

CHRISTIANITY

The Tentmaker

A modern narrative biography of Paul of Tarsus, written for this site rather than translated from an ancient source, drawing primarily on Paul's own letters -- with the Acts of the Apostles read second and more cautiously where the two disagree -- alongside current historical scholarship. Presents Paul as a Jew who never converted away from Judaism, whose crisis at Damascus was a call rather than a guilt-driven reversal, and whose churches were substantially run by women. Illustrated throughout with period maps of Paul's missionary journeys and photographs of Tarsus, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and Jerusalem.

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The Paul Who Wasn't Paul

Part One: The Pharisee

A Short Man with Bandy Legs

The only physical description of Paul of Tarsus we have comes from a source of the sketchiest kind — a story written in Greek in the second century, seventy or eighty years after his death, in which a woman named Thecla listens to Paul preach in Pisidian Antioch, leaves her fiancé at the altar, follows him around the eastern Mediterranean while lions refuse to eat her, and baptises herself in a river. It is not history. It is the kind of legend written about famous people after the heroes of the biblical and classical traditions settled into their reputations, and it was rejected by some early Christians for its extravagances.

And yet it is the only surviving attempt to say what Paul looked like, and is worth attention not because it is true — it is not — but because it is a real attempt, by real people who had some reason to think they knew, to describe a man whose physical presence had apparently left an impression strong enough to be preserved in a story otherwise composed of pure invention.

He is small. The Greek word is *mikros* — not a giant, not a commanding figure, not someone you'd look at across a marketplace and remember. He has bandy legs. He has a prominent nose — Greek *rhinos*, joined with the word for "thick" or "large," so the impression is of a face dominated by a nose that drew the eye. His eyebrows meet — a feature in Mediterranean populations sometimes associated with intensity of expression. The text says he was "somewhat prominent in his look," a word meaning "distinctive" or suggesting a man whose overall presence was unusual, difficult to ignore even if you didn't like looking at him.

He is not the sort of man you'd stop on the road in the first century and ask for a conversation. He is not a statue waiting to be carved. By any ordinary measure he is somewhat forgettable in appearance. This matters because Paul himself, in one of his letters, says something close to this — not the nose or the legs, but the general impression — and because the later tradition, for all its tendency to embroider, did not turn him into a majestic figure. It kept him small. Almost everything we have about him, including the letters, points the same way. He was not noble-looking, not an impressive speaker, not someone who won rooms by his presence. He won them by something else.

You could dismiss the physical description as legend and move on. That would be technically correct. It would also be a loss, because the legend tells us something the letters cannot say directly — not what he looked like, exactly, but how the later generation that remembered him chose to picture him. And they chose to make him physically unremarkable, even slightly awkward, someone whose face and legs drew attention to the fact that he was not quite what you expected.

In the ancient world, great men were often described as beautiful — the bodies of athletes and warriors and emperors were matters of public concern, and there were stories about what Alexander looked like, handsome, with a medusa on his neck, which is to say Alexander's historians had an

agenda. But when that interest attached to Paul, it did not produce the conventional result. He was not handsome. He was not commanding. He was, in the most basic physical terms, somewhat odd. What do you do with a man like that? You look for what was not physical, and you find it in the one source that does not lie about him — his own words.

The only major figure from the ancient world whose voice we can actually hear is the one we are writing about here. Not Alexander, who left no writings and whose biographers wrote centuries later. Not Julius Caesar, whose commentaries on the Gallic War are brilliant but written in the third person to shape how the Senate and crowds in Rome would see him. Not Jesus, whose words come to us through the Gospels, written decades after the fact by people with theological agendas and no pretence of having been present.

Paul left us his own writing. Not a biography, not a memoir, not a theological treatise addressed to posterity — seven letters, dictated in a hurry, mostly furious, occasionally tender, addressed to specific people about specific problems he was having with them. He never wrote a book. He never meant to be read by anyone not sitting in the room when the letter was read aloud. That accident — that the letters survived, were collected, copied, treasured, and eventually printed in the collection that became the New Testament — is the richest thing in this entire project. We can hear a first-century man losing his temper, defending himself, boasting about his scars, apologising, begging. We can hear a person.

You do not have to guess what he thought. You have what he wrote. He is present to us in a way no other major figure from the ancient world is present.

The seven letters universally accepted as his are: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. They are not the most systematic writings in the New Testament, and not the ones people interested in Paul's views on church structure or the conduct of women usually go to first. They are, however, the only letters serious scholars agree he wrote himself, and they are the letters you should read before you decide anything else about him.

They were written over roughly fifteen years, somewhere in the range of 48 to 62 or 63 CE, during the reigns of Claudius and then Nero, while Rome was still recovering from the expulsion of Jews in 49 and was about to burn in the fire of 64. They were written from cities around the eastern Mediterranean — Corinth, Ephesus, perhaps Philippi, perhaps somewhere in Macedonia, and finally, in the case of Romans, from somewhere near the end of his life, to a church he had never visited.

They were written to communities of Jews and non-Jews who had come together in houses, workshops, and *insulae* flats to follow a Jewish teacher called Jesus of Nazareth, executed by Roman authorities in Jerusalem about twenty years before the first letter was written, whose followers were not yet calling themselves by any single name and did not yet have a book of their own.

They were not written for publication. They were written to answer crises. Galatians is, by common consent, the angriest piece of writing in the New Testament — not angry at a person exactly but angry at a movement, angry at ideas spreading through the churches in Galatia and threatening, in his view, to undo everything he had tried to do. The letter to the Philippians reads as a love letter to a favourite church. The letter to Philemon is one chapter long and is about a runaway slave named Onesimus, whom Paul is sending back to his master with a request that he be received not as a slave but as a brother — a request that does not resolve the problem of slavery and does not pretend to, and which is therefore, in its oddness, more interesting than a moral statement would have been.

These letters are not theology in the sense of a structured argument about the nature of God or the destiny of the soul. They are pastoral — designed to hold a community together in the face of specific problems. But they are also, for all that, the most revealing documents we have about the thought of any single person from the first century, and they are the reason this book is possible.

When you read them in sequence, in a modern translation, in one sitting if you can manage it, a voice emerges. It is not a single voice — the voice of Galatians is not the voice of the letter to Philemon — but it is a human voice. It argues. It insults. It preaches. It threatens. It begs. It boasts. It tells a story about itself — the story of how a man who was persecuting a movement came to believe in it, and how he then spent the rest of his life trying to explain what that meant — told in fragments, in different ways, in different letters, never quite the same story twice.

That is the man this book is about. Not the Paul of sculptures that do not exist, not the Paul of stained glass invented by people fifteen hundred years after him who had no idea what he looked like, not the Paul of Luther or Augustine or twentieth-century revivalists who made him the patron saint of justification by faith and individual salvation. The Paul of the letters — smaller than those versions in some ways, larger in others, and the only one we can actually hear.

There are three things about him that virtually every general reader gets wrong, because the received picture of Paul was assembled over fifteen hundred years and most of its pieces are wrong. The corrections are straightforward, and they matter for every page that follows.

First: Paul did not convert to Christianity. He did not wake up one morning and decide to leave behind the religion of his fathers and join a new religion. There was no "Christianity" to convert to. The word does not appear in his letters. The people he wrote to were not called Christians by themselves; the name, when it appears in the sources, is an insult applied by outsiders. Paul continued to think of himself as a Jew. He continued to observe, in his own way, the Torah — the Law of Moses — or at least to argue about what observing it meant for people who were in Christ. He continued to believe that the God of Israel had acted in the history of Israel — the Exodus, the prophets, the return from exile — and that what had happened in Jesus was the fulfilment of that history, not its replacement and not the invention of a new religion, but the continuation of a story going on for a thousand years.

This is not a fringe view. It is the consensus of modern scholarship, and the direct opposite of the picture most people carry in their heads — a man who was a Jew, hated Jews, and started the Christian religion. He neither started it nor hated the Jews. He was a Jew who believed something had happened that changed the shape of the Jewish story for everyone willing to follow it, and he spent his life arguing about what that meant for people who were not Jews.

Second: his crisis was not guilt. The single most consequential misreading of Paul comes from Luther. In the early sixteenth century, Luther argued with the Roman Catholic Church about the nature of salvation and concluded Paul was his ally — that Paul believed human beings were condemned by the Law, could do nothing to save themselves, and had to be justified by faith alone, through grace, apart from works. This was a reading shaped by the struggle Luther was having with his own conscience, telling a story about Paul that made sense of Luther's world but did not have much to do with Paul's.

The most useful thing to read on this is Krister Stendahl's essay "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," a twenty-page piece written in 1963 that changed the

conversation. Stendahl, a Swedish New Testament scholar who later became Bishop of Stockholm, argued that Paul's struggle was not with his own moral standing — not the guilty conscience Luther read into him — but with an external question: what was the status of Gentiles who had come into the Jesus movement, and did they have to become Jews first? Paul argued for inclusion. He argued that the God of Israel had opened a door, and the door was open to people who had not kept the Law. The anguish in the letters is real, but it is the anguish of a man defending a community he believes is being threatened from within, not the anguish of a man who cannot forgive himself.

This is not to say Paul had no sense of his own unworthiness. He says, in several places, that he is the least of the apostles, that he persecuted the church, that he does not deserve the title. But the context is almost always polemical — he is saying it to make a point about grace, or to shut up rivals claiming to be more important than he was, or to explain why his authority was not what the Jerusalem leadership expected. He is not writing a diary. He is writing letters to people making trouble, and he uses his own story the way a lawyer uses a precedent — to win an argument.

Third: women ran his churches. You can see this in Romans 16, a list of greetings to people in the church in Rome. It names twenty-six people in some counts, and a significant number are women. Prisca and Aquila are mentioned first and Prisca is named before her husband — unusual in a Greek or Roman document, signalling she was the more prominent. Phoebe is the one who carried the letter to Rome; Paul calls her a *diakonos* of the church at Cenchreae and a *prostatis* of many, including himself — a deacon or minister and a patron or benefactor, a woman of means who supported the work. Junia is called "outstanding among the apostles," and the scholarly debate about whether this means she was an apostle or merely well-known to apostles has been largely settled in favour of the first reading — that one of the people Paul thought of as having the highest authority in the movement was a woman. Her name is often rendered as Junias in later manuscripts, a masculine form, but the earliest manuscripts and the earliest church fathers who comment on the passage read it as feminine.

The famous passage in 1 Corinthians 14 in which Paul tells women to be silent in the churches is, on the best current scholarly reading, very probably a later insertion — not by Paul but by someone in the second century uncomfortable with the role women were playing in the growing movement. The pastoral letters — 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus — almost certainly not written by Paul but by someone writing decades later, contain instructions about women simply not present in Paul's authentic letters and bearing the unmistakable marks of a later time and later concerns.

This does not mean Paul thought exactly what we think about the role of women, or that the churches he founded were egalitarian in any modern sense. It means the women were there, prominent, that Paul worked with them, trusted them with money and letters and the organisation of the churches, and that the later tradition has systematically erased them.

These three corrections are structural. They change the shape of everything. If Paul was a Jew who never stopped being a Jew, then his life is not the story of a man who left his religion and found a better one — it is the story of a man who believed the Jewish story had reached a point requiring him to go to the ends of the known world and tell non-Jews they were included in it. If his crisis was not guilt but inclusion, then the dramatic centre of his life is not his own soul but the community he was trying to build. And if women were central to that community, then the history of the early Jesus movement — often told as though conducted entirely by men — needs rewriting from the beginning.

The point of stating all this before the story starts is to make the method clear.

The method is this: we start with Paul's letters, the primary source for his thought and for the events of his life he describes. We use Acts — the only other major source — as a secondary source, valuable, later, tendenciously written to tell a story about the early church that emphasised harmony and smoothed over the conflicts Paul describes. Where the letters and Acts disagree, the letters win, and the reader is told why. Where the letters are silent, Acts may be all we have, but we say so.

This is not a new method. It is the standard method of modern Pauline scholarship for fifty years. It is not, however, the method by which most people have learned about Paul, who encountered him through Sunday-school summaries, sermons, and the Pauline tradition passed down through Augustine and Luther and the revivalists. That tradition did things with Paul he did not do with himself, and the book will have to untangle them, gently and repeatedly, until the reader can see the seam between the Paul of the letters and the Paul of the tradition.

The seam is real, and runs through everything. It is most visible in the story of Paul's conversion, which Acts tells three times — chapters 9, 22, and 26 — and tells differently each time, while Paul himself describes it in a single, strange, sideways sentence that omits the falling to the ground, the blindness, the voice from heaven that appear in Acts. It is visible in Paul's relationship with the Jerusalem leadership, which the letters describe as negotiation and suspicion and occasional humiliation, and which Acts describes as steady mutual support. It is visible in Paul's attitude toward the Law, which the letters describe as a complex and difficult question that divided his communities, and which Acts describes as a solved problem.

This book is the story of a man who tried to destroy the movement he ended up building, spent thirty years trying to explain why, was right about almost everything he said and unwelcome almost everywhere he went, and died without knowing how the story would end.

The question is not what Paul believed, or what he taught, or whether he was right. Those are questions for theologians. The question is: how does a man who tried to destroy a movement end up rebuilding it, and what does it cost him to spend thirty years being right, alone, and unwelcome almost everywhere he goes?

The answer is not a theological answer. It is a human answer — about travel and illness and enemies and friends, about letters carried by couriers across the eastern Mediterranean, about house churches in Roman cities and synagogues in diaspora communities and the difficult economics of an itinerant preacher who worked with his hands and refused to take money from the churches he founded. It is about a man who, by his own description, was beaten with rods three times, stoned once, shipwrecked three times, spent a night and a day adrift, and went without sleep, food, water, or clothing, in danger from rivers, bandits, his own people, Gentiles, cities, wilderness, sea, and false brothers — and who, at the end of the list, said nothing about his own goodness. He said only that the Lord had rescued him from them all.

He did not live to see the movement he built become the institution that would outlast the empire that crucified the man he believed was the Messiah. He died in a house in Rome, under guard, in the sixth decade of the first century, with plans for what he would do next and only the vaguest sense of what he had already done, and the story simply stops.

Acts stops there. It does not say he died. Later tradition imagined his death — beheaded under Nero, plausible but not documented — but the New Testament account ends with him in Rome, preaching boldly and without hindrance, and then the book is over. The silence after that is one of the things that makes him interesting.

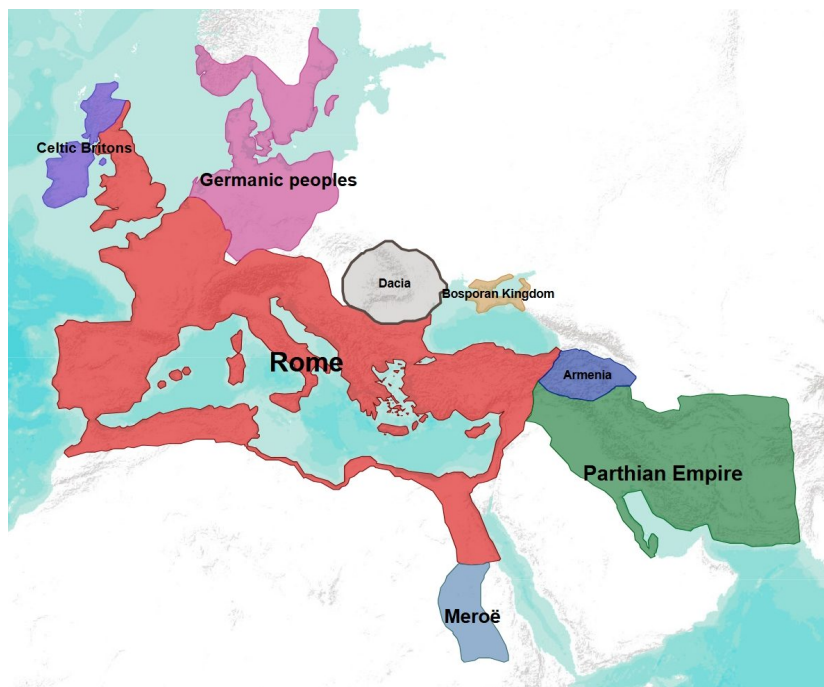


Figure 1: The Roman Mediterranean world of Paul's lifetime, stretching from Britain to the Parthian frontier. Every city in this book — Tarsus, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Jerusalem, Rome — sat inside this one political system, connected by Roman roads and sea lanes. (Image: Portasa Cristian, adapted from HistoAtlas, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.)

The story begins not in Rome but in Tarsus, a city on the coast of Cilicia, in what is now Turkey, where Paul was born and lived for the first part of his life and where he returned, at some point, after the events that changed him, and where he stayed for years the sources describe only as years of silence. It begins with a short man with bandy legs, whose voice we will hear in full in the next chapter, and whose life was larger than his appearance and more complicated than his enemies thought, and more difficult than his friends wanted.

That is the man. This is his story.

Tarsus



Figure 2: Cilicia (highlighted), the Roman province on the southeastern coast of Asia Minor of which Tarsus was the capital and Paul's home city. (Image: Milenioscuro, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.)

In the middle of the first century, when Paul was born, Tarsus was already old. It was old in a way that only cities in the eastern Mediterranean could be old — not just old in years, but old in the sense of having accumulated centuries of ruin and rebuilding, of having been a Greek city and a Persian possession and a Hellenistic kingdom's prize and a Roman province's administrative centre, all of which left layers of memory in the streets and in the names people used for things. It sat on the Cydnus River, about ten miles inland from the Mediterranean coast of what is now Turkey, in the province of Cilicia, and by Paul's time it was a self-governing city with the right to call itself more senior and more honourable — than a hundred other cities, which was the kind of boast that mattered to people who lived in cities and thought about their cities the way people in the modern world think about their national identities.

It was a Greek city. That is, the language of the street and the market and the school was Greek, and the institutions of the city — the gymnasium, the council, the theatre — were Greek institutions, even though the city was in a province that had once been Persian and was now Roman and had a population that included people who still spoke Aramaic and people who had never left their village and people who were there because the Romans had moved them. Being a Greek city was not a matter of ethnicity. It was a matter of culture and status, and it was the kind of thing a city could claim and lose and claim again over the centuries, as Tarsus had done more than once.

It was also a university city. Cicero called it *ludus philosophiae* — a school of philosophy — and Strabo, the geographer who wrote about it in the early years of Paul's life, said that the students there were so numerous and so dedicated that the city was in effect a university before there was such a thing as a university, in the sense that there were teachers with regular students, a curriculum, and a reputation that drew people from outside the city the way that modern universities draw students

from other countries. The philosophers who taught there were not all of one school. Tarsus had produced its own philosophical tradition — the Stoic school had some of its most important figures there — and it had attracted philosophers from other schools as well, so that a young man growing up there would have heard arguments about virtue and the good life and the role of reason in human affairs in several different voices, all of them Greek, all of them competing.

The philosophical tradition of Tarsus is not the most famous thing about Tarsus, and it does not get much space in the books that are written about Paul's life, because the books tend to focus on the things that were unusual about him — his Jewishness, his persecution of the Jesus movement, his conversion, his letters — and the things that were ordinary about him get less attention than they deserve. But the ordinary things are important. Paul was a man who had been educated in a city that was a school of philosophy. He had heard arguments about virtue and reason and the proper life before he ever heard about the Jesus movement, and those arguments had shaped the categories he used when he tried to explain what he believed. When he wrote about the law, or about the flesh, or about the mind, or about the nature of the universe as God had made it, he was using concepts that his audience in Tarsus or Corinth or wherever he was would have recognised, even if they had never heard his Jewish God talked about in those terms. The Greek philosophical world was not an alien environment for him. It was the air he had breathed as a young man.

And yet it was not the only air. Paul was a Jew. His family was a Jewish family, and there were Jewish families in Tarsus, and there had been Jewish families in Tarsus for a long time, and that was one of the things that made Tarsus what it was — a city where Jews and non-Jews lived together in a way that was normal for the eastern Mediterranean in the first century, where the synagogue was one institution among others and the Jewish people were one community among others, but a community with its own laws and its own identity and its own ways of doing things, and a community that Paul's family belonged to and that Paul himself, in his own way, never stopped belonging to.

