul’s preceding assertion (vv. 20–21) that he only wants to preach where Christ has not already been named (e.g. Jewett 2006:923; Dunn 1988:871; Talbert 2002:329; Schreiner 1998:774; Knox 1964:2). Interpreters have generally considered Paul’s theological justification of his plan to move on to Spain to be a pillar of his mission strategy,<sup>20</sup> despite plentiful evidence throughout the Pauline corpus that Paul regularly worked in cooperation and often competition with other Christ-preachers. Paul’s letters to Corinth, for example, from where he seems to have been written Romans, represent a sustained attempt to defend his territory from those he fears are encroaching on it (1 Cor 1:10–4:21; 2 Cor 3:1–3; 7:2–16; 10–12; cf. Phil 1:12–18). Either Romans 15:20 is simply rhetorical justification or Paul is announcing a new strategy here. Indeed, it may be more credible to interpret Paul’s desire to work new ground as evidence of the situation to which the conflict in Corinth has reduced him than to imagine that it is a general Pauline principle.<sup>21</sup>

It is striking that a statement such as Paul’s theological justification for visiting Rome has largely been taken at face value while Paul’s reports of travel hardships are treated as “mere” rhetoric. As we have seen, despite—or perhaps because of—their rhetorical setting, these texts yield significant insight into what travel meant for Paul. As the litany of dangers<sup>22</sup> recited by

<sup>20</sup> Robert Jewett, e.g., calls 15:20 “Paul’s apostolic rule” (2006:916).

<sup>21</sup> I am indebted to Leif E. Vaage for this suggestion concerning Romans 15.

<sup>22</sup> Eight of the nine occurrences of κίνδυνος in the NT are in 2 Cor 11:26.

Paul highlights, travel was a source of significant hardship and peril. Given what we know about the exigencies of ancient travel, this should come as no surprise. Even among the elite who appear in Casson's study, travel was accompanied by considerable anxiety (1974:72–76, 160–62). Bandits on the road and shipwrecks at sea loomed large in the ancient imagination;<sup>23</sup> the mundane drudgery of travel by foot<sup>24</sup> received less literary attention but may have been more onerous.

### THE CONTINGENCY OF PAULINE TRAVEL

Less conspicuous than complaints of danger and homelessness but more pervasive in Paul's letters are indications that he did not always travel when and where he wanted. As noted above, Terry Donaldson has shown that an account of Paul's travel cannot merely elucidate a grand eschatological vision but must also contend with the "gritty realities." A brief look at texts in which Paul discusses his itinerary—both past and present—will demonstrate the extent to which Paul's travels were contingent on other factors.

First Thessalonians provides a good example, since it appears that Paul neither set out for Thessalonica nor left there willingly. Immediately following his extended thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' faith (1:2–10), Paul discusses the circumstances of his arrival:

You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition (2:1–2)

Unfortunately we don't get any more detail here, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Paul fled to Thessalonica to avoid trouble in Philippi (so Riesner 1998:344; Crossan and Reed 2004:161). And we need not imagine that Paul's next destination was determined by any particular missionary motivation. Quite simply, Thessalonica was just down the road.

When Paul arrived, he proclaimed the gospel despite the threat that similar problems would recur. As his letter indicates, they did:

As for us, brothers and sisters, when, for a short time, we were made orphans by being separated from you—in person, not in heart—we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again—but Satan blocked our way. (2:17–18)

Again, the exact circumstances of Paul's separation from the Thessalonians are not clear. A number of interpreters have postulated, quite credibly though of course not verifiably, that Paul either fled from or was escorted out of town by disgruntled local authorities.<sup>25</sup> It seems likely

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<sup>23</sup> E.g. Lucien, *Alex.* 44; Josephus, *B.J.* 2.125; Lysias, 137–39. See further Blumell 2005; Grünwald 1999; Shaw 1984; de Souza 1999; Lacoureur 1980. Note also Erin Vearncombe's discussion of the merchant of Hierapolis' pride in successfully navigating seventy-two voyages from Cape Maleus to Italy (2006:10).

<sup>24</sup> Regardless of whether Paul's use of the word ὁδοιπορία in 2 Cor 11:26 denotes in particular travel by foot (so Riesner 1998:309) it can be assumed that—like other non-elites—Paul would generally have undergone land travel by foot. See Murphy-O'Connor 1985:39; Casson 1974:67.

<sup>25</sup> Crossan and Reed 2004:161: "Notice that such a flight across provincial boundaries suggests opposition primarily from Roman authority." Riesner 1998:359: "Since there was no common legal jurisdiction between cities, every change of locale brought Paul into secure surroundings."

that Paul's activity aroused the ire of local authorities who were jittery about the potentially disruptive influence of unsupervised voluntary associations.<sup>26</sup>

The emphatic desire to be with the Thessalonians that Paul expresses can hardly be exaggerated (cf. Malherbe 1987:63–66): In 2:17, Paul evocatively describes the separation of him and his companions from the Thessalonians as being orphaned (ἀπορφρανισθέντες) from them;<sup>27</sup> the separation is “in face” (προσώπῳ) not “in heart” (καρδίᾳ), yet Paul has sought (σπουδάζω)<sup>28</sup> actually “to see your face” (τὸ πρόσωπον ὑμῶν ἰδεῖν); he qualifies his eagerness rather awkwardly with both an emphatic comparative (περισσοτέρως)<sup>29</sup> and a prepositional phrase (ἐν πολλῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ). Again and again (καὶ ἄπαξ καὶ δίς; 2:18)<sup>30</sup> he wanted to come to them. Eventually, no longer able to endure the situation (μηκέτι στέγοντες; 3:1) Paul sends Timothy to ensure that the Thessalonians are not shaken. Even when Timothy returns with good news, Paul prays night and day, more earnestly than ever (ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ; 3:10), that he will see them face to face and that God might direct his path to them (3:11).

This overflowing eagerness to visit the Thessalonians invites the question why Paul did not or could not go to Thessalonica himself. Paul is not very direct on this point: he asserts that Satan has prevented his coming (2:18), but unfortunately does not specify the attendant material cause. It is worth noting that Paul elsewhere speaks of satanic opposition precisely when his power is limited (see Johnson 1999). In the Corinthian correspondence, where the bulk of these references occur, “the thing that provokes such language from Paul . . . is clearly his uncertain position of authority at Corinth” (Johnson 1999:153). In 1 Thessalonians, as noted above, it appears to be Paul's helplessness vis-à-vis the political authorities that fuels his “Satan talk.”

Margaret Mitchell, in a highly illuminating study of the use of envoys in the ancient world (1992), has suggested that Paul thought sending Timothy would be more effective than going himself—in which case the emphatic language we have just seen is simply a somewhat disingenuous expression of goodwill (εὐνοία). Calling into question Robert Funk's well known hierarchical arrangement of the various manifestations of the apostolic *parousia* (1967)—wherein physical presence is always preferable—Mitchell posits: “Hardly mere substitutes for the universally preferable Pauline presence, these envoys were consciously sent by Paul to play a

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<sup>26</sup> Note esp. Pliny's correspondence with Trajan concerning the potential politicization of a fire brigade (*Ep. Tra.* 10.33.3; 10.34.1). On the “official suspicion of associations,” see Ascough 2003:42–46; Cotter 1996; Crossan and Reed 2004:249–57; Harland 2003:161–73.

<sup>27</sup> Malherbe 2000:187–88: “The way he stands the metaphor on its head, that *he* is the orphan, shows the extent to which he goes to express his need.”

<sup>28</sup> Wanamaker 1990:121: “σπουδάζειν indicates more than mere desire; it denotes actual effort on Paul's part to fulfill his desire, as v. 18 is intended to demonstrate.”