The Jewish community in Tarsus was not, by the standards of the eastern Mediterranean, an unusual one. There were Jewish communities in most of the cities of the eastern Mediterranean by the first century, and they had been there for a long time, and they had established synagogues and ports of trade and connections with Jerusalem that went back generations. The Jews of Tarsus were part of the Jewish diaspora — the Jewish people spread outside the land of Israel — and the diaspora was not a small thing. It was the majority of the Jewish people in the first century, living in cities from Rome to Alexandria to Antioch to Tarsus, and they were, in the ordinary sense, Jews who lived outside Judea and observed the Torah as best they could and maintained their identity as Jews in communities where they were surrounded by people who were not Jews.

Paul was, by his own account, from this diaspora. He says in his letters that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee, a son of a Pharisee, and that he was zealous for the traditions of his fathers before he became a follower of the Jesus movement. These are not casual claims. They are claims about his background, and they are claims that tell you something specific about the kind of Jew he was. "Hebrew of the Hebrews" is a phrase that suggests a family that had kept its Jewish identity in a particularly pure or uncompromising way, perhaps in a way that was not typical of all diaspora Jews. "Pharisee" is a claim about his religious affiliation — he belonged to the Pharisaic party, one of the several Jewish groups active in the first century, which is to say that he was part of a movement that was concerned with the interpretation and observance of the Torah and with the application of Jewish

law to everyday life. "Zealous" is a claim about his attitude toward his religious tradition — he was not a passive Jew but a committed one, the sort of Jew who would act to defend the traditions of his people when he thought they were threatened.

These claims are made in letters that were written after his life had been transformed by the Jesus movement, and they are made for a purpose — they are part of the story he is telling about himself, and they are part of the argument he is making about why his authority was what it was and why what he believed was what it was. They are not simple autobiographical statements. They are strategic. But they are not untrue, and they tell you something real about the world he came from before the movement that changed his life.

The most interesting thing about that world is that Paul almost certainly never refers to it directly, at least not in any of his letters that survive. He mentions Tarsus only once, in passing, and he tells you nothing about it. He mentions his family only a few times, and mostly to say that they had delivered him out of danger at one point or that he had a relative in the court of the Roman governor in Jerusalem or that his father had been a Pharisee. He does not tell you what Tarsus was like. He does not tell you what it felt like to grow up in a city that was both Greek and Jewish, or what it meant to be a Jewish boy in a Greek city in the first century, or what he thought about the philosophy that surrounded him before he encountered the movement that changed his life. He leaves all of that blank.

This is the kind of silence that makes biography difficult, because it is the kind of silence that invites you to fill it in, and filling it in means constructing things from the materials around you rather than from the source itself. You have the city — you know it was a Greek city and a university city and a diaspora Jewish community and a Roman city, and you can look at the other cities of the eastern Mediterranean that are similar to it and use them to understand what Tarsus would have been like. You have the kind of Jew Paul says he was — a Pharisee, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, zealous — and you can look at what those things meant in the first century to understand what his background might have been. You have the letters themselves, and you can read them to see whether the language and the ideas in them bear traces of the education he had and the community he came from.

But you do not have Paul telling you any of this. He does not tell you that he grew up in a city that was so Greek that it could call itself a school of philosophy, or that his family was part of a Jewish community that was large enough to have a synagogue and connections to Jerusalem and a place in the life of the city. He does not tell you that he learned Greek as a child and that he probably learned it the way children in the diaspora learned it — as a second language, perhaps, but one that they learned so completely that it became the language of their minds by the time they were grown, or perhaps as a first language, if his family was the kind of family that spoke Greek at home — and he does not tell you anything about the tension that might have produced, the sense of being in two worlds at once, or the sense of never quite belonging to either one.

That sense of never quite belonging is one of the things that people who write about Paul tend to say about him, because it is one of the things that seems to fit the evidence and because it makes for a good story. A boy born in a Greek city to a Jewish family, growing up in a world where Greek culture and Jewish tradition coexisted without fully merging, who belonged to neither world completely and who eventually ended up somewhere else entirely — that is a story with a shape to it, and it is a story that has the advantage of being both plausible and, in some important sense, true.

It is plausible because that is what diaspora Jewish life was like in the first century — you belonged to a Jewish community, but you lived in a city where the dominant culture was not Jewish, and you navigated the two in one way or another, and different families and different people navigated them in different ways, and some of them ended up with a stronger attachment to one than the other and some of them never quite settled into either. It is true because Paul's own letters suggest that he was a man who moved between worlds — who could argue about Torah with Jews and about philosophy with Gentiles and who wrote to communities of mixed background in a language that belonged to neither world entirely but was a kind of bridge between them.

And it is a good story because it gives the young Paul a shape before the story really starts — it tells you where he came from and what kind of person he was before the events that changed his life, and it tells you something about the resources he had when the crisis came. If he was a man who had grown up in a Greek city and been educated in its schools and made a place for himself in its Jewish community, then he had resources of language and thought and social connection that were available to him when he needed them, and those resources are visible in the letters he wrote later, even if he does not describe where they came from.

But there is a danger in this story, and the danger is the one that every biographer has to guard against — the danger of making a person too coherent, of fitting their life together in a way that makes sense but may not be the way it actually made sense to them. Paul was, by his own account, a man who was zealous for the traditions of his fathers before he became a follower of the Jesus movement, and that is a fact. But it is not a fact that necessarily implies that he was comfortable in the Greek world or that the Greek world was a comfortable home for him. It is possible that he was tense in both worlds and that the sense of never quite belonging was more painful than the standard story allows. It is possible that his background in Tarsus was something he carried with him as a kind of loss — something that gave him abilities he used all his life but that he never fully made peace with.

This is a guess. It is a plausible guess, and it is a guess that fits the shape of the evidence, but it is a guess, and it should be treated as a guess and not as a fact. The evidence for Paul's childhood is almost entirely silent, and the evidence we do have is evidence about the adult Paul — the Paul who wrote the letters — and the rest has to be reconstructed from what a man who was as educated and as committed and as strange as he was might have had as a background.

The best way to approach this is to start with the city and work out from it, because the city is the thing we know most about, and because the city is the thing that shaped the man before he had any choice in the matter. Tarsus was a Greek city in Cilicia, with a university and a large Jewish community, in a Roman province, on the edge of the Mediterranean world. It was not an unusual city for the first century. It was, in fact, a typical city for the kind of life Paul led — a typical city for a diaspora Jew with ambition and education, and a typical city for a Greek-speaking person who wanted to make something of themselves in the eastern Mediterranean.

What happened to him in that city is not something we can know. Whether he was happy there or restless, whether he was already forming the ideas that would later define him or whether his life was still waiting for the event that would give it shape — none of this is something we can recover from the letters, because the letters begin after the event that changed everything. They begin after the thing he does not describe in detail and does not describe in a way that fills in the world around him.

What we can say is that the city gave him something. The Greek language, or at least the fluency in Greek that made his letters possible. The philosophical traditions of the city, which gave him the concepts he used and the categories he argued in. The Jewish community, which gave him the identity he claimed and the zeal he said he had. And the sense — perhaps not a sense at all, perhaps just the unspoken fact — that he was from somewhere that was not Jerusalem, that was not Judea, that was not the centre of the Jewish world in the way that Jerusalem was the centre, and that this distant place was going to be part of the story he told about himself in ways he never fully explained. That is Tarsus. It is the city he was from, and it is the city he returned to at some point — after the event that changed his life, when he had been rejected by the Jerusalem leadership and had wandered and had begun the work that would make him the most influential figure in the early Jesus movement — and it is a city that remains important to his story in ways that he never fully articulated, and that the later tradition did not much notice, and that the book has to notice now.

The Citizenship Question

Paul was, according to the only source that says so, a Roman citizen. The claim appears twice in the Book of Acts, both times when Paul is in trouble with Roman authorities and both times when the claim saves him or might save him — once when he is about to be flogged in Jerusalem and tells the centurion that he is a Roman citizen, and once later, when he is in Caesarea and tells the governor that he has the right to appeal to Caesar because he is a Roman citizen. The book does not say he was a citizen on any other occasion, and it does not explain how he got it, or when, or from whom. It simply asserts that he was one, and uses that assertion in two scenes where it makes a dramatic difference.

The matter is important in the story Acts is telling, because Roman citizenship was a legal status that gave a person specific rights — the right not to be tortured or bound or imprisoned without cause, the right to a trial before a magistrate rather than a summary flogging, the right to appeal a sentence to the emperor — and because the people who had it were not always easy to identify from their appearance or their behaviour. A Roman citizen in the eastern provinces might look like any other Greek-speaking person, might dress like any other person from the diaspora, might live in a city where citizenship of the city was more immediately meaningful than citizenship of the empire. The claim to Roman citizenship was something that had to be made, and made at the right moment, and then the authorities had to be convinced that it was real — which in the case of Paul seems to have worked both times, though in the first case the centurion was alarmed by the fact that he had already ordered the flogging, and in the second case the governor was politely surprised and then had to decide what to do about the appeal.

The claim is the kind of detail that a writer includes when he wants to show that a person had rights and that those rights mattered in the story. It is not the kind of detail that is easy to verify from other sources, and in the case of Paul it is not verified by any other source, because the other source — the letters — never mentions it.

That is the first puzzle. Paul was, by his own account, a man who was in Roman custody and who appealed to Caesar and who was sent to Rome for trial before the emperor. In the Roman legal world,

the appeal to Caesar was a right that belonged to Roman citizens, and it was a right that could be exercised by anyone who had it, regardless of whether they were a citizen by birth or by grant or by purchase. A person who was not a Roman citizen could not appeal to Caesar in this way, or at least could not do so with the legal effect that Paul seems to have had — the governor in Acts 25 is obliged to send him to Rome because Paul has invoked his right as a citizen. So the letters, despite being about Paul's trials and his custody and his journey to Rome, do not mention his citizenship once, even when the matter would have been central to any defence he was making or any explanation he was giving of his rights.

This is not a small omission. It is a significant silence, and it is the kind of silence that makes historians uncomfortable, because it is a silence in the one source that should mention it if it were a real and important part of Paul's identity, and it is a silence that is filled in by a different source that has reasons of its own for wanting to make Paul a citizen. The Book of Acts is not a neutral account of Paul's life. It is a book written at a later time, by a later writer, with a later agenda, and one of the things that agenda seems to do is to make Paul into a person who had Roman citizenship — not necessarily because that is what happened, but because that is what makes the story in Acts work in the way Acts wants it to work.

The reason Acts needs Paul to be a Roman citizen is that the argument of Acts, at least in its later chapters, depends on Paul having rights under Roman law, and on the Roman authorities being bound by those rights in ways that allow the story to unfold as it does. If Paul were not a citizen, then the governor in Caesarea would have more discretion in what to do with him, and the appeal to Caesar would not have the effect that it has in the story. The dramatic structure of the arrest and the appeal and the voyage to Rome depends on Paul having the legal standing that the book gives him. The citizenship is not the point of the story, but it is the mechanism that makes the story possible, and it is the mechanism that the book asserts without explaining and without any other source corroborating it.

This does not mean that Paul was not a Roman citizen. It is perfectly possible that he was, and there are arguments in favour of the claim that go beyond Acts — the name itself, the fact that he was a Jew in a diaspora city where Roman citizenship was sometimes available to Jews, the fact that he moved with some assurance in the Roman world and seems to have had a status that was more than ordinary. The claim is not absurd, and it is not impossible. The question is whether we have enough reason to believe it from sources other than Acts, and the answer is that we do not. The letters do not mention it, and the letters are the only source that describes Paul in his own words, and the letters are the source we should prefer when they and Acts disagree, for the reasons that were explained in the first chapter.

So the citizenship question is a small mystery, and it is a small mystery that teaches the reader something about the whole source problem in the Paul story. The two sources for his life — the letters and Acts — disagree on matters large and small, and the disagreement is not always about facts that are easy to establish from outside both sources. Sometimes it is about something as simple as whether a man was a Roman citizen or not, and that simple question has consequences for the way the story is told and for the way we understand the man who is at the centre of it.

The citizenship question also teaches the reader something about the way that legal status worked in the Roman world. Roman citizenship was not the same as the citizenship of the city you lived in, and

it was not the same as the nationality of the people you were among, and it was not something that you could always rely on other people to know or to respect. A Roman citizen in the eastern provinces could be anyone, and the claim to citizenship had to be made explicitly and had to be backed by something — a birth certificate, a grant, a register, a witness — and the authorities had to be persuaded that it was legitimate. The scenes in Acts show a man who makes the claim at the right moment and who is believed, but they do not show the evidence behind the claim, and they do not show how he got it. The reader is left with the assertion and no way to test it from inside the story.

This is one of the things that makes the history of Paul difficult. The sources are often not sources in the sense of providing information that can be checked against other sources. They are sources in the sense of providing a story, and the story has to be read with the knowledge that it may be shaped by purposes that have nothing to do with the truth of the facts it contains. Acts is a book that shapes the story of Paul in a particular way, and one of the ways it shapes it is to give him Roman citizenship, which makes the ending of the book — the appeal to Caesar, the voyage, the arrival in Rome — work as a story about a man who is under Roman protection and who exercises his rights under Roman law. The letters do not shape the story in this way, and they do not mention the citizenship, which is one of the ways they disagree with Acts.

The reader who picks up Acts and reads the story of Paul's arrest and his appeal and his voyage to Rome will, if they read it as a story, accept the citizenship as part of the story and move on. The reader who picks up the letters and reads them for what they say about Paul's life will notice that the citizenship is never mentioned and will wonder why. The reader who does both will see the disagreement and will have to decide which source to trust and why. That decision is not a trivial one, because it affects the way the story of Paul's later life is understood — the arrest, the custody, the appeal, the voyage, the arrival in Rome — and because it affects the way Paul's relationship with the Roman authorities is understood. If he was a citizen, then the authorities had obligations to him that they might not have had to a non-citizen, and the story of his imprisonment and his journey is a story about a man who had rights and was able to exercise them. If he was not a citizen, then the authorities had less obligation to him, and the story of his imprisonment is a story about a man who was, in some important sense, unprotected.

This is not a question that can be settled once and for all. It is a question that has to be answered in the context of the whole source problem, and the answer has to be provisional, and the answer has to be stated with the knowledge that it may be wrong. The most reasonable answer, given the sources we have, is that the citizenship is not something we can confirm from Paul's own words, and that we should not assume it is a fact when the source that asserts it has reasons of its own for asserting it and the source that does not assert it is the one that is closer to Paul's own voice. This does not mean that he was not a citizen. It means that we cannot know, and that the citizenship is one of the things that is claimed for him by a source that is not his own, and that we should be careful about treating that claim as if it were established.

The smaller point of the chapter is that the citizenship question is a good example of the method the book will use throughout: start with the letters, use Acts with caution, notice where they disagree, and explain why the disagreement matters. The larger point is that the citizenship question is a good example of the kind of thing that makes the story of Paul interesting — a small factual question that

opens into a larger question about sources and methods and the way that history is constructed from the remains of a life that is not fully documented.

Paul himself does not mention his citizenship in any of his letters. He mentions his arrest and his custody and his appeal to Caesar in 2 Corinthians and in Philemon and in the letter to the Philippians, but he does not say he was a citizen. He says that he was in danger from the Gentiles and from his own people and from the city, and that he was rescued by the Lord. He says that he appeals to Caesar and that he is going to Jerusalem in chains. He never says he was a citizen. He never says he had rights under Roman law. He does not say anything about the legal basis of his custody or his appeal or his journey.

This silence is not because Paul had nothing to say about his legal status. It is because the letters were not written to explain his legal status. They were written to churches and individuals about matters that had nothing to do with Roman law, and the legal status he had was not a topic that came up in those letters. The letters are not a record of his legal case. They are a record of his thoughts and his arguments and his instructions to the people he wrote to. The citizenship, if he had it, was a fact about him that was relevant to his legal situation but not to the content of the letters, and so it does not appear in them. That is the most obvious explanation for the silence, and it is probably the right one.

But it is also true that if Paul had had the kind of citizenship that Acts says he had, then the claim would have been useful in some of the situations the letters describe, and that the failure to mention it is a fact about the letters that is worth noting. The letters describe a man who was in danger from his own people and from Gentiles and who was sometimes in custody and sometimes in danger of being punished, and the claim to Roman citizenship would have been something he might have mentioned if he had wanted to explain why he was not being punished more severely or why he had certain rights. He does not mention it. He does not use it as a defence or an explanation in any of the letters. This is the other side of the silence — not that the letters do not explain his legal status, but that the legal status he had, if he had it, is not used by him in the letters as a fact about himself that was relevant to the situations he describes.

This is enough to make the citizenship question a small mystery but a real one. It is not enough to make it a contradiction in the sources, because the sources are not in direct contradiction on the matter — Acts says he was a citizen, the letters do not say he was or was not, and the silence of the letters is not a denial of the claim. It is enough to make it a question about the sources that has to be answered by looking at the sources as sources and not just as stories, and by applying the method the book uses throughout: prefer the source that is closer to the man himself unless there is a good reason not to, and read the other source with the knowledge that it may have its own reasons for the things it says.

The citizenship question is one of those questions. It is a small question, and it is one that can be answered provisionally, and it is one that illustrates the method the book will use for larger questions.

Zealous

Paul says, in one of his letters, that he was a Pharisee, a son of a Pharisee, and that before his life was changed by the Jesus movement he was zealous for the traditions of his fathers. These are not casual claims. They are claims about his background, and they are claims that tell you something specific about the kind of Jew he was and the kind of person he was before the event that changed everything.

The first claim — that he was a Pharisee — is the claim that tells you he belonged to a particular Jewish party. The Pharisees were one of the several Jewish groups active in the first century, and they were a group with distinctive beliefs and practices and a distinctive relationship to the Torah. They were not, as they are sometimes represented in later tradition, mere legalists who were interested in small points of law and who had lost sight of the larger questions of justice and compassion. They were, in fact, a group that was deeply concerned with the interpretation and application of the Torah to everyday life, and that believed that the Torah contained more than the written text — that it contained an oral tradition, passed down from the teachers of the law, that explained and extended the written law in ways that were binding on the Jewish people.

The Sadducees were the party of the temple and the priesthood, the wealthy and the politically connected, and they denied the resurrection and the oral law and the existence of angels. The Essenes were the group that lived in communities apart from the world and that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls. And the "people of the land" were the ordinary Jews who did not belong to any particular party and who observed the Torah as they understood it.

The Pharisees were, in this context, the party that was most concerned with the interpretation of the law and with the life of the Jewish people outside the temple — the party that was most concerned with the application of the Torah to the ordinary circumstances of daily life, and that believed that the Jewish people had a calling to live in a particular way in the world as it was, and that the way they were called to live was defined by the Torah and by the traditions that explained the Torah.

The Pharisees were, in the judgment of Josephus, the party with the most followers among the ordinary people, and they were the party that had the most influence on the way the Jewish people actually lived their lives, because they were the party that taught the law to the people and that interpreted the law in ways that were accessible to the people and that were applied to the situations the people faced. They were not the party that held the most direct power in the Jewish state and in the temple — that was the Sadducees — but they were the party that had the most influence on the ordinary life of the Jewish people, and they were the party that most directly shaped the way the Jewish people understood their calling and their obligations.

The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, and they believed in the existence of angels and spirits, and they believed in the importance of the oral law and the traditions that explained the Torah. They were, in the later tradition, the party that preserved and transmitted the oral law in the form that it took in the Mishnah and the Talmud, and they were the party that was most concerned with the life of the Jewish people outside the temple, and with the application of the Torah to the ordinary circumstances of daily life.

Paul says he was a Pharisee. This means that he belonged to this party, and that he shared its beliefs and its practices, and that he was educated in its traditions and its methods of interpreting the law. It means that he was a Jew who was concerned with the interpretation and application of the Torah to

everyday life, and that he believed that the Torah contained more than the written text, and that he believed that the Jewish people had a calling to live in a particular way in the world as it was, and that the way they were called to live was defined by the Torah and by the traditions that explained the Torah.

The Jesus movement, from the point of view of a Pharisee like Paul, was a movement that was making a claim about the Torah and about the traditions that explained it, and that was making a claim about the Jewish people and about the calling of the Jewish people, and that was making a claim about God and about what God had done and about what God was doing. The claim was that something had happened — that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead by God, and that this event was the sign that God had acted in a new way for the Jewish people and for the world, and that the response to this event was to belong to the Jesus movement and to live in the way that the movement taught.

From the point of view of a Pharisee who was zealous for the traditions of his fathers, this claim was dangerous, because it seemed to undermine the authority of the Torah and the traditions, and because it seemed to redefine what it meant to belong to God's people, and because it seemed to say that something had happened that changed the terms of Jewish life in a way that the traditions did not anticipate and did not allow. The claim was that God had acted in a new way, and that the response to this action was to belong to the Jesus movement, and that the Jesus movement was the people of God in a way that the Jewish people had not been before. This was, from the point of view of a Pharisee, a claim that had to be resisted, because it seemed to undermine the truth of the Torah and the traditions and the calling of the Jewish people.

The threat was real to Paul, and the threat was real in the way that a threat to something you believe is real. It was not a threat to Judaism as a whole — the Jesus movement was a movement within Judaism, and the people in it were Jews, and the movement did not claim to be a new religion but a new understanding of what it meant to belong to God's people. But it was a threat to a particular understanding of what Judaism required, and it was a threat to the traditions of Paul's fathers, and it was a threat to the authority of the Torah as Paul understood it. And Paul responded to the threat with the force that his understanding of zeal required.

What kind of threat was the Jesus movement to a Pharisee like Paul?

The threat was not the threat of a new religion. The Jesus movement was not a new religion in the first century. It was a movement within Judaism, and the people in it were Jews, and the movement did not claim to be a new religion but a new understanding of what it meant to belong to God's people. The threat was not the threat of a rival religious system.

The threat was the threat of a claim that seemed to undermine the authority of the Torah and the traditions, and that seemed to redefine what it meant to belong to God's people. The claim was that something had happened — that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead by God, and that this event was the sign that God had acted in a new way for the Jewish people and for the world, and that the response to this event was to belong to the Jesus movement and to live in the way that the movement taught. This was a claim that was different from the claim of the Pharisees, and that was different from the claim of the Sadducees, and that was different from the claim of the Essenes, and that was different from the claim of the ordinary Jewish people who did not belong to any particular party. It was a claim that was made by a particular group of Jews who believed that something had

happened and that this something changed the terms of Jewish life in a way that the traditions did not anticipate and did not allow.

The threat was not the threat of a rival political power. The Roman empire was the political power that ruled the world, and the Jewish people lived under Roman rule, and the threat of Roman rule was a real threat to the Jewish people and to the temple and to the Torah. The Jesus movement was not a political movement in the first century, and it did not claim to be a political movement. It was a movement that was about the meaning of Jewish life and the response to what God had done, and it did not claim to be a movement that would overthrow the Roman empire or restore the Jewish state. The threat was not the threat of a political rival.

The threat was the threat of a claim that was made about God and about the Torah and about the Jewish people, and that was made by a group of Jews who believed that the claim was true. The claim was that God had acted in a new way, and that the response to this action was to belong to the Jesus movement, and that the Jesus movement was the people of God in a way that the Jewish people had not been before. This was a claim that was dangerous to a Pharisee like Paul, because it seemed to undermine the authority of the Torah and the traditions, and because it seemed to redefine what it meant to belong to God's people, and because it seemed to say that something had happened that changed the terms of Jewish life in a way that the traditions did not anticipate and did not allow.

The threat was real to Paul, and the threat was real in the way that a threat to something you believe is real. It was not a threat to Judaism as a whole, and it was not a threat to the Jewish people as a whole, and it was not a threat to the temple or to the priesthood or to the state. But it was a threat to a particular understanding of what Judaism required, and it was a threat to the traditions of Paul's fathers, and it was a threat to the authority of the Torah as Paul understood it. And Paul responded to the threat with the force that his understanding of zeal required.

The response was not senseless. It was a response to a threat that Paul believed was real, and it was a response that was consistent with the understanding of zeal that Paul had learned from his Pharisaic background. The response was not the response of a man who was wicked or who was evil or who was bad. It was the response of a man who believed that the traditions of his fathers were worth defending, and that the Jesus movement was a threat to those traditions, and that the threat had to be answered.

This does not mean that the response was right. It was wrong. The threat was not what Paul thought it was, and the Jesus movement was not what Paul thought it was, and the claim that God had acted in a new way was not a claim that undermined the Torah and the traditions but a claim that fulfilled them in a way that Paul could not yet see. But the response was not senseless, and it was not the response of a man who was simply wicked or evil or bad. It was the response of a man who believed in something and who defended it against what he believed was a threat, and who was wrong about what the threat was and wrong about what the response should be.

The wrongness of the response does not make it less real, and it does not make the man who made it less human, and it does not make the story less interesting. The wrongness is part of the story, and it is part of the story that makes the rest of the story — the call, the reversal, the life of argument and conflict — possible. The wrongness is what makes Paul the man he was, and it is what makes the call the event it was, and it is what makes the life of the early Jesus movement the story it is.

The Pharisees were not the only Jewish party in the first century, and Paul was not the only Jew who was zealous for the traditions. But Paul was, by his own account, a Pharisee and a son of a Pharisee and zealous for the traditions, and these claims are claims that tell you something specific about him and his background, and they are claims that are worth paying attention to, because they are the claims that explain, in part, why he was the man he was and why he did what he did before the movement changed his life.

The threat was real to him. The fact that he was wrong does not make the threat less real. The fact that he was wrong does not make the response less human. The fact that he was wrong does not make the story less interesting. The wrongness is part of the story, and it is part of the story that makes the rest of the story possible, and it is part of the story that makes Paul the man he was, and it is part of the story that makes the conversion the event it was.

This is the point of the chapter. The Pharisee and the zeal and the threat are not facts that are simply there. They are facts that have to be understood, and they have to be understood in the context of the first century and in the context of the Jewish world that Paul came from, and they have to be understood in the context of the threat that the Jesus movement posed to a Jew like Paul, and in the context of the response that Paul made to that threat. The chapter is not a chapter about the Pharisees or about zeal or about the threat. It is a chapter about Paul and his background, and about the way that background made him the man he was, and about the way that background made the conversion the event it was.

The next chapter is the chapter about what Paul did when he was on the other side, and what he did was wrong, and what he did was wrong in a way that he never told us in detail, and what he did was wrong in a way that we have to reconstruct from what he did tell us and from what we know about the world he lived in. That is the chapter about the persecutor, and it is the chapter that is the most delicate in Part One, because it is about the actions that Paul took before the movement changed his life, and because those actions are the actions that make the rest of the story possible, and because those actions are the actions that make Paul the man he was.

The Persecutor

He tells us he tried to destroy the movement. He tells us this in several letters, in several ways, and he tells us it with a kind of contempt and remembrance that is hard to misunderstand and hard to forget. "I persecuted the church of God." "I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people." "I was a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man." "I was furiously enraged against them and tried to force them to blaspheme." These are not the words of a man making a small confession or a small admission. They are the words of a man describing a part of his life he does not like to remember and does not like to forget, and that he is describing in a way that makes it clear he did something serious and knows what he did and is not going to pretend he did not do it.

But he does not tell us, in these letters, what he did. He does not tell us how he persecuted the church. He does not tell us whether he threw people in prison, or beat them, or turned them over to the authorities, or bullied them in the synagogue, or denounced them, or frightened them, or did any

of the other things a man determined to destroy a movement might do. He tells us the result — that he persecuted, that he was violent, that he tried to force people to blaspheme — but he does not tell us the method, and he does not tell us the detail, and he does not tell us the shape of the persecution in the way a historian would want to know it.

This is the silence that makes the chapter difficult. The persecutor is a figure necessary to the story — the man before the conversion, the man on the other side, the man whose violence made the conversion possible — but the figure is one Paul does not describe in detail, and that the other sources do not describe in detail, and that we have to reconstruct from what we know about the world he lived in, and from what we know about the movement he was trying to destroy, and from what we know about the kind of persecution a zealous Jew like Paul might have carried out in the first century.

The first thing to say about the persecution is that it was real. Paul does not say he tried to destroy the movement in a metaphorical sense or a gentle sense. He says he persecuted, and he says he was violent, and he says he tried to force blasphemy. He says these things in letters that are mostly about other matters, and he says them in a tone that suggests he is not inventing or exaggerating, and that he is not minimizing or maximizing, but simply stating what he did and what he was. The persecution was real, and it was serious, and it was the kind of thing a man who was later to become the most influential figure in the early Jesus movement would have to account for and to remember and to describe.

The second thing to say about the persecution is that it was not, from Paul's point of view, unjust. He does not describe it as unjust in the letters, and he does not describe it as a mistake he made because he was confused or misled or because he did not know what he was doing. He describes it as something he did, and as something that was wrong in the way all his actions were wrong before the conversion, but he does not describe it as a mistake in the sense of a legal mistake or a factual mistake or a misunderstanding. He describes it as a part of his life before the conversion, and as a part of his life that was part of the wrongness of that life, and as a part of his life he had to recover from and answer for.

The third thing to say about the persecution is that it was the response to a threat Paul believed was real, and that the threat was the threat of a movement that seemed to undermine the authority of the Torah and the traditions and the calling of the Jewish people, and that seemed to redefine what it meant to belong to God's people, and that seemed to say that something had happened that changed the terms of Jewish life in a way the traditions did not anticipate and did not allow. The persecution was the response to that threat, and it was the response of a man who believed in the traditions and who believed in the authority of the Torah and who believed that the Jesus movement was a threat to both, and who believed that the threat had to be answered.

This much we can say with confidence, because it is what Paul says about himself and what the other sources say about the time and the place and the movement, and it is what can be deduced from the background of the man and the movement and the world. But the detail — the shape of the persecution, the specific actions, the people involved, the places where it happened, the way it was carried out — this is the part that is not there, and that we have to fill in with what we know about the world and what we know about the kind of persecution a zealous Jew might have carried out, and

what we know about the movement and the people in it and the way it was organised and the way it was vulnerable.

The most plausible form of the persecution, in the first instance, is that it was carried out in the synagogues. The Jesus movement in the first century was, for the most part, a movement of Jews who met in synagogues or in houses or in other places, and who continued to attend the synagogue or to use it as a place of meeting and worship and teaching, and who were, in many cases, recognised as part of the Jewish people by the Jewish authorities and by the ordinary Jewish people. The movement was not an obvious outsider — it was a movement within Judaism, and the people in it were Jews, and they met in places that were familiar to other Jews, and they used language and ideas that were familiar to other Jews.

The persecution of such a movement would not have been, in the first instance, a persecution by the Roman authorities, though it might in some cases have led to Roman intervention. It would have been, in the first instance, a persecution by the Jewish authorities and by the Jews who were opposed to the movement, and it would have taken the form of pressure on the people in the movement, and on the leaders of the movement, and on the communities where the movement was established, and it would have taken the form of threats and denunciations and perhaps physical violence, and it would have taken the form of the expulsion of people from the synagogue and the exclusion of people from the Jewish community, and it would have taken the form of the turning over of people to the Roman authorities when the Jewish authorities thought that was necessary or useful.

This is the form that persecution took in many cases in the first century, and it is the form that it takes in the story of the early Jesus movement in Acts and in the letters, and it is the form that it takes in the story of Paul's own persecution of the movement. The synagogues were the places where the movement was most vulnerable, because they were the places where the movement was most visible, and where the movement was most likely to be seen as a threat, and where the movement was most likely to be opposed by the Jewish authorities and by the Jews who were opposed to it.

The second plausible form of the persecution is that it was carried out with the support of the high priest and the Sanhedrin, or with the support of the leading priests and the people who were in power in Jerusalem. Paul mentions, in one of his letters, that he received letters from the high priest and from the council of the elders, and that he went to Damascus with the authority of those letters to bring people in the Jesus movement back to Jerusalem for punishment. This is a detail that is given in the letters and that is confirmed by Acts, and it is a detail that tells us something about the scale of the persecution and about the involvement of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem.

The involvement of the high priest and the council is significant, because it tells us that the persecution was not just a personal matter or a local matter, but a matter that involved the people who were in power in the Jewish community in Jerusalem, and that involved the people who had the authority to act against the movement. The high priest and the council were the people who had the authority to pursue the movement, and the fact that Paul received their letters and their authority means that the persecution was authorised by the people who had the authority to authorise it, and that it was carried out by a man who had the authority of the people who had the authority to authorise it.

This does not mean the persecution was carried out by the high priest and the council directly, or that they were the ones who did the violence. It means that the persecution was authorised by them, and

that Paul was acting with their authority, and that he was carrying out the persecution on their behalf, and that he was the man who was given the task of pursuing the movement and of bringing its people to Jerusalem for punishment.

The third plausible form of the persecution is that it included violence and threat and denunciation and the turning over of people to the authorities, and that it included the kind of violence a man determined to destroy a movement might carry out — the flogging of people, the beating of people, the imprisonment of people, the threat of imprisonment, the denunciation of people, the fear that was spread through the communities where the movement was established.

Paul mentions, in one of his letters, that he went from house to house to seize men and women and to bring them to prison, and that he tried to force people to blaspheme and that he was furiously enraged against them. These are details that are given in the letters and that are confirmed by Acts, and they are details that tell us something about the nature of the persecution and about the intensity of it and about the way it was carried out.

The detail about going from house to house is significant, because it tells us the persecution was carried out in the homes of the people in the movement, and that the people in the movement were reached in the places where they lived and where they met, and that the persecution was carried out with the intensity and the determination of a man who was determined to destroy the movement and who was willing to go into the homes of the people in the movement to seize them and to bring them to prison.

The detail about trying to force people to blaspheme is significant, because it tells us the persecution was not just about imprisonment or violence, but about forcing people to renounce their belief in the movement and to denounce it, and that the persecution was about forcing people to do something they believed was wrong and that they believed was against their faith, and that the persecution was about forcing people to betray the movement and to betray their belief in it.

The detail about being furiously enraged is significant, because it tells us the persecution was carried out in a state of anger and intensity, and that the persecution was not a cold or calculated thing but a thing that was driven by anger and zeal and a determination to destroy the movement, and that the persecution was the kind of thing a man determined to destroy a movement would do when he was angry and when he was zealous and when he was determined.

This is the persecution that Paul describes, and this is the persecution that we can reconstruct from what he tells us and from what we know about the world and the movement and the people in it and the kind of persecution a zealous Jew like Paul might have carried out in the first century. It is not a detailed picture — it is not a picture of specific people or specific places or specific events — but it is a picture that is plausible and that is consistent with what Paul tells us and with what we know about the world and the movement and the people in it, and it is a picture that is enough to make the man who did it the man he was, and the persecution the thing it was, and the conversion the event it was.

The persecution is not the only thing Paul tells us about his life before the conversion. He tells us that he was zealous for the traditions of his fathers, and that he was a Pharisee, and that he was a son of a Pharisee, and that he advanced in Judaism beyond many of his own age among his people, and that he was blameless under the law, and that he was enrolled in the camp of the saints, and that he was in the camp of the saints and not outside it.

These are the claims Paul makes about himself in the letters, and they are the claims that tell us what kind of Jew he was and what kind of person he was before the movement changed his life. They are the claims that tell us that he was a Pharisee, and that he was a son of a Pharisee, and that he was zealous for the traditions, and that he advanced in Judaism beyond many of his own age among his people, and that he was blameless under the law, and that he was enrolled in the camp of the saints, and that he was in the camp of the saints and not outside it.

The claims are not all the same claim. The claim that he was a Pharisee is the claim that he belonged to a particular Jewish party. The claim that he was a son of a Pharisee is the claim that his father was a Pharisee and that he came from a family that belonged to the party. The claim that he was zealous for the traditions is the claim that he was the kind of Jew who would defend the traditions with force if he thought they were threatened. The claim that he advanced in Judaism beyond many of his own age among his people is the claim that he was educated in the traditions and that he was more educated than many of his contemporaries. The claim that he was blameless under the law is the claim that he observed the law in the way that was expected of a Pharisee and that he was not guilty of any particular breaking of the law. The claim that he was enrolled in the camp of the saints is the claim that he was part of the Jewish people and that he was not an outsider to the Jewish people.

These are the claims that make the persecution possible. If Paul had not been a Pharisee and a son of a Pharisee and zealous for the traditions, and if he had not advanced in Judaism beyond many of his own age among his people, and if he had not been blameless under the law, and if he had not been enrolled in the camp of the saints, and if he had not been in the camp of the saints and not outside it, then he would not have been the man who persecuted the movement in the way that he did, and he would not have been the man who was given the authority of the high priest and the council to pursue the movement and to bring its people to Jerusalem for punishment, and he would not have been the man who went from house to house to seize men and women and to bring them to prison, and he would not have been the man who tried to force people to blaspheme and who was furiously enraged against them.

These are the claims that make the persecution possible, and they are the claims that make the conversion the event it was. The persecution was the action of a man who was committed to the traditions and to the law and to the Jewish people, and who believed that the Jesus movement was a threat to those things, and who believed that the threat had to be answered. The conversion was the reversal of that commitment and that belief and that response, and it was the reversal of the man who had been committed to the traditions and to the law and to the Jewish people, and who had believed that the Jesus movement was a threat to those things, and who had believed that the threat had to be answered.

The conversion is the event that changed the man, and it is the event that made the man who he became, and it is the event that made the life of the early Jesus movement the story it is. The persecution is the part of the story that comes before the conversion, and it is the part of the story that is necessary to the story, and it is the part of the story that is the most difficult to know in detail, because Paul does not tell us the detail, and because the other sources do not tell us the detail, and because we have to reconstruct the detail from what we know about the world and the movement and the people in it and the kind of persecution a zealous Jew like Paul might have carried out in the first century.

This is the chapter about the persecutor. It is the chapter about the man who tried to destroy the movement, and it is the chapter about the man who did it in a way that we can only partly reconstruct, and it is the chapter about the man who did it in a way that was wrong, and it is the chapter about the man who did it in a way that was wrong in a way that he never told us in detail, and that we have to reconstruct from what he did tell us and from what we know about the world he lived in. It is the chapter that is the most delicate in Part One, because it is about the actions that Paul took before the movement changed his life, and because those actions are the actions that make the rest of the story possible, and because those actions are the actions that make Paul the man he was.

The chapter is not a chapter about the details of the persecution, because the details are not there, and because the details are not the point of the chapter. The chapter is a chapter about the persecution, and about the man who did it, and about the way that the persecution made him the man he was, and about the way that the persecution made the conversion the event it was, and about the way that the persecution made the life of the early Jesus movement the story it is.

The next chapter is the chapter about the conversion, and about Damascus, and about the way that the conversion happened, and about the way that the conversion changed the man, and about the way that the conversion made the man who he became. That is the chapter that begins the story of the man after the conversion, and that is the chapter that begins the story of the life of the early Jesus movement after the conversion of its most influential figure.

Part Two: The Road

Damascus

The story of the conversion is told three times in Acts, and told differently each time. The first telling — in Acts 9 — is the longest and the most detailed, and it gives us the colour of the event: the trip to Damascus, the light from heaven, the fall to the ground, the voice that speaks in Hebrew, the blindness that lasts for three days, the appearance of Ananias in a vision, the laying on of hands, the receipt of sight, the baptism, the meal, the beginning of the new life. The second telling — in Acts 22 — is Paul's own speech to the crowd in Jerusalem, delivered in Hebrew, and it gives us the personal dimension: the journey, the light, the voice, the question "Who are you, Lord?", the answer "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting," the instruction to rise and go into the city and you will be told what you must do, the blindness, the vision of Ananias, the restoration of sight, the commission to be a witness. The third telling — in Acts 26 — is Paul's own speech to the governor Agrippa and the king Bernice and the centurion and the city officials, and it is the most compressed and the most theological: the journey, the light, the voice, the commission to be a witness, the instruction to rise and serve, the vision of the risen Christ.

These are not the same story told three times. They are three versions of the same event, and they differ in what they include and what they leave out and what they emphasise, and they differ in ways that matter for what the story is about and for the way the story works in the argument of Acts.

The most obvious difference is the language of the voice. In Acts 9, the voice speaks in Hebrew — "in the Hebrew language" — and the content is given in the third person by the narrator. In Acts 22, the voice speaks in Hebrew — "I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language" — and the content is given in the first person by Paul, who reports the conversation in direct speech. In Acts 26, the voice speaks — "I heard a voice saying to me" — and the language is not specified, and the content is given in the first person by Paul, who reports the conversation as a commission to be a witness.