<sup>29</sup> Commentators have often explained the sense of *περισσοτέρως* not as strictly comparative but as relative (e.g. Wanamaker 1990:87 n. 84; Frame, 1912:119; Malherbe 2000:183), primarily due to the lack of an explicit comparison. However, the immediately preceding contrast between being present “in heart” and “in face” provides adequate basis for understanding its comparative force: “We wanted more eagerly to see you in face [than merely to be present in heart].” The construction is awkward, but sensible.

<sup>30</sup> Morris 1956:207: “The expression . . . is simply a way of denoting a plurality of occasions, with no attempt at exact specification.” See Phil 4:16, where the point is that the Philippians aided Paul “more than once” (NRSV); cf. Ascough 2003:166–67.

complex and crucial intermediary role that he could not play, even if present himself” (1992:662).

Mitchell successfully demonstrates that “the role of envoys, as the go-between for separated parties, is to confirm and reaffirm the affection and loyalty of each party to the other” (1992:659–60). Her argument that Paul would rather send a mediating envoy than go to Thessalonica himself is particularly compelling if one imagines that Paul’s relationship with the Thessalonians was threatened by a “negative propaganda campaign” (Holtz 2000:79; cf. 1986:65–95). But there is no evidence in the letter that this relationship was so tenuous that Paul felt obligated to test the waters by sending Timothy.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, the earnest desire expressed by Paul to see the Thessalonians and his unqualified commendation of their faith (1:2–10) both suggest very warm relations (cf. Stowers 1986:25; Malherbe 1987:66 n. 11). There is simply no reason to suppose that Paul’s relationship with the Thessalonians was under threat or required the cautious mediation Mitchell envisions.

Moreover, Mitchell’s argument does not account for Paul’s explicit discussion of his reason for sending Timothy. We may quote the helpful reminder of Johan Vos at length:

The situation from which the letter was born is unambiguously described in 2:17–3:10: During his absence, he feared that the church would lose faith and subsequently reject his proclamation as untrue, due to “persecutions” or pressure from the surrounding society. . . . Twice the apostle emphasizes that the tension was so great that he could not stand it any longer. Since Satan prevented him from coming personally, he sent Timothy both to strengthen (στηρίξει) the Thessalonians and to encourage (παρκαλέσει) them in their faith “so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions” (3:2–3).<sup>32</sup>

It would seem that all three of these aims—seeing how the Thessalonians’ fared under “persecution,” strengthening them, and encouraging them to endure—could have been accomplished as easily by Paul himself as by Timothy.

The question is, then: If Paul really wanted to visit the Thessalonians, what prevented him from doing so? It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Paul was not free to travel—at least not to Thessalonica.<sup>33</sup> The simplest explanation, of course, is that the same conflict with local authorities that forced him to flee in the first place prevented him from returning. In any case, we may safely conclude that Paul set out from Philippi for Thessalonica unwillingly, was then forced to leave Thessalonica unwillingly, and was unable to return to Thessalonica when he wished.

Not surprisingly, further indications that Paul could not always travel as he wished occur in the prison letters. In light of the foregoing discussion, it is worth noting that twice in his letter to the Philippians Paul contemplates sending Timothy because he is unable to travel himself: “Whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm” (1:27); “I hope therefore to send [Timothy] as soon as I see how things go with me; and I

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<sup>31</sup> Some interpret 1 Thess 2:1–12 as an apology designed to defend Paul from slander (Holtz 2000; cf. Donfried 2002:163–66). But Abraham Malherbe has convincingly demonstrated that Paul’s autobiographical references do not presuppose a threatened relationship; on the contrary, this text functions paranetically by holding up Paul’s behaviour as a model to be followed (1970; 1987:52–60; cf. Lyons 1985:189–221; Stowers 1986:25–26; Merk 2000; Wanamaker 1990:90–91).