The differences in the content are significant. In Acts 9, the voice says "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" and Paul asks "Who are you, Lord?" and the voice says "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting." In Acts 22, the voice says the same thing, and Paul asks the same question, and the voice gives the same answer. In Acts 26, the voice says the same thing, and Paul asks the same question, and the voice gives the same answer — but the content is given in a more compressed form, and the emphasis is on the commission rather than on the identification.

The repetition of the same dialogue in all three versions is significant, because it tells us that the dialogue is the core of the event as it is remembered in the later tradition, and that the dialogue is the thing that is preserved across the different tellings. The differences in the detail are significant, because they tell us that the event is being told in different ways for different purposes, and that the

versions are not simply copies of each other but are shaped by the arguments that the different tellings are making.

The most important difference is the role of Ananias. In Acts 9, Ananias is a disciple in Damascus who receives a vision from the Lord and is told to go to Saul and lay his hands on him and restore his sight. In Acts 22, Ananias is a devout man according to the Law and highly respected by all the Jews who live in Damascus, and he comes to Paul and says "Brother, receive your sight" and Paul looks up at him. In Acts 26, Ananias is not mentioned at all, and the restoration of sight is not mentioned, and the emphasis is on the commission rather than on the restoration.

The differences in the role of Ananias are significant, because they tell us that the appearance of Ananias is part of the later tradition and not part of the core of the event as it was experienced by Paul, and that the later tradition has added to the story the figure of Ananias as a means of showing the continuity between Paul and the Jerusalem church and the way that the opposition was overcome by the authority of the church. Ananias is, in this reading, a figure who connects the conversion to the Jerusalem church in a way that makes the conversion a conversion within the church rather than a conversion apart from it, and that is a significant theological point.

The most important difference is the content of the commission. In Acts 9, the commission is to be told what you must do, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and to be baptised, and to be the chosen instrument to bear the name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel. In Acts 22, the commission is to rise and go into the city and be told what you must do, and to be the witness of what you have seen and heard. In Acts 26, the commission is to rise and serve, and to be the witness of what you have seen and heard, and to be the chosen instrument to bear the name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel, and to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light.

The differences in the commission are significant, because they tell us that the commission is the thing that is emphasised in the different tellings, and that the commission is the thing that connects the event to the rest of the story of Paul's life and to the argument of the book.

The version that is closest to the experience of Paul is not any of the three versions in Acts, because the versions in Acts are all told by the later tradition and are all shaped by the arguments of the later tradition. The version that is closest to the experience of Paul is the version that Paul himself gives in his letters, and that version is much less detailed and much less dramatic than any of the versions in Acts.

Paul does not tell us, in his letters, that he fell to the ground or that he was blinded or that he heard a voice from heaven or that Ananias appeared to him or that he was baptised or that he was filled with the Holy Spirit or that he was told what to do. Paul tells us, in the way that he tells us about his conversion, that he was set apart from his mother's womb and called by God's grace, and that God revealed his son in him so that he might preach the gospel among the Gentiles, and that he did not consult with any human being and did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before him but went into Arabia and returned to Damascus.

This is the version of the conversion that comes from Paul himself, and it is the version that is the least dramatic and the most theological, and it is the version that is the least colourful and the most restrained, and it is the version that is the one that should be used as the primary source for what happened and for what it meant.

The differences between the version in the letters and the versions in Acts are significant, because they tell us that the later tradition has added to the story the details that make it more dramatic and more visible and more memorable, and that the later tradition has shaped the story in ways that are not always consistent with what Paul himself says about it, and that the later tradition has made the conversion into an event that is more clearly a supernatural intervention and more clearly a commission from Christ, and that the later tradition has made the conversion into the kind of story that works as a story about a man who is called by Christ and sent by Christ and commissioned by Christ.

This does not mean that the versions in Acts are wrong, or that they are inventions, or that they are not based on what Paul himself said. It means that the versions in Acts are versions that have been shaped by the later tradition and that have been told in different ways for different purposes, and that the versions in Acts are not the versions that Paul himself gave of his conversion, and that the versions in Acts are not the versions that should be used as the primary source for what happened and for what it meant.

The primary source for what happened is the version that Paul himself gives in his letters, and the version that Paul himself gives is much less detailed and much less dramatic than any of the versions in Acts, and the version that Paul himself gives is the version that should be used as the primary source for what happened and for what it meant.

The most important thing to notice about the version that Paul himself gives is that it is not an event that is located in time and place in the way that the versions in Acts locate it. Paul does not tell us that he was on the road to Damascus, or that he was on his way to the city, or that he was near the city, or that he was outside the city. Paul does not tell us that he fell to the ground or that he was blinded, or that he heard a voice from heaven, or that Ananias appeared to him, or that he was baptised or filled with the Holy Spirit.

What Paul tells us is that God revealed his son in him, and that he was set apart from his mother's womb and called by God's grace, and that this revelation was the thing that made him a preacher of the gospel among the Gentiles, and that he did not consult with any human being and did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before him but went into Arabia and returned to Damascus.

The reference to Arabia is one of the most interesting and most puzzling things in the story of the conversion, because it tells us something about the direction of Paul's life after the conversion and about the way that the conversion was lived out in the first years after it happened. Paul says he went into Arabia, and this is not the Arabia of the desert and the spices and the incense trade, but the Arabia that was on the other side of the Jordan and the Dead Sea and the frontier of the Roman empire, the Arabia of the Nabataeans and the cities of Petra and Hegra, a place that was outside the Roman province of Syria and the Jewish world of the Galilee and the Judea and the Jerusalem that Paul had known before the conversion.

The reference to Arabia is significant because it tells us that the conversion was not immediately followed by a return to Jerusalem or by a commission to go to the Gentiles, but by a period of withdrawal and reflection and perhaps of teaching and preaching in a place that was outside the main centres of Jewish and Christian life and that was on the frontier of the world that Paul knew. The reference to Arabia is also significant because it tells us that Paul did not consult with the apostles in Jerusalem in the first years after the conversion, and that he did not go up to Jerusalem to those who

were apostles before him, and that his understanding of his calling and his mission was worked out in isolation from the Jerusalem church and from the other leaders of the movement.

The reference to Arabia is also significant because it tells us that Paul was not immediately the man he became, and that the conversion was not immediately the beginning of the public life that made him the most influential figure in the early Jesus movement. The conversion was the beginning of the life, but the life took shape in the years after the conversion, in the silence of Arabia and the return to Damascus, and in the long period of preparation and reflection and perhaps of teaching and preaching in the places where no one expected him and where the movement had not yet been established.

The three years in Damascus and Arabia are the three years that Paul mentions in the letter to the Galatians, when he says that he went into Arabia and returned to Damascus, and that after three years he went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him for fifteen days, and that he did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother. The three years are a gap in the story, and the gap is a gap that tells us something about the way the conversion was lived out and the way the life of the movement was shaped in the first years after the event.

The three years are a gap that is not filled in by the later tradition, and the gap is a gap that tells us that the conversion was not immediately followed by the public life that made Paul the most influential figure in the early Jesus movement, and that the conversion was the beginning of a life that took shape in the years after the event, in the silence of Arabia and the return to Damascus, and in the long period of preparation and reflection and perhaps of teaching and preaching in the places where no one expected him and where the movement had not yet been established.

The three years are the three years that make the conversion the event it was, and that make the man who he became, and that make the life of the early Jesus movement the story it is. The conversion is not a moment in time that can be described and then left behind. The conversion is the beginning of a life, and the life is the life that is told in the rest of the book, and the life is the life that is the story of the man who was called by God's grace and who spent the rest of his life trying to explain what that calling meant.

The next chapter is the chapter about the years of silence, and about the return to Damascus, and about the beginning of the public life, and about the meeting with the Jerusalem leadership, and about the way that the first years after the conversion were lived out. That is the chapter that begins the story of the life after the conversion, and that is the chapter that begins the story of the man who was called by God's grace and who spent the rest of his life trying to explain what that calling meant.

Arabia

The gap is three years. In the letter to the Galatians, Paul says that after his conversion — after the revelation of the son of God in him — he went into Arabia and then returned to Damascus. He does not say why he went into Arabia, or what he did there, or how long he stayed, or what the Arabia was that he went to, or whether anyone went with him or whether he was alone, or whether he preached to anyone or whether he only thought and prayed and waited. He says he went into Arabia, and that after three years he went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and that he stayed with him for fifteen

days, and that he did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother, and that he did not consult with any human being and did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before him. That is all he says. The three years in Arabia are a blank in the record, and they are a blank that is one of the most interesting blanks in the life of Paul, because they are the three years immediately after the conversion, the three years before the first visit to Jerusalem, the three years before the public life that made him the most influential figure in the early Jesus movement. They are the three years in which Paul was neither the persecutor he had been nor the public figure he became, but a man in the middle of a transformation that he does not describe and that no one else describes, and in a place that is not the place where the movement was centred and not the place where the Jerusalem church was, but a place on the edge of the world he knew, in Arabia, on the other side of the Jordan and the Dead Sea and the frontier of the Roman empire, in the land of the Nabataeans, in the cities of Petra and Hegra, in a place that was outside the Roman province of Syria and the Jewish world of the Galilee and the Judea and the Jerusalem that he had known before the conversion.

The Arabia of the Nabataeans was a place that was well known to people in the Roman world in the first century. The Nabataeans were a people who controlled the trade routes that crossed the desert from the south to the Mediterranean, and who had built a kingdom that was recognised by the Romans and that had its capital at Petra, and that had its own kings and its own laws and its own army, and that was a place where Jews and Greeks and Romans and others met and traded and lived. The Nabataeans were a people who had a culture of their own, and who had a relationship with Rome that was one of independence and sometimes of tension, and who had a place in the world of the eastern Mediterranean that was significant and that was known to people who travelled and traded and wrote.

The Arabia that Paul went to was, very probably, the Arabia of the Nabataeans, and not the Arabia of the desert and the Bedouin and the incense trade, though the two were connected. The Arabia of the Nabataeans was on the other side of the Jordan and the Dead Sea, and it was on the frontier of the Roman empire, and it was a place where people went and sometimes stayed, and where people who wanted to be away from the centres of power and the centres of the Jewish and Christian worlds could go and be away, and where people could think and wait and be alone without being disturbed by the concerns of the city or the synagogue or the church.

The blank is also interesting because it is a blank that Paul does not fill in, and that no other source fills in, and that we cannot fill in from the materials we have. We do not know what Paul did in Arabia. We do not know whether he preached to anyone or whether he only thought and prayed and waited. We do not know whether he was alone or whether he had companions. We do not know whether he was in a city or in the desert, or whether he moved between the two. We do not know what he thought about, or what he prayed about, or what he wrote, if he wrote anything. We do not know whether the revelation that had happened to him in the conversion was the whole of the revelation, or whether there were further revelations in the three years, or whether the revelation was something that worked itself out in him over the three years in the silence of Arabia.

What we know is only that the three years happened, that they came before the first visit to Jerusalem and the public life that followed, and that whatever the conversion was working out in him worked itself out in that silence and distance rather than in front of any witness who wrote it down. That is the discipline this book keeps: the three years in Arabia are a blank in the record, and the honest

response to a blank is not to fill it with invented detail but to say plainly that it is a blank, and to let the not-knowing itself be part of what the reader understands about how little of any ancient life survives into evidence.

The next chapter follows Paul back to Tarsus, into fourteen more years the sources barely describe — the years before the public life that made him the most influential figure in the early Jesus movement. That chapter, too, begins in silence.

Fourteen Silent Years

The next thing Paul does in the record is disappear. Not for a season but for fourteen years. Not into a cave or a desert but into the ordinary life of his own city, in Tarsus, working at his trade, teaching and preaching to people whose names we do not have, building churches in Syria and Cilicia that he mentions once in a letter and never describes. A life that leaves no mark on the story, so far as the sources can tell.

That is a long silence. It is also, in one sense, the whole point. The silence is not an absence the book should try to fill with guesses and stories that sound plausible. It is one of the ways the sources tell us that the period between Paul's call and his public ministry was lived in a way no one thought to record and that Paul himself did not think needed to be recorded. He tells us the gap exists. He tells us roughly how long it lasted. He tells us what he did not do during it. He does not tell us what he did do, and the book should respect that.

The framework is in Galatians. In that letter, Paul sets out his timeline with unusual precision, and for an unusual reason. He is not telling the story for its own sake. He is telling it as an argument. The Galatians are being told by other teachers that they need to be circumcised, and Paul is answering that his gospel did not come to him from any human being and that his authority is not derived from Jerusalem. To make that argument, he offers the chronology.

He says he was set apart from his mother's womb and called by God's grace, and that God revealed his son in him so that he might preach the gospel among the Gentiles. He says he did not consult with any human being and did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before him. He went into Arabia and then returned to Damascus. After three years he went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him for fifteen days, and did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother. Then he went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and the churches in Judea did not know him by sight — they had only heard that the persecutor who had tried to destroy them was now preaching the faith he had tried to destroy, and they glorified God for him.

That is the timeline. Three years in Arabia and Damascus. Fifteen days in Jerusalem. Then the years in Syria and Cilicia, which are the years in which the record goes silent and does not come back until Barnabas finds him in Tarsus and brings him to Antioch, and until the famine relief visit to Jerusalem recorded in Acts, and until the Jerusalem council recorded in Acts and alluded to in Galatians.

The total span from the call to the Antioch period is roughly fourteen years by the reckoning scholars have made, working from dates that can be assigned with some confidence. The conversion is usually placed in the early 30s — around 33 or 34 — and the Antioch period in the mid-40s. The fourteen years are the years in between. They are the years of the silence.

There are a few things Paul tells us about what he did not do, and these are important because they tell us something about the man he was becoming.

He did not consult with any human being. The phrase is striking, because it is not the way a man who was simply revising his opinions would speak. A man who changed his mind about a theological question would consult with his teachers, or with his peers, or with the leaders of the movement. Paul says he did not do that. He says God revealed his son in him and that the revelation was sufficient, at least for the beginning.

He did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before him. This is also significant. Paul was from the province of Cilicia, and his connection to the Jerusalem church had been hostile. He had tried to destroy it. When he became a follower of the Jesus movement, his most conspicuous act of obedience would have been to go to Jerusalem and put himself under the authority of the people who had known Jesus. Paul says he did not do that, at least not for three years. The first visit he describes was a visit of fifteen days, and he saw only Peter and James. He did not see the other apostles.

Those two claims — that he did not consult with any human being and that he did not go up to Jerusalem to the apostles — are the claims that give the silence its shape. The silence is not the silence of a man who was passive or inactive. It is the silence of a man who was busy at something that he did not need to report to Jerusalem and that he did not do in consultation with the leaders of the movement. There is a distance in the claim, and the distance is deliberate. Paul is telling the Galatians that his authority does not come from Jerusalem, and the silence is part of the evidence for that claim.

What did he do in Syria and Cilicia? Paul does not say, in any detail. He says he went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and that the churches in Judea did not know him by sight, and that they glorified God for him. He says he was still unknown by face to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. The only thing they knew about him was what they had heard — that the man who had tried to destroy them was now preaching the faith he had once tried to destroy.

That is all he says. The churches in Syria and Cilicia are mentioned as churches that existed, that were unknown to the Jerusalem leadership, and that had heard of Paul's conversion and were glad about it. That is a significant amount in one sense, because it tells us that the work was real, that it produced churches, and that those churches were not under Jerusalem's supervision. But it is not much in another sense, because it tells us nothing about how Paul worked, what he taught, who he worked with, how long he stayed in any place, whether he moved from one city to another or stayed in one, what the communities were like, or what happened to the people in them.

The region of Cilicia was, in the first century, a Roman province that included the city of Tarsus and a number of other cities. It was on the coast of the eastern Mediterranean, north of Cyprus and south of Pontus, and it was a region with a significant Jewish population, like most of the cities of the diaspora. The Jewish community in Tarsus was large enough and established enough that a Jewish family could live there and send a son to study, and that the city was known for its university and its philosophical schools. It was not a frontier region. It was a part of the Roman Empire in which people lived ordinary lives, traded, met in synagogues, and observed the Torah as they understood it.

Syria was the region to the west and south of Cilicia, including the great city of Antioch. Antioch was not in Syria in the provincial sense at this point in the same way, but the region was known as Syria,

and Antioch was the great Syrian city, and it was the city where the Jesus movement would later take the name "Christian." But in the period of the silence, Antioch had not yet become that. The movement was not yet in Antioch in a significant way. That would come later, after Barnabas came from Jerusalem and brought Paul with him.

In the period of the silence, the work that Paul did was presumably in the cities of Cilicia and the cities of Syria — in Tarsus and in Tarsus's neighbours and in the cities along the coast and in the interior. The work was presumably the work of a Jew who had become a follower of the Jesus movement, preaching to Jews and to Gentiles who were interested, forming communities, and establishing the congregations that would later be the churches of Syria and Cilicia that Paul mentions in Galatians.

What those communities were like, we do not know. They were not the great churches of the later tradition. They were not the churches of the letters. They were small, local, unknown to Jerusalem, and unknown to us. They were the work of the silent years. They disappear from the record and reappear only as a reference in a letter written years later, and they are gone again before we have any chance to know them.

The city of Tarsus is where Paul spent the silent years, very probably, and the city of Tarsus is a city we have already visited, in the second chapter of this book. It was a Greek city, a university city, a city with a large Jewish community, and the city of Paul's birth. It was a city in which a Jewish family could live as outsiders and insiders at the same time, belonging to the Jewish people and to the diaspora and to the Roman Empire and never quite belonging to any one of those completely.

For the silent years, Paul was back in the city of his birth. That is a significant fact, not because we know what he did there but because we know what it meant. The man who had gone to Damascus to seize the followers of Jesus had, within a few years, returned to the city of his birth and lived there as a follower of Jesus. He had not gone to Jerusalem. He had not sought the approval of the apostles. He had not joined the Jerusalem community. He had gone home.

That is not a detail that can be filled in with confidence, except in the broadest terms. We do not know whether he lived with his family. We do not know whether his family had become followers of the Jesus movement or whether they remained Jews who did not share his conviction. We do not know whether he had companions, or whether he lived alone, or whether he was married, or whether his wife had shared his new conviction or had stayed with the old one. The sources do not say. The book should not pretend to know.

What we can say with confidence is that Paul worked. He worked at his trade. He was a tentmaker, and a tentmaker in Tarsus was not an unusual thing. Tarsus was known for its goat-hair cloth, which was used for making tents and sails and other practical things, and the trade was known in the city. Paul's trade was not something he had picked up later in life. It was something he had learned, probably as a young man, in the way that a Jewish boy in the diaspora would learn a trade — as something to do with his hands, as something to support himself, as something that was part of being a responsible man in the ordinary world.

The tentmaking was not, for Paul, only a way to make a living. It became, in the later years, something more than that — it became a theological argument about the nature of his ministry, the independence of his authority, and the way the gospel should be carried into the world. In the later chapters of this book, the workshop and the trade will have their own chapter. For the silent years,

the trade is the ordinary work of a man who is spending his days at his bench, making things, selling things, living in the city of his birth, and building communities that no one will write about.

There is a particular kind of obscurity in this period that is worth naming, because it is the obscurity that a man of Paul's gifts would have experienced, and it is not the same as the obscurity of an ordinary man.

Paul was not an ordinary man waiting for his moment. He was a man who had a vision of a calling, who had a conviction about what God had done in the death and resurrection of Jesus, who believed he had been set apart from his mother's womb for a purpose, and who believed he had been called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. That conviction did not go away during the silent years. It was the conviction that had produced the conversion and the Arabia and the refusal to consult with Jerusalem. It was the conviction that would drive the rest of his life.

But conviction without an audience is a difficult thing. A man who believes he has been called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles is in a strange position if he is living in Tarsus, preaching to people who are not Gentiles, or if he is preaching to Gentiles who do not become famous and whose communities do not survive in the record. The calling has the shape of a mission, and the mission requires a field. In the silent years, the field was the region of Syria and Cilicia, and it was not the great field of the later years — the churches of Galatia and Corinth and Ephesus and Rome. It was a smaller field, and it was a field that Paul had to work in without the support of Jerusalem, and without the recognition of the apostles, and without the confidence that the mission was in fact the mission he thought it was.

That is a plausible human situation, and it is worth holding in mind as the book moves forward. The man who would later be the most influential figure in the early Jesus movement spent fourteen years in a region of the eastern Mediterranean building small churches that no one would write about, working at a trade that Roman gentlemen despised, and living in the city of his birth while believing he had been called to a mission that had not yet begun.

That is not a glamorous period. It is not a period that offers itself to dramatic writing. But it is the period in which Paul became the man who could carry the mission when it began, and it is the period in which the argument with Jerusalem took its shape, and it is the period in which the distance between Paul's understanding of his calling and Jerusalem's understanding of theirs was working itself out in the silence.

There is one more thing the silence tells us, and it is perhaps the most important thing. The silence tells us that the great public period of Paul's life — the letters, the journeys, the congregations, the arguments, the imprisonment, the voyage to Rome — did not come out of nowhere. It came out of a long period of preparation that was not recorded and not celebrated and not recognised at the time.

The Jerusalem church did not know Paul by sight during those years. The churches of Judea had only heard of him as a former persecutor who was now preaching the faith. Paul was building something in Syria and Cilicia, but Jerusalem did not know what it was, and did not know that it mattered.

When Paul finally went to Jerusalem in the later period — not the fifteen-day visit of the third year, but the later visit of the Jerusalem council or the collection visit described in Acts and alluded to in Galatians — he went as a man who had been living a life that was separate from Jerusalem, and as a man who had built communities that were not under Jerusalem's authority, and as a man whose

authority came from a revelation he had received and from the work he had done in the silent years, and not from any commission he had received from the apostles.

That is the shape of the silence. It is not only a gap in the record. It is a gap that matters for the argument of the book. Paul's authority was never derived from Jerusalem. The silence is the evidence for that claim, and the silence is the period in which Paul built the foundations of the ministry that would later make him the most controversial figure in the early Jesus movement.

The fourteen years are also the years that make it possible to understand the rest of the story. Without the silence, Paul's later career would look like a sudden eruption of a charismatic figure into a situation that he had not been part of. With the silence, it looks like the continuation of a life that had been going for fourteen years in the same direction. The call had come in the conversion. The mission had begun in Arabia and Damascus, with the first preaching and the first persecution. The years in Syria and Cilicia were the extension of that mission into a larger region. The later public career was not a new thing. It was the next phase of a life that had been going for fourteen years.

That is one of the reasons the book should not try to fill in the silence with stories that are not there. The silence is already significant. It does not need decoration. It is fourteen years of a life of conviction and work and distance from the centre, and the book should respect it.

What can be recovered is the broadest outline only. We know they happened. We know Paul was in Syria and Cilicia. We know he worked at his trade and built communities. We know he was not in Jerusalem and not under Jerusalem's authority, and that he had not consulted with the apostles. We know the churches in Judea had heard of his conversion and glorified God for it.

The next chapter is the chapter about Antioch, and about the mixed city where non-Jews started joining the movement, and where the word "Christian" was coined as an insult, and where Barnabas came from Jerusalem looking for Paul and found him in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch. That is the chapter in which the silence ends and the public ministry begins.

Antioch

Antioch was a Seleucid foundation, built in the third century BC on the shelf of land above the Orontes where the river turns toward the sea, and named after the father of its founder. It had been a Syrian capital for the Seleucid kings and then a regional centre for Rome, and it sat where the road from the east met the road from the north and the road from the south, eighteen kilometres from the port of Seleucia at the mouth of the river. It was not a Jewish city — Jerusalem was the Jewish city — but the Jewish community in Antioch was large and old and established, part of the Dispersion that had lived throughout the eastern Mediterranean for generations, and the city was a city of the diaspora in a way that Jerusalem was not: Greek-speaking and Aramaic-speaking and administered in the language of the empire, with a population that was mixed by the standards of any ancient city and that had been mixed for a very long time.

That is the city. It is the city Barnabas comes to from Jerusalem, and the city he leaves to go to Tarsus, and the city he brings Saul back to, and the city in which the Jesus movement for the first time takes the shape of a mixed community — Jews and Gentiles, God-fearers and people who have never attended a synagogue, people who decide to belong to this movement without having belonged

to the Jewish people before. That is the reason the chapter is named after the city rather than the man. Barnabas finds Saul. But what is found is not only a man but a place and a shape of community that had not existed before, and that shape will be the shape of the rest of the story.

The account of the coming of the movement to Antioch is in Acts 11. After the death of Stephen, the believers are scattered — "they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" — and some of them go as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, and they preach the word to none but Jews. Then some of them — the text is careful about this — "men of Cyprus and Cyrene" go to Antioch and speak to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus, and a great number believe and turn to the Lord.

The word for Hellenists here is significant. In Acts 6, the Hellenists are the Greek-speaking Jews of the Dispersion, the ones who are in tension with the Hebrew-speaking Jews of Jerusalem over the daily distribution, the ones who are the first to be identified as a distinct group within the movement. The men from Cyprus and Cyrene are Hellenists themselves. They are Diaspora Jews preaching to Diaspora Jews in Antioch, and then they start preaching to people who are not Jews at all. The text says the Lord's hand was with them, and a great number believe, and this is the moment when the movement crosses the line from preaching only to Jews to preaching to people who are not Jews.

Then Jerusalem sends Barnabas. The church hears that the Lord has opened the door of faith to the Gentiles — a phrase that is significant in itself, because it is the first time in Acts that the Gentiles are described as receiving something the Lord has opened — and the church sends Barnabas to Antioch. Barnabas arrives, sees the grace of God, is glad, and encourages them to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose. He is described as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a great number of people are added to the Lord. Then Barnabas goes to Tarsus, finds Saul, and brings him to Antioch.

They meet with the church for a whole year and teach a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples are for the first time called Christians.

That is the story from Acts. It is a story told by someone who is interested in the coming of the movement to the Gentiles, in the role of Barnabas as the bridge figure who carries the authority of Jerusalem to Antioch and who brings Saul out of Tarsus and into the work, in the way the Jerusalem church authorizes and sends and approves. It is a story told by someone who wants the reader to see the church as one family, and Paul and Jerusalem as allies, and the coming of the Gentiles as something authorized from above and received with joy.

The second source for the Antioch story is not Acts but Paul's letter to the Galatians. In Galatians 2, Paul describes a visit to Jerusalem that happens after fourteen years — the visit in which he goes "by revelation," submits his gospel to the leaders "privately" to those who seemed to be influential, and receives their recognition that he has been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised.

Whether Galatians 2 describes the same visit as Acts 11:27-30 or a later visit — the Jerusalem council visit of Acts 15 — is a question that scholars have argued about for a long time, and the chapter will not pretend to settle it. What matters for this chapter is that the argument of Galatians — the sense that Paul's authority is contested, that the Jerusalem leadership is an institution with its own agenda, that Paul has to defend his gospel against people who want to impose circumcision on the Gentiles — hangs over the whole Antioch story and over everything that follows. The book prefers Paul's own voice over Acts's harmonization, and it will say why.

The disagreement is real. In Acts, Barnabas goes to Tarsus, finds Saul, and brings him to Antioch. The initiative is Barnabas's. The Jerusalem church sends Barnabas, and Barnabas goes to Tarsus. Paul is found. Paul is brought. The story is one of agency moving from Jerusalem to Antioch and then back again, with Barnabas as the person who makes the connection and the Jerusalem church as the source of the authority that sends him.

In Galatians, Paul goes to Jerusalem "by revelation." The initiative is God's. Paul does not go because Barnabas told him to or because the Jerusalem church sent for him. He goes because God revealed something to him — and the text does not say what. Paul submits his gospel to the Jerusalem leaders, but he does it privately, to "those who seemed to be influential," and the purpose is "so that I might not be running or had run in vain." He is not going for their approval as though he were uncertain of his gospel. He is going to make sure they do not oppose what God is doing through him, and that if they do, he knows about it before it becomes a public problem. And when he gets there, he finds that they "added nothing to him" — that they recognized his authority to preach to the Gentiles as something given to him by God, just as Peter's authority to preach to the circumcised was given to him by God.

The difference between the two accounts is not small. In Acts, Paul comes to Antioch because Barnabas brings him, and Barnabas brings him because Jerusalem sends Barnabas — the whole thing is authorized from Jerusalem, and the authority that sends Paul is the authority that Jerusalem confers. In Galatians, Paul's authority comes from a revelation that has nothing to do with Jerusalem, and the Jerusalem leadership is something he has to negotiate with, not something he receives his authority from. The two stories are not the same story told in different words. They are two stories that disagree about where Paul's authority comes from and what the Jerusalem leadership thinks of him, and the disagreement is a disagreement about the shape of the movement.

The famine relief visit is the third part of the story from Acts 11. While Barnabas and Saul are in Antioch, prophets come down from Jerusalem — one of them, Agabus, predicts a great famine over all the world, which happened in the reign of Claudius. The disciples decide, each according to their ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. They do, and they send it to the elders with Barnabas and Saul.

This is the first time Paul goes to Jerusalem after his conversion with a mission of generosity. He is not a fugitive escaping Damascus. He is not a guest staying fifteen days with Cephas. He is not the man who has publicly confronted Peter in Antioch — that will come later, in the next part of the book. He is a messenger with money, carrying relief to the Jerusalem church that he did not found and does not lead, and that he knows has been suspicious of him from the beginning.

From Acts's point of view, this is the story of a harmonious church sending help to its elder sibling — a church in Antioch, a church in Jerusalem, the one sending to the other, the whole thing an example of what the church does when it is one body. From Galatians's point of view, it is already clear that the Jerusalem leadership represents something Paul has to contend with — the institution that will eventually try to impose circumcision on his Gentile converts, the institution that will ask him to remember the poor as a condition of its recognition of his authority, the institution that Paul believes has a gospel of its own and is trying to make his converts obey it. The famine relief is a generous gesture, but it is also the beginning of a theme that will run through the rest of the book — the

collection, the attempt by Paul to reconcile the Gentile mission with the Jerusalem leadership, the attempt that will eventually shape the end of his life.

The name "Christian" is the small detail that carries a large meaning. The text says the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch, and the name is an outsider's label — it means "belonging to Christ" or "of the party of Christ," and it is marked by the text as something the movement does not choose for itself but that is imposed on it by the city around it. It is a name given by outsiders to a group that is not simply a Jewish sect anymore; it is a name that marks the movement as separate from Judaism in a way that matters for everything that follows, because from this point onward the movement has its own name and its own identity in the eyes of the city.

That is what the name means. What the name does not mean is that the movement has decided to leave Judaism behind and become something else. The movement in Antioch is still a movement of people who believe that God has acted in Jesus and that the response is to belong to this community. The non-Jews in the community are not ceasing to be Gentiles; the Jews are not ceasing to be Jews. The movement is a mixed community, and the name marks the observation made by outsiders that the community does not fit the categories they are used to.

The community in Antioch was, by all the evidence, a mixed community. It included Jews and Gentiles and God-fearers — people who had attended the synagogue and were interested in the Jewish God but had not become Jews, people who had heard the Jewish scriptures in Greek and were drawn to them but had not been circumcised. It included people from the diaspora and people from the city itself. It was the first community outside the Jewish homeland where non-Jews were full members of the Jesus movement in significant numbers, and where the movement was not simply a Jewish movement with Gentile adherents but a community that crossed the line between Jew and Gentile.

That is a significant thing, and it is the reason the chapter is about Antioch. Antioch is the place where the Jesus movement becomes what it will be for the rest of the story — not a Jewish sect with Gentile converts but a mixed community in a city of the Diaspora. The community is shaped by the city: Antioch is a Seleucid foundation, a Greek city, a city of the eastern Mediterranean where Greek and Aramaic and Hebrew and the languages of the Dispersion meet and overlap. The community is shaped by the city in the way its members speak and the way they live and the way they think about the God they worship. And the community is shaped by Paul, once Barnabas brings him from Tarsus. Paul teaches with him for a year, and the community is shaped by his understanding that the Gentiles who join it are not required to become Jews first, and that the gospel he preaches is not a revision of Judaism but an announcement that God has acted in Jesus for the whole world — a thing that the Jerusalem leadership will not accept easily, and that will produce the argument that runs through the rest of the book.

The two-source method must be applied here with force. This is the first chapter in which the reader should be able to see what Acts is doing and what the letters are doing, and to understand why the book prefers the letters. What Acts is doing, in the Antioch story, is telling the story of the Gentile mission as something that comes from Jerusalem, is authorized by Jerusalem, and is harmonious with Jerusalem — Barnabas is sent, Barnabas brings Paul, the church sends relief, the elders receive it, the whole thing is an example of a church that is one. What Paul is doing, in Galatians 2, is telling the story of his own authority as something that comes from God and not from Jerusalem, and of the

Jerusalem leadership as an institution he has to contend with — one that he goes to privately, one that he defends his gospel against, one that he has to win over to the idea that his authority to preach to the Gentiles is something God has given him and not something Jerusalem has given him.

The reader should also understand that the disagreement between the two sources is not simply a disagreement about facts. It is a disagreement about what the story is. In Acts, the story of Antioch is a story of a movement that expands from Jerusalem to the Gentiles in a way that is authorized and blessed by the Jerusalem church. In Paul's letters, the story is one in which Paul's authority comes from God directly, and the Jerusalem church is an institution with its own interests and its own gospel, and the meeting with the Jerusalem leadership is something Paul has to do carefully and privately to protect his gospel. The two sources are not giving two versions of the same events. They are telling two different stories about the same events, and the book prefers Paul's.

The chapter ends where the famine relief visit ends, with Barnabas and Saul carrying money to Jerusalem. This is the beginning of a theme that runs through the rest of the book — the collection for the Jerusalem church, the attempt by Paul to reconcile the Gentile mission with the Jerusalem leadership, the attempt that will eventually shape the end of his life.

The next chapter is the first chapter of Part Three, and it is about the mechanics of the mission — the distances, the roads, the ways people move in the eastern Mediterranean in the first century, the things Paul would have had to think about when he travelled. The Antioch chapter is the end of the period of the origin. The next chapter is the beginning of the period of the roads.

Part Three: The Roads

On Foot

Paul is on foot for most of the known part of his life. This is not an opinion. It is the shape of the record. The letters mention journeys — he goes to Jerusalem, he goes to Damascus, he goes to Antioch, he goes to Macedonia, he goes to Greece, he goes to Jerusalem again, he is taken to Caesarea, he is sent to Rome. The journeys are mentioned in the letters as the substance of his life: "in journeying often, in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, in danger on the sea, in danger from false brothers, in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and exposure." Most of that is being on foot. Most of it is walking.



Figure 3: Paul's first journey (Acts 13–14): Antioch to Cyprus, then on foot through Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, and back. White circles mark stops where Acts records specific events. (Image: Roberto Reggi, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.)

He walks because there is no alternative for long-distance movement in the eastern Mediterranean of the first century that does not require wealth or status or a reason to be on a ship. He walks because he is not rich. He walks because he is a man with a mission and the mission is done by moving from one place to another, and the moving is done by walking. The roads exist. They are Roman roads, or at least roads that have been made usable by Roman administration and the demand of the provinces for military movement. They go from one city to another. They go from Antioch to Tarsus, from Tarsus to Derbe, from Derbe to Lystra, from Lystra to Iconium, from Iconium to Pisidian Antioch,

from Pisidian Antioch to Perga, from Perga to Attalia, from Attalia back to Antioch — a journey described in Acts 13 and 14, a journey that is part of Paul's life, a journey that can be traced on a map, a journey that took weeks and that was done by walking.

The distance is the first thing to think about, because the distance is the thing that determines the shape of the life. A day's walking in the eastern Mediterranean is not a modern day's walking. It is a day's walking by the distance of the Roman road system, which was built for the movement of troops and not for the comfort of travellers. The average day's march for a Roman army was twenty Roman miles — about eighteen kilometres — and that was for men carrying packs. A traveller on a civilian journey moved more slowly, or at least moved with less urgency and less load, and the Roman road system allowed a pace that was roughly fifteen to twenty miles a day, or twenty-four to thirty-two kilometres, for a person on foot moving with no extreme urgency. A journey of three hundred kilometres — the distance from Antioch to Tarsus — is about twelve to fourteen days of walking, with no days off. A journey of five hundred kilometres takes about twenty days. A journey of a thousand kilometres takes about forty.

Paul's journeys are not short. The journey from Antioch to Derbe is about three hundred kilometres. The journey from Derbe to Lystra is shorter, maybe eighty kilometres. Lystra to Iconium to Pisidian Antioch is another hundred and fifty or so. The total ground covered in the Paul chart in Acts 13 and 14 is perhaps eight hundred to a thousand kilometres of walking in a period that is measured in weeks and months. The journey described in Acts 20 and 21 — the journey from Macedonia down through Achaia, then across the Aegean to Asia, then from Asia to Jerusalem — is a much longer journey, and it is done partly on foot and partly by ship. The voyage to Rome at the end of the book is ship, and it is shipwreck and it is being driven by the winds, and it is not the kind of movement you do on foot. But most of the journeys in Paul's life are on foot, and the distance is such that the life is largely the life of a walker.

The roads are not abstract. They are Roman roads, which means they are built to a specification that was designed for the movement of the army. The roads are paved, or at least they have a paved surface in the best sections, with a foundation of rubble and sand and stones, with drainage, with a camber so that water runs off, with milestones that tell you how far you are from Rome or from some other point of reference. The roads are mostly east-west or north-south, built along the lines that the Roman empire needed for military and administrative movement, and they do not necessarily go where a pilgrim would want to go. They go from Antioch to the east, from Antioch to the north, from Tarsus to the west toward the coast. They go through passes and valleys and plains. They go through places that are defensible and places that are not.

The Roman road system is, in one sense, the reason the movement can travel at all. Without the roads, the distances are harder, the journeys take longer, the risk of banditry is higher because the alternative paths are worse. With the roads, there is a known route, there is some measure of safety on the main roads, there is the possibility of movement that is planned rather than improvised. The roads are a product of Roman empire, and they are one of the conditions of the possibility of the mission. The mission is done by moving from one place to another, and the moving is done on roads that exist because Rome has placed its authority on the ground in the form of infrastructure.

The roads are also dangerous. The letter to the Romans is the letter in which Paul lists the dangers of the journey, and the list is one of the most human documents in the letters. He is in the chapter that is

about the collection, and he is trying to persuade the Roman church to receive him, and to help him on his way to Spain, and to support him in what he is about to do. And in the course of the argument, he tells them what the road has been. He tells them about the Jews and the Gentiles and the false brothers. He tells them about the rivers and the bandits. He tells them about the city and the wilderness. He tells them about the sea and the shipwrecks. He tells them about the toil and the hardship and the sleepless nights and the hunger and the thirst and the fastings and the cold and the exposure.

And he tells them it has been on the road that the danger has happened, not at the destination. The danger has not been in the city where he preaches. The danger has been in the getting there. The danger has been on the road. The danger has been in the places between the cities.

That is the thing the road tells you. The city is a place you arrive at. The road is a place you pass through. The city is a place of safety, or at least a place you hope is safe. The road is the place of danger — bandits, rivers, wolves, false brothers, the things that happen to people who are moving from one place to another and who are vulnerable in their movement. The road is the condition of the mission, and the road is the threat to the mission, and the two are the same thing.

The roads are Roman roads, but the people on them are not Roman. They are Jews and Gentiles and God-fearers, and they are moving for reasons that have nothing to do with Rome. A Jew in the Diaspora travels to a festival in Jerusalem, or to a friend's house in another city, or to a community that welcomes him. A Gentile traveller travels for trade, or for imperial service, or for pleasure, or for the kind of movement that depends on status. A Christian moves for the mission — to preach, to strengthen a community, to deliver a letter, to carry the collection, to escape a city that has become dangerous. The roads are the infrastructure of empire, but the people on them are using them for their own reasons, and the reasons are not the reasons of the empire.

That is one of the things the records tell you. The Roman road system is there because Rome has ruled the eastern Mediterranean for a century and a half, and the roads are the sign of Roman authority, and they are the thing that makes the movement possible. But the movement does not use the roads for Rome's purposes. It uses the roads for the mission. It uses the roads to get from Antioch to the Galatians, from the Galatians to Corinth, from Corinth to Ephesus, from Ephesus back to Jerusalem. It uses the roads to carry letters, to carry people, to carry the collection, to carry the gospel. The roads are Roman. The use of them is not.