<sup>32</sup> Vos 2000:82–83; see also Crossan and Reed 2004:160–62; Wanamaker 1990:126.

<sup>33</sup> Riesner 1998:359: “The fact that Paul’s return was “blocked by Satan” (1 Thess. 2:18) apparently means that, for some reason, things had become too risky for him in Thessalonica.”

trust in the Lord that I will also come soon” (2:23–24). Writing to Philemon, Paul states with an affecting touch of bravado: “One thing more—prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you” (22).

Clearly, Paul’s ability to travel was at times restricted by his rather rocky relationship with the authorities. But other factors also must be taken into account, including Paul’s sometimes equally turbulent relationships with his churches. Repeatedly in the Corinthian correspondence we get the impression that Paul’s travel is contingent on the unpredictable receptivity of his audience.

Like Margaret Mitchell, Lee A. Johnson (2006) takes issue with Robert Funk’s hierarchical arrangement of Paul’s apostolic *parousia*. Through careful analysis of the so-called *parousia* texts, Johnson convincingly argues that Paul actually preferred to write to the Corinthians than to visit them. As Johnson concludes:

The apostolic *parousia* passages in the Corinthian letters amount to about one-half the total verses in Paul’s correspondence with this community, far outweighing similar passages in Paul’s letters to other communities. Throughout these numerous and lengthy passages . . . Paul never expresses his eagerness to see the Corinthians, never hints that something or someone has hindered him from visiting them, . . . and never acknowledges that such a visit to Corinth would be of benefit to him. (2006:497)

Indeed, Paul explicitly states that he wrote the “letter of tears” in order to avoid another painful visit (2 Cor 1:23–24) and clearly felt his letters were better received than his personal presence (2 Cor 10:10). Thus “Paul . . . opted to rely on letters in order to avoid another painful visit to Corinth” (2006:496).

Although Johnson is certainly correct, it is important to specify what her language of volition means in this context. Paul was not abstractly choosing a strategy for apostolic effectiveness; his own concrete interests were also at stake. Paul did make a choice, but his options were very limited. As Johnson herself is aware, it was Paul’s “stormy relationship with the Corinthians” that engendered Paul’s uniquely epistolary approach to this community and made another visit to Corinth untenable (2006:498; cf. 2 Cor 2:1–3; 12:20–21). In other words, the Corinthians’ lack of receptivity effectively eliminated the possibility that Paul could travel confidently to Corinth. Thus although it is true that “Paul presents his absence from Corinth as due to personal choices rather than to circumstances beyond his control” (2006:491), imposing himself on the Corinthians was hardly a realistic choice. Thinking concretely: In order to travel Paul needed hospitality and accommodation at his destination and resources for his next journey.<sup>34</sup> It would have been decidedly unpleasant, even downright risky, to travel where he was not wanted.<sup>35</sup>

What the Corinthian correspondence reveals, then, is the extent to which problematic relationships with his churches could impinge on Paul’s travel plans. Quite simply, Paul is forced to change his plans when he is not welcome—a rather humiliating reality that Paul does his best to portray in a positive light:

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<sup>34</sup> Note Paul’s mention of being “sent forth” (προπέμπω), which implies the provision of travel assistance—“food, money, . . . means of travel, etc.” (BDAG 873), in 1 Cor 16:6, 11; 2 Cor 1:16. Cf. Rom 15:24, and indeed the entire letter of Romans, which serves to ensure that Paul can expect hospitality and travel provisions when he visits Rome.

<sup>35</sup> Paul’s ability to work as an artisan would not have relieved the need for a receptive patron to provide access to both workplace and local markets. As Alison Burford explains, “Without a patron, the craftsman was literally and figuratively at a loss” (1972:124).