The travel is also expensive, and that is one of the things the letters tell you directly. Paul raises money to travel. He does not travel as a man who can afford to go where he wants when he wants. He travels as a man who needs help — the collection is money for the Jerusalem church, but it is also money that will in part support his journey to Jerusalem and his continued work. The Roman church is asked to support him on his way to Spain. The churches in Macedonia and Achaia are asked to send money to Jerusalem, and Paul goes with them, and the journey to Jerusalem is part of the journey of the money.

The cost of travel is the reason Paul is not constantly on the move, or not constantly moving in the way a man with money would move. He stays in places. He works. He makes tents. He stays in the places where he has work and where he has friends, because staying is cheaper than moving and because the mission is not a tour — it is a series of stays in places where he has work to do. The movement is the movement of the letter carrier and the letter reader, the movement of the visit to

strengthen a congregation, the movement that is necessitated by the crisis in a community or the need to go to Jerusalem and settle something that the letters have not settled.

The travel also has a shape that the map does not show. The map shows the roads. The map shows the distance. The map does not show the banditry. It does not show the cold and the exposure. It does not show the rivers. It does not show the sleepless nights. It does not show the false brothers. It does not show the fact that the road is the place where the danger happens, and the danger is the reason the letters are written — because the communities that Paul has left behind are places where the mission has to be defended against people who want to impose circumcision on the Gentiles, and Paul has to continue the argument from a distance, and the distance is the distance of the road, and the distance is the distance of the life.

The map shows a man moving from one city to another. The life is a man who is on the road most of the time, who is tired, who is in danger, who is writing letters from places where he has been forced to stop, who is building communities in places where he cannot stay, who is moving from place to place in a region where the travel is hard and the travel is dangerous, and where the travel is the condition of the whole thing.

The letters are occasional documents, and the travel is the context of the letters. The letter to the Thessalonians is written because the community in Thessalonica has been disturbed, and Paul has left abruptly, and he is writing from somewhere else — from Corinth, from somewhere in the region — and he is trying to continue the teaching he began and to answer the questions that have come up in his absence. The letter to the Galatians is written because the community in Galatia has been put under pressure by teachers who want the Gentiles circumcised, and Paul is writing from a distance, and the distance is the distance of the road. The letter to the Corinthians is written because Paul has left Corinth and the community there has been in trouble, and he is writing to settle things from a distance.

Every letter in the letter collection is a letter written from a distance. Every letter is a letter written from somewhere on the road or in a place the writer has reached after being on the road. The letters are the product of a life spent moving, and they are the product of the difficulty of the movement — the distance, the danger, the expense, the fact that the travel is the context of the letters and the condition of the letters.

The two-source method matters here in the way it always does. The record of the travel in Acts is mostly about the journeys, and the record of the travel is shaped by the purpose of Acts — to tell the story of the spread of the church. The record of the travel in the letters is mostly about the dangers and the hardship, and the record of the travel is shaped by the purpose of the letters — to persuade, to defend, to teach, to settle things from a distance. The two records are not the same. The letter to the Corinthians lists the dangers of the journey in a way that Acts does not do. The letter to the Romans lists the dangers of the journey in a way that Acts does not do. The list in 2 Corinthians 11 is one of the most human documents in the letters because it is a list of what the road has been, and the road has been the life.

The next chapter is about the work itself — the workshop, the trades, the tentmaking, the kind of work Paul does with his hands, and the place of that work in the life of the movement. The travel is one part of the life. The work is another.

The Workshop

Paul made tents. This is the only trade we can associate with him with any confidence, because the passage about tentmaking is brief and specific and leaves little room for disagreement. In Acts 18, after Paul arrives in Corinth and meets Aquila and Priscilla, who have recently come from Rome because Claudius had commanded all Jews to leave, the text says they were tentmakers by trade, and that Paul stayed with them and worked, because they had the same trade. The trade connects Paul to the workshop and the workshop to the life of ordinary work, and that connection is the ground of the chapter.

The word for tentmaker in the Greek is *skēnopoios*, and the word for the cloth from which tents were made is *kilikion*, a cloth made from the hair of goats. Cilicia, the province of which Tarsus was the capital, was known for its goat-hair cloth, which was used for making tents and sails and other things that needed to be light and strong and waterproof. Tarsus was a place where goat-hair cloth was made and sold, and a place where tentmakers worked, and it is plausible that Paul learned the trade there, in the city of his birth, as a young man, in the way that Jewish boys in the diaspora learned a trade — as something to do with their hands, as something that supported them, as something that was part of being a responsible man in the ordinary world. It is a guess, and a reasonable one, but it is a guess: the sources do not tell us that he learned the trade or when he learned it. What the sources tell us is that in Corinth, in the middle of his public life, he worked at the trade with a man and a woman who did the same trade.

The trade did not end with Paul's conversion. It continued in Damascus and Tarsus and Corinth and in the years when he was travelling and needed money and did not want to be dependent on the communities he preached to. It continued, in one sense, for the rest of his life — as a trade that he knew, as a way of making a living, as a thing he could do in any city and any workshop where there was goat-hair cloth and a frame and a need for a tent. The trade was not the mission, but it was the ground on which the mission's argument about itself was built.

The workshop is the place where the trade happened. It is not the factory — there was no factory in the first-century eastern Mediterranean — and it is not the office, because there was no office in the modern sense, and it is not the shop, because the workshop was not necessarily a public place but a place where work was done. The workshop was a room, or a set of rooms, in a building, and the building might be a house or might be part of a house. The workshop might be the place where the tentmaker worked and where he lived, or it might be separate from the place where he lived. The workshop was the place where the trade was done, and where the smell of goat-hair cloth and sweat and heat and the noise of the work filled the air.

The workshop was also the place where Paul met people. The passage in Acts says he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla and worked, because they had the same trade. That means the trade was the reason for the relationship: Paul did not arrive in Corinth and find Aquila and Priscilla by preaching in the synagogue or by chance or by divine intervention, but because he was looking for work and found people who worked at the same trade. A man comes to a city, he looks for work, he finds work, he meets the people who work with him, and in that meeting the mission begins — not in a synagogue or on a street corner or in a vision, but in a room where two men and a woman are cutting cloth and fitting frames and talking about the job and the city and the weather and the price of cloth.

The workshop is a small thing, and the kind of small thing the sources do not record as small things, but it is the kind of small thing the mission was made of.

The workshop was not a building made for the purpose. It was a room that was already there, set into a house or a block, shared with the people who lived there or with the people who came and went, used in the day by the man who owned the trade and used in the evening or the morning or the middle of the day by the community that came together. The workshop was not clean, and not quiet, and not a place set apart for holy things. It was a place where work was done, and the work was hard, and the work was all day, and the work left marks on the room and on the hands and on the body. The workshop was the ordinary world, and the mission was the ordinary world, and the meeting of the two was the point.

The twelve-hour days are the shape of the life of a worker in the eastern Mediterranean of the first century. The workday began before dawn and ended after dusk, and the hours were counted by the sun and not by the clock. The worker worked from before the sun came up to after it went down, and the work was hard, and the work was all day, and the worker had little time that was not work, and little money, and little security, and little time that was his own. The day was the day of work, and the night was the night of rest and of whatever was left, and there was not much left. The worker woke with the light and went to bed with the dark, and between them was the day of work, and the day of work was the shape of the life.

The slaves worked longer hours, and the slaves had no choice and no time that was their own and no money and no security. The workers who were free had some choice and some money and some security and some time that was their own. But the free workers in the workshop also worked long hours, and had little money, and little security, and little time that was their own. The distinction between free worker and slave was real and important and the shape of the social world, but it was not a distinction that made the free worker's life easy or the free worker's work short or the free worker's body unbroken. The free worker worked long hours and had a body worn by the work and a life spent in the work.

The twelve-hour days are the shape of the life of a worker in the eastern Mediterranean of the first century, and they are the shape of the life of Paul in the workshop, and they are the shape of the life of the mission, because the mission is not done by people who have time that is not work and money that is not needed and security that is not uncertain. The mission is done by people who work, and who work hard, and who work all day, and who have little time that is not work, and who have little money, and who have little security, and who have little time that is their own. The mission is the life of the worker, and the life of the worker is the life of the mission, and the workshop is the place where both are done. The twelve-hour day was not a special difficulty for Paul. It was the ordinary difficulty of the ordinary man, and Paul was, in the workshop, an ordinary man.

The smell is the smell of goat-hair cloth and sweat and heat and the noise of the work, and it is the smell of the workshop and the smell of the trade and the smell of the life. The smell of goat-hair cloth is the smell of the cloth made from the hair of goats, and it clings to the cloth and to the hands and to the clothes and to the room and to the air. The smell of sweat is the smell of the work, and the smell of heat is the smell of the sun and the room and the work, and the smell of the noise is the smell of the work. The smell of the workshop is the smell of the trade, and the smell of the trade is the smell of the life. The smell is not a single smell but a combination, and the combination is the

thing that stays in the memory after the work is done, the thing that marks the man who has worked and the man who has not, the thing that tells the room what has happened there.

The smell is not described in the sources, because the sources are about the mission and the letters and the communities and not about the detail of the workshop and the trade and the life. But the smell is the thing that gives the workshop its reality, and the trade, and the life, and the book should say what the smell is and what the workshop is, and not pretend that the detail of the workshop and the trade and the life is not there. The detail of any ordinary life is there, and the book should respect it. The sources do not mention the smell, but the smell is the reality of the thing the sources are about.

The social contempt for manual labour is the second thing the workshop tells you, and the thing that makes the insistence on paying his own way a theological argument rather than just a practical thing. In the Roman world, manual labour was the work of slaves and freedmen and the poor, and the free man of status did not work with his hands. The Roman ideal was the man who did not have to work, the man who lived off the labour of others, the man who had the time and the freedom and the authority that came from not working. Manual labour was a sign of lower status, and the work of the hands was the work of the lower orders, and the free man who worked with his hands was a man who had fallen from the ideal or had never achieved it. The Roman world had its own vocabulary for this, and the vocabulary told the story: the freedman, the slave, the worker, the artisan, the man who works with his hands — these were not the words for the man of status, and the man of status was the man for whom the words of the world were made.

The contempt was also a matter of the Jewish world, where the work of the hands was the work of the ordinary person, and the scholar and the teacher and the man of the law did not work with his hands. The rabbis of the later tradition would say that the study of the Torah was the most important thing, and that the work of the hands was secondary, and that the man who studied and did not work was the man who was living the ideal life. The Jewish world of the first century was not the world of the rabbis of the later tradition, but the suspicion of manual labour was there in the Jewish world as well, in the sense that the ideal was the life of the mind and the Torah, and the work of the hands was the work of the ordinary person who needed to support himself and his family. Paul, the learned Jew from Tarsus, could have been that kind of man. He did not become that kind of man.

The contempt is the reason the insistence on paying his own way is a theological argument, because the insistence on paying his own way is a refusal of the Roman and Jewish ideal of the man who does not work, and a claim that the mission does not depend on the money of others and does not require the status of the free man and does not require the separation from ordinary labour that the Roman and Jewish world considered the mark of the superior man. The insistence on paying his own way is a claim that the mission is the work of a man who works, and that the work is the mission, and that the two are not separate. It is a claim that the apostle — the man who carries the gospel to the nations — is also the man who cuts cloth and fits frames and earns his bread by the work of his hands, and that this is not a compromise or a necessity or a temporary arrangement but the shape of the thing itself.

The theological argument is the argument of 2 Corinthians 11 and 1 Thessalonians 2 and elsewhere, where Paul insists that he did not burden the communities he preached to, that he worked with his own hands, that he supported himself and those with him by the work of his hands. The argument is

not simply that he was not a burden or that he was independent. The argument is that the mission is not the mission of a man who lives off the money of others, and that the mission is the mission of a man who works, and who works with his hands, and who supports himself and those with him by the work of his hands.

The argument is also against the people who did want to be supported by the communities, and who did want the status of the free man and the separation from ordinary labour. The letter to the Philippians is the letter in which Paul thanks the Philippian community for their generosity, and says that they were the only ones who shared with him in his trouble, and that they sent him money more than once, and that he was not a burden to them because he had learned to be content in whatever state he was in, in plenty and in want, in the state of being full and in the state of being hungry. But he was not always content in the state of being hungry, and the Philippian money was important.

The argument is not a perfect argument, and it is not an argument that holds together without strain. Paul had the right to support, and he argues for the right, and he refuses the right, and he refuses it for reasons that are theological and strategic and personal and not entirely consistent. He is not always hungry. He is sometimes in need, sometimes helped by the communities and sometimes by the Philippians, sometimes in prison and sometimes at large, sometimes with money and sometimes without. The argument is a statement of principle, and the principle is that the man who preaches the gospel should not be dependent on the people to whom he preaches, and that the gospel should not be compromised by the charge that it is a means of support. The principle is that the worker should keep his own pay, as he says in 1 Corinthians 9, and that the principle itself is the argument.

The principle is the principle of the ordinary man who is also the apostle, and the ordinary man who is also the author of the letters, and the ordinary man who is also the man who carries the gospel to the nations. The principle is the principle of the man who has not risen above the work but has carried the work with him into the mission, and who has made the work part of the argument of the mission.

The workshop is also the place where the theory of the letters meets the reality of the life, and the meeting is not a meeting of things that are separate but a meeting of things that are the same thing. The letters are the documents of the mission, and the mission is the work of a man who works, and the work is the tentmaking, and the trade is the trade of the workshop, and the workshop is the place where the trade is done, and the place where the trade is done is the place where the mission is done, and the place where the mission is done is the place where the life is lived. The theory of the letters — the argument that the mission is not the mission of a man who lives off the money of others, the argument that the mission is the work of a man who works, the argument that the work is the mission, the argument that the two are not separate — is the theory of the life, and the life is the work, and the work is the tentmaking, and the trade is the trade of the workshop.

The workshop is the place where the letters and the life meet, and the meeting is the meeting of the theory and the reality. The letters were not written in a study by a man who did not work, in a temple or a synagogue or a public building, by a man who had risen above the life of ordinary labour. They were written by a man who worked, who thought the letters in the middle of the work or after it or before it or in the hours that were not work, and who wrote them in the same voice as the man who worked. The letters are the letters of the workshop, and the workshop is the life of the letters.

The next chapter is about the house church, the place where the mission is done, the place where thirty people meet in a workshop or an insula flat, the place where the book uses Peter Oakes' reconstruction of the house church in *Reading Romans in Pompeii*. The workshop is the place where the trade is done, and the house church is the place where the community gathers, and the two are not separate — the workshop is the place where the trade is done in the day and the community gathers at another time, and the workshop is the place where the ordinary life of the city and the mission of the gospel are the same room.

The Front Room

The house church was a room in a house, or a workshop, or an insula flat. It was not a basilica or a chapel or a building made for worship, because there was no such building in the first-century eastern Mediterranean. The Christian community met in whatever space was available — a dining room, a reception room, a courtyard, a workshop where the owner worked by day and the community gathered by night, the upper room of an insula flat where the neighbours' footsteps could be heard through the floor. And it was thirty people at most.

That figure comes from Peter Oakes' reconstruction in *Reading Romans in Pompeii*. He takes the house of the Cupids in Pompeii, a modest dwelling in an insula block, and uses it to model the kind of space in which a Christian community would have met in the decade of the 50s. The point is not that every house church was the same size or the same shape. The point is that the space was small, that the community that met in it was limited by the space, and that the figure of thirty is a realistic estimate for the number of people who could gather in a private house or a workshop or an insula flat without the meeting becoming visible in a way that would draw attention from the neighbours or the authorities or the synagogue.

Thirty people is not a congregation in any modern sense. It is not a membership roll or an audience or a parish. It is the people who knew each other, who lived in the same building or the same block or the same neighbourhood, who shared the same space for the meeting. The community did not choose that space the way a church chooses a building; it used what was there, and the space became the space of the community simply because the people were in it.

The house church was not a service in the modern sense. There was no order of service, no liturgy, no sermon from a pulpit, no hymn book, no offering plate passed down the rows. The meeting was the gathering of the community itself — not a performance, not something done by a leader for an audience, but the people together.

Nor was it a congregation in the sense of the modern church — the church of the building made for worship, the service that is held, the preaching that is done, the offering that is taken, the announcements that are made, the fellowship that follows. The house church was not that.

The meal was part of the meeting, not a separate event from it. Eating together and gathering as the church were, in practice, the same occasion.

The house church was the church of people who had a name and a history and a life in the same city — it was not anonymous. The thirty people knew each other's names and histories. The leader was

one of the thirty, and the teacher was one of the thirty, and the minister was one of the thirty; authority came from within the group, not from outside it.

The next chapter turns to Philippi and to Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, a business owner, Paul's first known patron in Europe. The economics of the mission ran through women's money, and the house church in Philippi is a case study in exactly what that meant.

Philippi and Lydia

The road came first.

It was the Via Egnatia, the great Roman road that ran from the Adriatic coast at Dyrrachium — the modern Durrës in Albania — across the mountains of Macedonia and the plains of Thrace to the Bosphorus and Byzantium. It was the road the Romans built when they took Macedonia, a road for legions and couriers and trade, the road that tied the eastern Mediterranean together at a scale that had not existed before. It ran through Philippi, through the forum on two terraces on either side of the main street, through the city that had been refounded as a Roman colony after the battle in which the republic died.

The colony was called *Colonia Augusta Iulia Philippensis*. It had been refounded as a Roman colony after the battle of Philippi in 42 BCE, when the armies of Octavian and Antony defeated the forces of Brutus and Cassius on the plain west of the city. The veterans of the legions were settled there, and the city was given the status of *ius Italicum* — the legal fiction that treated it as if it were on Italian soil: Roman citizenship for its residents, self-government under Roman municipal law, exemption from the direct provincial taxes that the rest of Macedonia paid. Of the cities in the province of Macedonia, only five had this privilege, and Philippi was one of them. It was a small city, but it was a Roman city in a way that mattered for anyone who was passing through.

The colony had a port fourteen kilometres away, at Neapolis on the Aegean, and the road from the port climbed the Pangaion mountains to reach the plain. Ships from Asia Minor and the Aegean and Egypt came to Neapolis; goods moved over the mountain pass and along the colonnaded street and past the forum; the colony sat at the junction of the road that came from the east and the road that came from Thessalonica and the Adriatic, and the people who passed through Philippi were the people for whom the road existed. That is the setting.

The missionaries arrived on that road. Paul and Silas and Timothy, and possibly Luke — the "we" passage in Acts 16 begins here, and although the authorship question is one of the older and less productive arguments in New Testament studies, the pronoun itself is a marker that says something about the shape of the tradition, if not about Luke's physical presence. They crossed the Aegean from Troas to Neapolis in two days, according to the narrative, and walked up to Philippi. This was the first time the gospel crossed the sea into Europe, if Europe is the right word for the territory of Macedonia. The word did not mean in antiquity what it means now, and the boundary was drawn at the sea, not at a political concept, but the account in Acts marks the moment as a boundary crossing anyway. It is the first European convert.

The first European convert was a woman.

Her name was Lydia, and Acts tells us what it tells us about her and no more.

She was, the text says, a dealer in purple cloth. The Greek word is *porphyropōlis* — a merchant, a seller, not a dyer. The dyer was called *porphyrobapha*, and the distinction is the kind of small thing that tells you something: Lydia was not the person who produced the dye or operated the vats. She was the person who bought the cloth and sold it. She was a trader, and a trader in a product that had a market.

The product was purple, and the purple of the ancient world was not the colour purple we think of now. The famous purple was Tyrian purple, made from the murex sea snails — *Bolinus brandaris*, *Hexaplex trunculus* — that the Phoenicians had harvested for centuries from the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean. The production was violent and expensive: thousands of snails crushed to release the precursor chemical, the rot in the sun that turned the liquid from grey to the legendary deep colour, the smell that made the dyers' workshops something that cities placed downwind. A few grams of the dye cost more than its weight in gold. Purple was the colour of emperors, of senators, of the people who could command that kind of expense. A purple cloth on the market was a luxury good.