I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double favor; I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on to Judea. Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards (κατὰ σάρκα), ready to say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time? . . . I call on God as witness against me: it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth. (2 Cor 1:15b–17, 23)

Of course, despite all the danger, uncertainty, and contingency we have seen, it is clear that Paul managed to cover a lot of territory. And his account of his early travels in Galatians 1–2 would suggest that at least some of his travels were purposeful. Nevertheless, to subsume all of Paul’s travels under a single heading—particularly an arguably anachronistic heading like mission—fails to account for the diversity of factors that motivated Paul’s travel and upon which his ability to travel was contingent.

### TRAVEL AND PAUL’S “MISSION”

Revisiting Paul’s references to his travel has significant implications for Pauline studies. First, attending to the concrete exigencies of Paul’s movement from city to city prevents us from severing his religious discourse from the social and economic networks in which it was embedded. It has long been recognized that Paul’s theological formulations were occasional, but it has generally been assumed that they were occasioned exclusively by Paul’s evaluation of his recipients’ spiritual needs. Yet the role of Paul’s own concrete exigencies as occasioning factors must not be ignored. Recognition of Paul’s precarious social “location” reminds us that Paul’s activities were not disinterested; indeed, much was at stake for Paul himself—sometimes his very survival.

Second, indications that Paul’s travel was often restricted and contingent on other factors require a reevaluation of the common notion that Paul imagined himself to be triumphantly realizing the eschatological master plan that would bring all the nations on pilgrimage to Zion. It is indisputable that Paul used universalistic language to describe the import of his gospel; it does not follow that he expected his own travels to encompass that scope. At the very least, we must concur with Terry Donaldson (2006) that the shape of the Paul’s mission was defined by an ongoing dialectic between Paul’s grand missionary vision and the realities of ancient travel. Paul was dependant upon local hospitality, often to an uncomfortable degree. Sometimes Paul’s movements were restricted by local authorities. When Paul did travel, it was apparently a trying ordeal.

Finally, observing what Paul says about his travel raises questions about the adequacy of the category “mission” for describing Paul’s work among the Christ-confessing communities of Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia Minor. The widespread and uncritical acceptance of the paradigm of Paul as travelling missionary obscures the extent to which the travels of Paul present us with a significant historical question. As Leif Vaage observes in his introduction to *Religious Rivalries in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Early Christianity*, there is simply no precedent for missionary programmes in contemporaneous Jewish or Greco-Roman practice (2006:9–17). It is seldom disputed that first-century pagans did not engage in organized missionary activity (MacMullen 1981:98–99). Moreover, recent studies have even called into question the assumption that early Christianity was missionary in orientation. According to

Ramsay MacMullen: “After Saint Paul, the church had no mission, it made no organized or official approach to unbelievers” (1984:34).<sup>36</sup>

Donald Akenson attempts to minimize the problem by emphasizing the proselytizing activity of some other contemporary forms of Judaism: “In the matter of Saul’s missionary activities . . . we should abandon the Guinness Book of Records mindset that Paul-was-the-first-Missionary and notice that he was engaged in an animated and ambulatory form of what was a commonplace activity among keen Judahists of his time” (2000:147). Akenson’s assertion, however, runs counter to the majority opinion, well articulated by Shaye Cohen (1992), Martin Goodman (1994), and Scot McKnight (1991), that first-century Judaism cannot accurately be called a missionary religion (cf. Will and Orrieux 1992). Though certainly open to converts and sympathizers, proselytization was not considered a religious duty. Moreover, even if Akenson is correct, behind his subtle adjective “ambulatory” lies a difference whose importance should not be understated. Louis Feldman (1992; 1993:288–341), who does think first-century Judaism was a missionary religion, nevertheless adduces no evidence of *travelling* missionaries. Attracting one’s neighbours to the synagogue is simply not the same thing as itinerant missionary activity. The Diaspora undoubtedly resulted in what Akenson calls “outreach,” but the Diaspora was not a missionary project. Quite simply, the concept of “mission” appears to be an anachronism.