There was another purple, less expensive and more common, made from the madder root — *Rubia tinctorum* — which produced a reddish purple that was far easier to produce in quantity and far cheaper to sell. Thyatira, the city from which Lydia came, was famous for this. Strabo, describing the region of Lydia in his *Geography*, called Thyatira a centre of the dyers' guild. A first-century inscription from Thyatira lists the purple-dyers (βαφείς πορφύρας) as an organised *collegium*, and of the known inscriptions from the city, fifteen of them are connected to the purple-dyeing trade. Thyatira was a city of trades — wool-workers, linen-workers, garment-makers, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, potters, bakers, bronze-smiths — and its purple-dyers were the ones who had built the guild.

The traditional assumption was that Lydia's purple was madder root, because Thyatira was inland and murex purple came from the sea. A 2017 article by David E. Graves argued that the inland location did not necessarily preclude Thyatira's dyers from working with murex-derived dye — the trade networks of the eastern Mediterranean were well enough developed that purple could move inland, and the guild may have worked both kinds. This is not certain, and the reader does not need to know the chemical pathway of the murex dye to understand Lydia. She is not defined by whether her purple was Tyrian or Turkey red.

What is established, and established independently of Acts, is the connection between Thyatira and Philippi that the purple trade makes plausible. An inscription found at Philippi honours a purple-dye dealer from Thyatira who was a patron of a citizen there — CIL 3.664.1. The inscription is not about Lydia, and it does not mention her, but it establishes that people involved in the purple trade moved from Thyatira to Philippi and did so with enough means to be patrons. Lydia's occupation is not invented. The trade existed. The connection existed. The social position of a woman who moved between those two cities and had enough to live on and enough to host a group of strangers is plausible on the basis of the evidence, and the plausibility is not the same as the certainty, but it is enough.

The city she came from was Thyatira, and the city she lived in was Philippi.

She is not a local. She is from Thyatira, in the region of Lydia, and she has moved to a Roman colony in Macedonia. The name "Lydia" invites speculation. It may be a personal name — two first- and second-century inscriptions record women of high status named Lydia — or it may be an ethnonym,

indicating origin from the region of Lydia, in which case it may be the kind of name given to a freedwoman. This is a guess. State it as a guess and move on.

Her religious status is a better-established detail. The text says she worshiped God — *sebomenē ton theon*, a God-fearer, the category of Gentile sympathiser with Judaism who attended the synagogue or prayed to the Jewish God without becoming a Jew. This is the language that Acts uses for the people who are on the edge of the Jewish community and who are the natural audience for the movement. It is the same language used for other individuals in Acts, and it tells you something about how the movement understood its own audience: the people who were already oriented toward the Jewish God were the first to hear the claim about Jesus.

Where she heard the claim is one of the small but significant details. Acts says they went to the place of prayer by the river, on the Sabbath, and spoke to the women who gathered there. The wording is careful. Luke does not say "synagogue." He says "place of prayer" — *proseuchē* — which is the word he uses for the less formal Jewish meeting places, and the choice of the word matters: Philippi was a Roman colony, and Roman colonies were not notable for their Jewish communities. A marble plaque found about a kilometre west of Philippi, inscribed *Θεῷ Ὑψίστῳ* — "to God Most High," the language of diaspora synagogues — confirms that there was some form of Jewish or monotheistic worship in the area, but the absence of a formal synagogue in the text is consistent with a community too small to sustain one. The place of prayer was by the river, outside the city gate. This is the kind of detail that is consistent with a small group of women — the text says they spoke to the women who gathered — and with a community that met informally because there was not enough of a community to fill a building.

The group of women at the Sabbath prayer in Philippi is one of the most significant silences in the early narrative, because it is the kind of detail that the modern reader expects to be otherwise and that the text simply does not adjust. The synagogue was the place where Jewish communities met, and the synagogue was, in most communities, dominated by men — the men were the ones who counted for the quorum, the men were the ones who read and interpreted the law, the men were the ones who held the office. A group of women meeting by a river on the Sabbath is a group that exists because the men are not there in the numbers that would make a formal synagogue, and that is a thing that happened in diaspora cities that were not Jewish. It is not invented for the story; it is consistent with what we know about the Jewish presence in Philippi.

The meeting with Lydia happened on the Sabbath, at the place of prayer, and the text tells us three things about it, two of which are the things that matter.

The first is that she heard Paul. The narrative says that Paul spoke, and that she heard, and that the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said. The second is that she and her household were baptised. The third is that she insisted that Paul and his companions stay at her house.

The first of these is the most important, because it is the thing that the narrative is pointed toward. Paul spoke. Lydia heard. The Lord opened her heart. This is the conversion of the first European convert, and the conversion is described as something that happened to her, not something she did. She is the object of the action — she heard, her heart was opened, she was baptised, she invited — and the agency belongs to God. This is the pattern of conversion in Acts when the protagonist is a woman, and it is the pattern that the book should note without making it into a thesis about gender, because the pattern is the pattern of the narrative and not necessarily the pattern of the history.

The household baptism is the second thing, and it is the thing that is hardest to know. The text says "she was baptised, and her household." The household — *oikos* — in the ancient world was the extended family unit: the wife, the children, the servants, the slaves, the freedpersons, the business associates who lived in the house and were part of the household economy. Who exactly was baptised is not specified, and the book does not need to specify it, and the book should not pretend that it can. The baptism of the household is the kind of thing that later tradition built whole systems of doctrine on, and the book should not do that here. The household was baptised. The members of it were persons. What else is known about them is not known.

The third thing — the insistence on hospitality — is the thing that marks Lydia as someone who was not simply converted but who exercised power. She begged them to come into her house, and she persuaded them. The word is *peisasa* — she persuaded, she prevailed. The hospitality of a woman with a house and the resources to maintain it and the social standing to invite strangers in and make them stay is the kind of patronage that the mission depended on everywhere, and Philippi was the first European city where that kind of patronage was exercised. The house was the church, in the pattern that the previous chapter described: thirty people at most, in the available space, the community met in the ordinary space that was there. Lydia's house was that space, and the chapter on the front room applies here — the community met in Lydia's house, and Lydia's house was the community meeting place, and the community was the people who knew each other and shared the space.

What Acts does not say is as important as what it says.

Paul does not mention Lydia in his letters. He does not mention Philippi by name in any of the undisputed letters except the letter to the Philippians, and in that letter he does not mention Lydia by name. He writes to the church in Philippi — the church that he founded, or that the tradition says he founded — and in the letter he names others. He names Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians 4:2-3, describing them as women who contended at his side in the work of the gospel, and who had once been of help to him alongside Clement and the rest of Paul's co-workers. He does not name Lydia. He names other women. He names the co-workers. He names the church's generosity — "your partnership in the gospel from the first day" is the language of the letter — but he does not name the woman whose house was the place of meeting.

This is not a contradiction. It is not the kind of disagreement that the method is designed to resolve. It is simply the fact that Paul's letters and the Acts narrative are different kinds of documents, and that Lydia may have been someone Paul did not think to name in the letter he wrote to the church he founded, or she may have been someone whose name the later tradition preserved without Paul having given it. The book should not pretend to know which, and it should not pretend that the absence is significant in the same way that the citizenship silence or the Antioch disagreement is significant. It is simply a blank, and blanks are what the book leaves as blanks.

What is significant is the presence of the women — Euodia, Syntyche, the unnamed co-workers, the women who contended at Paul's side. The letter to the Philippians is one of the places where Paul names women as active participants in the mission, and the house church at Philippi is the place where women's economic power made the mission possible. Lydia was a trader in purple cloth. Purple cloth was a luxury product with a market. A trader in purple cloth who had moved from Thyatira to Philippi and had enough to own a house and host a team of missionaries was a woman of

means. The economics of the mission ran through women's money in ways that the modern reader does not always notice — the patronage, the houses, the hospitality, the resources that the communities needed to exist — and Philippi is one of the places where that is visible in the record. The brief identifies this as one of the three chapters in which women should be treated as structural rather than as an aside. Chapter 13 is the first of them. The structural thing is not simply that a woman named Lydia was the first European convert. It is that the mission in Europe began in the house of a woman who had the economic resources and the social standing to host it, and that the women named in the letter to the Philippians — Euodia, Syntyche, Clement, the rest of the co-workers — were part of the network that made the mission work, and that the economics of the mission ran through women's money in the same way that it ran through women's houses and women's hospitality everywhere else in the early movement.

This is not a campaign. It is not the assertion that Paul was a feminist or that the early church was egalitarian in any sense that a modern reader would recognise. It is the observation that the sources, read straightforwardly, show women as patrons, house-church hosts, and co-workers in a way that the secondary literature on the social world of the early church — Meeks, Hock, the work on patronage and the gift economy — makes visible, and that the reader should be told what the sources say before they are told what later tradition did with them.

The story from Acts that follows Lydia is the story of the slave girl with the spirit of divination, the story of the beating and the imprisonment, the story of the earthquake and the conversion of the jailer. It is a dramatic story, and it is a story that functions in Acts to move Paul from Philippi to Thessalonica to Berea to Athens to Corinth. Lydia does not appear again in the narrative except as the place where Paul returns before leaving Philippi — "He came to the house of Lydia and saw the brothers and encouraged them" (Acts 16:40). The narrative moves on. Lydia's house becomes the church. The chapter is over.

What Paul says about Philippi in his letters is compressed but real. The letter to the Philippians — almost certainly a letter written from confinement of some kind, possibly from Rome but possibly from Ephesus or somewhere else — thanks the church for their partnership in the gospel, for their generosity, for the support they had given him from the first day. He names the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche and asks the church to help them to agree. He says the church has sent gifts to him more than once. He does not tell the story of the founding of the church, and he does not name the woman who lent him her house. He writes to the church as a community that already exists and already has its own life and already has its own disagreements, and he writes as someone who is grateful for their support and anxious about their unity.

This is what the letters say about Philippi, and this is what the book should use. The founding narrative is in Acts, and the founding narrative gives the Lydias and the women at the river and the slave girl and the jailer. The ongoing life of the community is in the letter, and the letter gives the generosity and the co-workers and the conflict. The book reads them together, noting that the founding narrative is the narrative that Acts tells and that the ongoing life is the life that the letters show, and that the two are not the same kind of thing. This is the method applied, quietly, to a chapter that is mostly narrative from one source.



Figure 5: The forum of Philippi as it stands today. Paul's first known convert in Europe, Lydia, was a dealer in purple cloth who hosted the church that met somewhere in this city. (Image: Berthold Werner, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.)

The purple cloth that Lydia sold is the thing that makes her visible. Without the occupation, the text would have given us simply another woman at the river. The occupation gives her a place in the economy of the Roman world, a profession that connected her to the dye guilds of Thyatira and to the luxury markets of the eastern Mediterranean. It gives her the means to own a house in a Roman colony. It gives her the standing to be the patron of a team of missionaries and the host of a house church. It is the one thing that Acts tells us about her that makes her more than the woman who heard Paul and believed. She was the dealer in purple, and the dealer in purple was the woman who opened her house.



Figure 4: Paul's second journey (Acts 15:36–18:22), the one that carried the mission across the Aegean into Macedonia and Achaia for the first time — Philippi was its first stop in Europe. (Image: Roberto Reggi, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.)

Philippi was the city where the mission first went European, and the first European convert was a woman who sold purple cloth and owned a house and let the mission in. The next chapter turns to Corinth, the fractious port city and the most revealing community in the letters.

Corinth

Corinth sat on the isthmus — a neck of land about five kilometres across, where the Peloponnese was attached to mainland Greece. Ships from the Adriatic heading to Athens, or from Athens heading to the Levant, did not go around the Peloponnese when they could go across: they unloaded at one harbour, carried cargo overland on rollers, and loaded it onto ships at the other harbour. Corinth was the place where the sea came close to touching itself, and where movement from west to east could be made shorter by going across instead of around.

This was why the city had been important before the Romans destroyed it in 146 BCE, and why Julius Caesar refounded it as a colony in 44 BCE. The colony was settled with freedmen and veterans and migrants — a Roman city on Greek ground, capital of the province of Achaia. The forum was one of the largest in Greece, with the South Stoa running 164 metres along one side and the Bema — the speaker's platform where a proconsul would address the public — built on the terrace above. The Lechaion Road ran from the forum to the western harbour, and in Paul's time was an unpaved road of packed earth and gravel, twenty to twenty-five feet wide, with shops on either side.

The population is not known with any certainty — estimates range from fifty thousand to one hundred thousand, and all figures are guesses. Corinth had two harbours: Lechaion on the Corinthian Gulf on the west, and Kenchreai on the Saronic Gulf on the east. The eastern harbour was smaller,

but it was the one from which Paul sailed when he left Corinth, and the port at which Phoebe — the woman who carried the letter to the Romans — was a deacon and a patron of many, including Paul himself. The city held the Isthmian Games, the athletic festival second only to the Olympics, every two years on the isthmus. Movement was what Corinth existed to serve.



Figure 6: The Temple of Apollo at Corinth, already five centuries old by Paul's time and still standing over the city he spent a year and a half arguing with by letter. (Image: Joyofmuseums, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.)

The religious life of the city was typical of a Roman city in the eastern empire: temples and shrines and cults and imperial honours. The temple of Apollo, the old Doric temple of the sixth century BCE with its seven surviving monolithic columns, stood on the acropolis and was the most conspicuous landmark. The West Forum terrace had a cluster of Roman temples — Temple D, identified as Tyche; Temple F, dedicated to Venus Victrix; Temple G, the imperial cult temple. Temple E, the largest and most prominent, has been argued to be the temple of Octavia or the Capitolium — and the argument continues, because the dedication is not recorded. At Kenchreai, the temple of Isis was real and excavated. The meat from the temple sacrifices went into the market, and the *macellum* — the meat market — is attested by two Latin inscriptions. Paul uses the word in 1 Corinthians 10:25 when he tells the Corinthians they can eat meat from the market without asking questions about it. The city was a city of meat and temples and markets; the Christian community was in it, and had to live in it. Paul came to Corinth after leaving Athens, according to Acts, and came to a city that had a synagogue. He reasoned in the synagogue on the Sabbaths, and when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." He left the synagogue and went to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God who lived next door, and Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord and was baptised, and his whole household, and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptised.

This is the story from Acts, with the shape of a turning point: the Jews oppose, Paul leaves the synagogue, the Gentiles receive, the synagogue leader converts, the community begins. The letters tell a slightly different thing: Paul himself, in 1 Corinthians, mentions that he baptised Crispus and the household of Stephanas and some others, but he does not mention Titius Justus, and he does not mention Sosthenes — the man who was beaten before Gallio's tribunal, according to Acts — even though Sosthenes appears in the opening verse of the letter as a co-sender with Paul. The letters know things that Acts does not record, and the letters are the primary source.

The eighteen months in Corinth are the longest stay Paul had in any city up to that point. The workshop chapter made the point that the mission was done by stays, not by tours. Corinth was the first city where Paul stayed for that long, and the letter he wrote later shows that the community he left was not settled but was already producing reports, arguments, and questions that would require another letter to answer. The letter is written from Ephesus, in response to a report that came to him through the household of Chloe, and a letter that the Corinthians sent to him asking specific questions. This is the kind of letter that the letter-writing chapter will describe later: written from a distance, in response to what has been heard, addressed to a community the writer is in tension with.

The community in Corinth was, by the evidence of the letter, not a poor community. Wayne Meeks, in *The First Urban Christians*, made the argument that the Pauline churches were not communities of the destitute and the marginalised but communities that drew from across the social spectrum — artisans and traders, freedpeople and slaves, and a few people of considerable means. The Corinthian community included Crispus, the former ruler of the synagogue, who was baptised with his household; Gaius, who hosted the whole church; Erastus, the city treasurer, whose name is on an inscription in the courtyard of the theatre at Corinth — the inscription says the pavement was laid at his expense, and whether this Erastus is the same man as the Erastus named in Romans 16:23 is debated, but the plausibility is there; Stephanas, the first convert in Achaia, whose household Paul baptised and whose family became a standing pattern of service to the saints.

The social mix is one of the reasons the community was fractious. Meeks called it "status inconsistency" — the condition of people who had high standing in some dimensions and low standing in others, who were wealthy in skills or connections but not wealthy in birth or legal status, and who found in the Christian community a place where the hierarchies of the city were not the hierarchies of the church. Gerd Theissen, in *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, returned to the same material and argued that the specific conflicts in the letter — the Lord's Supper, the meat from the idol, the factions — could be explained by the socioeconomic divisions between the wealthier members and the poorer members. The book should present this as a strong scholarly reading and not as the only possible reading, and let the reader see what is in the letter and what the arguments about the letter are.

The first crisis in the letter is the factions. "It has been reported to me by Chloe's people," Paul says, "that there is rivalry among you. I mean that each of you says, 'I follow Paul,' or 'I follow Apollos,' or 'I follow Cephas,' or 'I follow Christ.'" The factions are named after teachers — Paul, who founded the community; Apollos, the eloquent Alexandrian Jew who had moved through the community after Paul left and was apparently a more polished speaker; Cephas, the Aramaic name of Peter, representing the connection to Jerusalem; and "Christ," which may be a party that claimed direct

authority from Christ himself and may have been the same party Paul later describes as the party of the "super-apostles."

The factions are, in the social world of Corinth, a competition for status. Apollos was a rhetorician, and Corinth was a city that valued eloquence; Cephas had the authority of the Jerusalem church behind him; Paul was the founder, and the party that followed him had the authority of the founding gift. The community was arguing about who had the better teacher.

Paul's response is the argument of the cross — the argument that the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God, and that God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and that God's weakness is stronger than human strength. It reorients the hierarchy: the wise in the world's way are not the wise in the way that leads to life; the powerful are not the powerful in the kingdom; the noble-born are not the chosen. "Not many of you were wise by human standards," Paul says, "not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth" — and the "not many" is important, because it means some of them were. The ones who weren't were the ones in the community competing for status, and Paul was telling them that the competition was the wrong thing to compete for.

The factions are worth dwelling on, because they reveal something about the social texture of the community that the rest of the letter only hints at. Apollos was, by Paul's own account in Acts, "an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures," and the Acts narrative says he "taught accurately the things concerning Jesus" and was "eloquent" — the Greek word is *logios*, the word for a cultivated speaker, a man of letters. In a city that valued eloquence, in a community that had heard Paul's long sermons and Paul's apparently thin speaking voice, the arrival of a man who could speak in the way that Corinth valued was an event. The community split. Some followed him, and some followed Paul, and some followed Cephas, and some followed Christ — and the followers of Apollos were not simply people who preferred eloquence to Peter's Aramaic roughness. They were people who were making a claim about what kind of community this was, and about who had the authority to define it. The authority that Apollos had was the authority of someone who could speak in the way that a Roman city expected its teachers to speak, and the authority that Paul had was the authority of someone who had founded the community and had, in the community's memory, been the one who brought the gospel in the first place.

The Corinthian community was not simply divided. It was divided in a way that reveals what the Corinthians valued — speech, eloquence, the person who could command the room — and Paul, by his own account, was not the kind of man who commanded rooms by speaking. The factions were not only about teachers. They were about the kind of authority the community recognized.

The second crisis is the sexual scandal. "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you," Paul says, "and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: a man is living with his father's wife." The man is living with his stepmother — forbidden by Jewish law, Roman law, and the standards of any Mediterranean society. The community's response was not to expel the man but to be proud of their tolerance. Paul's response is to tell them to hand the man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord, and to remove the wicked person from among them. "A little leaven leavens the whole batch."

The letter does not tell us what happened after Paul wrote this. It does not tell us whether the man was expelled, whether the community complied, whether the man repented. The silence is the kind of

silence the book has learned to leave as silence. What the letter shows is that the community had mistaken the freedom of the gospel for permission, and had mistaken its own tolerance for virtue, and had tolerated something that was genuinely wrong.

The section on sexual issues is not only the incest case. It is also the teaching on the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit — "You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honour God with your body" — and the teaching on prostitution — "Flee from sexual immorality" — and the teaching on marriage and celibacy in chapter 7, where Paul responds to the question "Is it best for a man not to marry?" The chapter on marriage is the longest section of practical teaching, and it shows the apocalyptic frame that governs Paul's advice: the time is short, the present form of this world is passing away, and the question is not what is the best life in the world as it is, but what is the best position from which to meet the coming of the Lord. The advice to stay as you are — married, single, slave, free — is not a moral command. It is temporary instruction for a community that believes the world is ending soon, and the reason it has been read as a permanent command by later tradition is the kind of thing that the chapter on the pastoral letters will explain.