Of course, we could simply broaden the category to include Paul. However, as the history of scholarship on Paul’s travels demonstrates, this interpretive move tends to deflect attention from important biographical questions by providing a ready-made pigeonhole in which to place Paul. Perhaps by shedding the anachronistic notion of Paul the missionary we will be able to attend to contemporary analogues that have previously been ignored.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, dispensing with the facile solution provided by the concept of mission may make room for inquiry into more mundane motivators. One such angle of inquiry arises from the undisputed fact that Paul worked as an artisan (see Hock 1978; 1980). Over forty years ago, Oscar Broneer posited that Paul may have been attracted to Corinth because of the economic opportunity provided by the Isthmian Games:

“Corinth doubtless offered better business opportunities to a man in his trade than did most Greek cities because of its wealth and business activities and, in particular, because of the Isthmian games. At such occasions large numbers of tents would be needed to provide shelter for the crowds of visitors.” (1962:5)

Of course, such specific proposals are necessarily speculative; however, the idea that Paul’s itinerary was at least partially dependant on economic opportunity certainly merits greater attention.

In her survey of *Craftsmen in Greek and Roman Society*, Alison Burford (1972:52–67; cf. 1965; Hock 1980:27–28) describes a world in which skilled craftsmen were often on the move, attracted to new cities by new economic opportunities:<sup>38</sup> Athenian shipbuilders worked in Macedonia (1965:34); a Phrygian woodworker was commemorated in Attica (1972:53; *IG I<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>36</sup> This conclusion is particularly striking because of the considerable evidence that travel was common among early Christians (Vearncombe 2006:15–16). Clearly travel and mission cannot be equated in early Christianity.

<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., the travelling “religious practitioners” noted by Harland 2005:20–24.

<sup>38</sup> This pattern obtained already in fourth-century Greece (McKechnie 1989:142–77). Note also Richard Ascough’s argument that professional associations did facilitate “translocal relationships” (1997:223–41).

1084); even distant Palmyra “turned to the builders and sculptors of the Roman imperial world” (1972:66). Public works and monuments in particular attracted itinerant craftsmen:

It was certainly not the case that any of the cities of the Roman empire, in the African provinces, for example, or in Asia Minor, managed to carry out their magnificent building programmes unaided; the monumental fortifications and civic amenities . . . must all have been built principally by itinerant crews of skilled workers, with the local craftsmen contributing what expertise they could. (1972:63)

Indeed, the New Testament itself provides noteworthy evidence of professionally motivated travel: Aquila and Prisca (Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19) are just two of the numerous Roman Christians with whom Paul apparently has, to use Ascough’s apt phrase, a “translocal relationship” (Vearncombe 2006:15).

It may prove impossible to evaluate with any precision the extent to which economic opportunity motivated Paul’s travels. At the very least, however, we can dispense with the idea that Paul restricted himself to cities because they somehow were representative of entire nations or because he strategically expected the gospel to filter out from the city to the countryside. Quite simply, cities gave Paul his best hope of eking out a living.

## CONCLUSION

In the book of Acts, Paul’s travels end with a paradoxically triumphant journey to Rome—triumphant because “the Word” is proclaimed in the heart of the Empire, paradoxical because Paul arrives as a prisoner. Paul’s own biographical record ends much more like the Gospel of Mark: shrouded in uncertainty and fear. Romans 15:22–33 does envision a visit to Rome, but that is not what weighs most heavily on Paul’s mind:

But now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you . . . At present however, I am going to Jerusalem . . . I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf, that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my ministry to Jerusalem might be acceptable to the saints, so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy. (Rom 15:23, 25, 30–32a)

There is no hint here of the foreknowledge of his fate that Acts attributes to Paul (20:22–23; 21:11); he has only vague premonitions. Unlike the Paul of Acts, who is resigned to his impending imprisonment (20:24; 21:13), the Paul of Romans clearly hopes to avoid trouble. But his imminent journey highlights the vulnerability, the precariousness, and the uncertainty of Paul’s life.

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