The question of food offered to idols is one of the most illuminating sections of the letter, because it shows the community in a city saturated with religious imagery and sacrificial meat, trying to figure out what it meant to be in the city without being of the city. The question came from the letter the Corinthians sent to Paul: "Is it lawful to eat food offered to idols?" The community was divided between the strong — who knew that an idol was nothing and the meat was just meat — and the weak — who were troubled by the connection to the temple.

Paul's answer is the one that defines the Christian ethic of the strong and the weak: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." The strong are right in their knowledge — "An idol is nothing in the world. There is no God but one." But the strong are wrong in their application, because knowledge that is right in itself can be wrong in its effect on the person who does not share it. If a weak person sees a strong person eating in a temple, the weak person may be emboldened to eat food offered to idols, and the strong person who caused this is guilty of sinning against the weak person and against Christ.

"It is not about your rights. It is about the person who is weak." The workshop chapter made the same point about the tentmaker's refusal of support: Paul had the right to be supported, but he refused it for the sake of the community. The same principle appears here: Paul has the right to eat what he wants, but he refuses the right for the sake of the weak person, because the strong person's right is not more important than the weak person's conscience. The argument in chapter 10 is stronger: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons." This is addressed to the people who were actually going to the temple meals, not just buying meat in the market, and the answer is that participation in a pagan cult meal is incompatible with participation in the Lord's table. The boundary is about participation, not about meat.

This is the question that shows the community living in the city in the most concrete way. Corinth was a city of temples and sacrifices and meat markets, and every meal the community ate had the question built into it: was the meat on the table meat that had been offered to an idol, and if it was, did it matter, and if it mattered, what did it mean to eat it? The question was not an abstract question. It was the question that came up at every dinner, and the question that the community had to answer every day, and the question that Paul answers in the letter by telling the strong that they were right in their knowledge and wrong in their application of it, and by telling the weak that they were wrong in

their fear and right in their concern, and by telling both of them that the community was a community in which the strong were supposed to give up their rights for the weak, and the weak were supposed to grow into the knowledge that the strong had already received.

The section on the Lord's Supper (chapter 11) is the earliest account of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament — earlier than any of the Gospels. Paul received it from the Lord and handed it on: "This is the body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." The tradition is the oldest thing in the letter, and the oldest thing in the New Testament about the meal the Christian community ate together.

The problem in Corinth was not the theology of the meal but the practice of the meal. "When you come together, it is not to eat the Lord's supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk." The community was eating the Lord's Supper in the context of a real dinner — the *agape* feast — and the meal had become a place where the wealthier members ate early and ate well and drank the best wine, and the poorer members arrived later and found the food gone and the wine gone.

Gerd Theissen's analysis argues that the division was socioeconomic: the wealthier members arrived early and consumed the best food and wine; the poorer members arrived late and found little or nothing left. Paul found this intolerable: "Do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" The Lord's Supper was not a ritual performed by a priest in a church building. It was a meal — a real dinner, with food and wine, eaten by the community together — and the rich members had made it a class meal, humiliating the poor. The later tradition turned the Lord's Supper into a ritual without a meal, and the division without the rich and the poor.

The section on spiritual gifts (chapters 12-14) shows the community intoxicated with ecstatic experience and treating the ecstatic experience as a measure of spiritual standing. The Corinthians were speaking in tongues, and some were treating the tongues as the highest gift, and the community was dividing itself into the pneumatikoi — the spiritual ones — and the people who did not have the tongues, who were therefore second-rate.

Paul's response is the body of Christ — the argument that the body is one and has many members, and that the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," and that the members that seem to be weaker are indispensable. The love chapter (chapter 13) is the most famous section of the letter, and it is the section most often read out of context. It is not about romantic love. It is about the exercise of spiritual gifts. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love," Paul says, "I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." The love chapter corrects the community's misunderstanding of the spiritual gifts — the gifts were for building up the community, and the love that built up the community was superior to the gifts that impressed the individual. The love chapter is not a wedding reading.

The section on order in worship (chapter 14) contains the verses that are the most debated and the most important for the question of women in the early church. "Women should remain silent in the churches," Paul says in chapter 14:33-35. "They are not permitted to speak. They should be submissive. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home."

These verses are, in the judgment of a significant number of scholars, a later interpolation. The argument is of two kinds. The first is the manuscript evidence: some manuscripts place the verses after verse 40, at the end of the section, rather than in the position they have in the standard text. The

second is the internal argument: the verses contradict chapter 11, where Paul assumes that women are praying and prophesying in the church, and gives instructions for how they should pray and prophesy — "Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head" — and where the assumption is that women are speaking in the church. If women are praying and prophesying in chapter 11, they cannot be forbidden to speak in chapter 14.

The book should not decide the question for the reader. It should present the argument for the interpolation, and the fact that reasonable people land in different places, and then move on. This is the same approach the book takes to Romans 1 and sexuality. The chapter on the silencing of women in later tradition — the final chapter of the book — will return to this, because the interpolation question is part of the larger story of what happened to Paul's voice after he stopped writing. For now, the point is that the letter itself shows women praying and prophesying in the Christian assembly, and that the verses that forbid women to speak are the verses most seriously questioned by modern scholarship.

The final major section of the letter is the resurrection (chapter 15), the longest sustained theological argument in the New Testament outside the Gospels. The Corinthians, Paul says, were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead. The denial is not simply a denial of the resurrection of Jesus; it is a denial of the resurrection of the dead in general, and it is the kind of denial that came from the Greek philosophical tradition, which regarded the body as inferior to the soul and the resurrection of the body as absurd. Some Corinthians may have accepted the resurrection of Jesus as a spiritual event and denied the resurrection of the dead as a general future event.

Paul's response is the creed, which he received and handed on: "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, was buried, was raised on the third day, and appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, then to more than five hundred brothers at one time, then to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, as to one born at the wrong time, he appeared to me." The creed is the oldest thing in the letter — older than the letter, older than Paul's mission, older than the community in Corinth. It is the thing Paul received and handed on, and the fact that it is the thing Paul received and handed on means that it is the thing that was handed on at the beginning, and that Paul was not the one who invented it.

The argument from the creed is that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ was not raised, and if Christ was not raised, then the faith is futile and the readers are still in their sins, and if Christ was not raised, then the readers are of all people most to be pitied. The resurrection of Jesus is not optional. It is the thing that the faith stands or falls with.

The resurrection body is the thing Paul explains: "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body." The body in the resurrection is not the same body that was buried — the analogy of the seed shows this: the seed that is sown is not the plant that grows, but the plant grows from the seed, and the plant is continuous with the seed and different from the seed. The resurrection body is continuous with the buried body and different from it, and it is a "spiritual body" — a body animated by the Spirit, not by the mere life-force of the living body, but by the Spirit of God. The end of the chapter is the apocalyptic promise: "We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet." The chapter shows the apocalyptic frame that governed Paul's thinking throughout the letter, and the future the community was living toward, and the thing the Corinthians had denied and the thing Paul could not let them deny.

The letter to the Corinthians is the most revealing document in the New Testament about how the early Christians actually lived — a letter written to a specific community about specific problems, with the most detail about the community of any New Testament letter. It shows a real community in the middle of a Roman city, living in houses, eating meals together, speaking in tongues, prophesying, arguing about meat from the idol and marriage and who had the better teacher, divided by wealth and poverty, knowledge and weakness, the spiritual ones and the non-spiritual ones. It shows a community Paul had to correct and teach and warn and encourage.

The letter is not a systematic theology or a constitution for the church. It is a letter written to a community in trouble, from a man in Ephesus, in response to reports and questions, in the apocalyptic frame the letter itself reveals. Paul wrote it for Corinth in the middle of the first century. What he did not write is the letter that later tradition used to build the rules for the church on women and slavery and spiritual gifts and the Lord's Supper — that letter is in the pastoral letters, written decades later by someone else, and the book will return to this at the end.

The next chapter is the chapter on Ephesus, the two or three years in the great port city of Asia, the riot, the imprisonment we can only infer, and possibly the lowest point of his life.

Ephesus

The city looked up the mountain to a temple that was the largest the Greeks ever built. The temple of Artemis at Ephesus was built on a platform 115 metres long and 55 metres wide, surrounded by a double row of 127 columns each 18 metres high, most of them carved with figures of the goddess and her procession. The temple burned once, in 356 BCE, by a man named Herostratus who wanted to be remembered; it was rebuilt, and in Paul's time it was still the largest building in the Greek world and one of the seven wonders. The city itself sat on a plain between the river Cayster and the Aegean, with the mountain of Panaeus behind it, and possessed a deep-water harbour that silted continuously and had to be dredged regularly, which the Romans paid for, which meant the harbour was always in the news, which meant the city never forgot that it was a port.



Figure 7: Paul's third journey (Acts 18:23–21:16), most of it spent based in Ephesus, the city that anchors this chapter.
(Image: Roberto Reggi, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.)

Ephesus was the capital of the province of Asia in Paul's day. It was not the largest city in the province — Sardis and Pergamum were larger — but it was the administrative centre and the commercial centre and the religious centre, and it was the city that the road from the east reached first and the city that the shipping lanes served. It was also the city that gave its name to the whole region in the popular usage of the time: "Asia" in Paul's day often meant the province, and the city of Ephesus was its heart. The population is guessed at somewhere between a quarter of a million and a third of a million — enormous by the standards of the ancient world, one of the largest cities in the Roman empire, and the city that Rome had chosen to be the administrative capital of the province. The city had a theatre that held 25,000 people, a amphitheatre, a stadium, a state archive, a bouleuterion, a library, a series of great processional ways and public squares, and a civic culture that took public life seriously. This is the city to which Paul came, according to Acts, at the end of his second missionary journey, after he had left Corinth — and it is the city where he stayed for the longest continuous period of his life.

The arrival is described in Acts 18:19 and Acts 19:1-7, and the account is more specific than most of the travel narrative in Acts. Paul arrives at the synagogue in Ephesus, reasons with the Jews, is invited to stay longer but declines, and leaves his companions Prisca and Aquila there while he returns to the synagogue on the next Sabbath. Then he goes into the lecture hall of Tyrannus — the text says he taught there day by day for two years — and the result was that "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." The two years are the most specific period Paul spends anywhere in the record, and they are the source of the chapter's argument about the time and the place and the effect.



Figure 8: The Library of Celsus at Ephesus — built after Paul's time, but standing on the site of the city where he taught for roughly two years in a rented lecture hall, the longest stay of his public life. (Image: Bernard Gagnon, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.)

The lecture hall of Tyrannus is the first thing worth noticing. The Greek word is *scholē*, which meant a room used for instruction — a schoolroom, a place where a teacher held his classes. Tyrannus is named, which in itself is unusual in Acts, where teachers are usually unnamed. The school may have been a private school of rhetoric or philosophy, the kind of thing a city like Ephesus would have had, and Paul hired or borrowed the room for his daily teaching. The two-year teaching in a schoolroom, available to anyone who came, is the kind of detail that suggests an organized teaching operation, not a visit to a synagogue followed by house visits. This was the first time Paul had a base from which to teach a whole region, and he used it for two years, five days a week, from about noon to about dusk — the standard teaching hours of a school in the eastern Mediterranean in the Roman period.

The effect was regional. "All the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." This is the claim of Acts, and it is the most expansive claim Acts makes about any of Paul's missions. It may be the high note of the whole narrative before the riot and the decline. What it means in practice is not clear, but it means that the region of Asia — the province around Ephesus — became known to the Christian movement in a way that no region before had been. The letter to the Ephesians, if it is Paul's, later refers to the church as the body of Christ "which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" — a statement of cosmic scope from a city that had been the place where all the residents of Asia heard the word. The connection between the claim of Acts and the claim of the letter is not something that can be demonstrated, but it is the kind of thing that makes the source difference matter.

The disciples who knew only John's baptism are one of the most carefully described early Christian groups in the record, and the account of them is the account that shows Paul at his most deliberate and careful. When Paul arrives in Ephesus, the narrative says, he finds some disciples, asks them whether they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed, and they say they had not even heard

of the Holy Spirit. Paul asks what baptism they had received, and they say the baptism of John. Paul explains that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, and that John had promised that someone would come after him, and that this someone was Jesus. They are baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, Paul lays his hands on them, the Holy Spirit comes on them, and they speak in tongues and prophesy. There were about twelve of them.

This is the account of a group of people who had received some form of Christian teaching — the baptism of John, the promise of the one who was coming — without knowing that the one had come, and without knowing the full content of the message that Paul brought. It is the most specific group that Acts describes, and it is the most specific moment of Paul's carefulness about what the people in the movement actually believed. He did not assume that they were fine because they were baptised. He asked what they knew. He found they knew only the preparatory teaching. He explained what had happened. He gave them the full baptism. The twelve received the Spirit. This is Paul as teacher and pastor, not only as missionary and founder, and it is the kind of narrative detail that makes the Acts account worth reading alongside the letters.

The account is also the account that introduces the miracles. After the twelve receive the Spirit, Acts says, "God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul," and reports that handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched Paul's skin were taken to the sick and the diseased and the evil spirits departed from them. The description is precise and uncommon — Paul's personal garments become vehicles of healing — and it is the gateway to the story of the sons of Sceva, the story that functions as a limit and a warning.

The sons of Sceva are the family of a Jewish chief priest whose seven sons tried to use the name of Jesus to cast out evil spirits and failed. The spirit answered, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?" The man who had the evil spirit jumped on them, overpowered them, and wounded them, and they ran out of the house naked and ashamed. The story spread, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour, and many who had believed came and confessed and revealed their practices. The story of the sons of Sceva is the story that shows the authority of the name of Jesus as something that was not transferable by technique, and the limits of the practice as specific to the authority of the person who carried it. Paul could do what Paul did. The sons of Sceva could not.

The immediate aftermath is the burning of the books. "A number of those who had practiced magical arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver." The books were not burned by order of a magistrate or by the action of the community as a group. They were burned by the people who had practised the magical arts themselves, which is a detail that should be noted: the conversion did not come from the outside as a result of a command, but from the inside, from the people who had done the practising and who were now repudiating the practice. The value — fifty thousand drachma or pieces of silver — was enormous, the equivalent of years of wages, which is the kind of detail that gives the account its scale. A large group of people, with significant resources, changed their behaviour in response to what had happened. This is the high-water mark of the Ephesus mission, the point just before the riot.

The riot is the story of the city turning against the movement, and the reason for the riot is the reason for the chapter's claim about the threat that the mission posed. The story is told in Acts 19:23-41, and it is one of the longest single episodes in Acts outside the Jerusalem narrative. A silversmith named

Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, called the craftsmen together and addressed them with a speech that was both economic and religious. The economic point was that Paul had persuaded and turned away a large number of people, and that this would mean bad business for the silversmiths and for all the craftsmen who made their living from the temple trade. The religious point was that the temple of Artemis, who was worshipped throughout Asia and the world, was in danger of being counted as nothing, and that the goddess herself was in danger of being robbed of her majesty. The two points were not separate in the ancient world; the economic and the religious were the same point, because the livelihood of the craftsmen and the honour of the goddess were the same thing.

The speech was effective. The craftsmen were enraged, and the city was filled with confusion, and people rushed into the theatre — the great theatre of Ephesus, the one that held 25,000 people — crying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" The riot moved through the city, and Paul's companions Gaius and Aristarchus were seized and dragged into the theatre, and Paul wanted to go in to speak but the disciples would not let him. The riot was chaotic, with people shouting different things, most of whom did not know why they were shouting — "some were shouting one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together." The town clerk calmed the crowd and dismissed them, with the argument that Ephesus was the guardian of the temple and that there was no real legal case against Paul and that the men should be defended in the courts if they had a case, and that the riot was unnecessary and dangerous. The crowd dispersed.

The riot at Ephesus is the most dramatic episode of Paul's public life in Acts, and it is the episode that most clearly shows the movement as a threat to the economic and religious structure of a Roman city. The temple of Artemis was the economic centre of the city's artisan class, and the movement that cast doubt on the goddess was a movement that directly threatened the livelihood of the craftsmen who depended on the temple. This was not a theoretical theological disagreement. It was a dispute over money and livelihood and the identity of the city, and the riot was the city's response. The town clerk's role is the role that the Roman administrative apparatus played in these situations: he was the person who had to manage the crowd and get it to disperse because the riot itself was a threat to public order, and the Roman peace depended on public order.

What Paul himself says about Ephesus in the letters is less dramatic and more heavy. In 1 Corinthians, written from Ephesus, he says he will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost because a wide door for effective work has opened for him, and there are many adversaries — the language of a man who knew that the work was hard and the opposition was real. In 2 Corinthians, he speaks of the "affliction in Asia" so severe that he despaired of life itself, the account of being so utterly burdened beyond his strength that he felt he had received the sentence of death, and learned to be content in whatever state he was in. The affliction is not named specifically, and the book does not name it specifically — it is part of the Paul who does not explain everything, and the reader should not try to name what Paul did not name. But the affliction is placed by the chronology of the letters in the Ephesus period, and it is one of the things that makes the Ephesus period more than the riot in Acts. Paul was in a city that threw a riot against him, and he was in distress of a kind that almost killed him, and he wrote about both of these things and did not explain either of them in the way that a modern reader would want.

The imprisonment that Paul suffered — or may have suffered — is not recorded in the letters directly. The letters describe distress, danger, persecution, the repeated near-death experiences. Acts describes the riot. The book of Acts describes no imprisonment in Ephesus, only the riot. The Ephesian imprisonment is a thing that tradition asserts and that historians infer, because if Paul was in Ephesus for two or three years teaching publicly, and the city threw a riot against him, and there was an artisan class that had lost money, and there was a governor of the province — the proconsul of Asia — who would have had to deal with the disturbance, then an imprisonment of some kind is a plausible and even likely inference. But plausibility is not the same as certainty, and the book should not present the inference as if it were a fact. Paul may have been arrested. He may have been held for a time. He may have been threatened with arrest. Or he may have simply been told to leave, and the riot was the mechanism by which the city told him to go. The letters do not say. Acts does not say. The inference is reasonable, but it is an inference, and the reader should be told what the sources say and what they do not say.

The imprisonment question is connected to the letter to the Philippians, which is almost certainly a letter written from confinement of some kind — "I am in prison" is the repeated language, and the letter names Epaphroditus, who came to him from Philippi and fell ill, and whom Paul sent back. The letter's setting is confinement. Whether that confinement was in Rome, in Ephesus, in Caesarea, or somewhere else, is one of the oldest questions in the secondary literature, and the book should not resolve it here. What it matters for this chapter is that the confinement is real and that the mood of the letter — gratitude mixed with anxiety, affection for the church that sent help, the naming of the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche — is the mood of a man who was in a difficult place and writing to people he loved and who had sent him help. The confinement may have been in Ephesus. If it was, the Philippian letter belongs to this period, and the emotional texture of the period is the texture of that letter.

The letter to the Ephesians, if it is Paul's, is different from the accounts in Acts in a way that matters for the source method. Acts 19 gives the riot and the teaching and the miracles. The letter to the Ephesians gives cosmic Christology, the church as the body, the mystery of the gentiles, the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Christ as the cornerstone. The letter does not name Ephesus in a clear way — the opening verse says "to the saints who are in Ephesus" in some manuscripts, but many important manuscripts omit "who are in Ephesus," and the letter may have been a circular letter addressed to the churches of Asia in general, with Ephesus as the primary destination. The letter is the thing that makes Ephesus the city of cosmic Christology in the tradition, and the thing that connects the riot and the teaching to the theological claim that the church is the fullness of Christ and the body of which he is the head.

The authorship question should be stated but not dwelled on. The letter to the Ephesians has a vocabulary and syntax that differ from the undisputed letters in ways that trouble many scholars, and the letter may be from a later period, written by a disciple in Paul's name. The high cosmology of the letter and the absence of the specific Ephesian conflicts that the other letters describe suggest a letter written at a different time or in a different frame. The book should note the dispute and explain that the letter to the Ephesians is one of the disputed letters, and that its content is different from what the other letters say about Ephesus and about the region of Asia, and that the riot and the two years of

teaching in the lecture hall are the primary source for the Ephesus story, and the letter to the Ephesians is the source that requires the most caution.

The two years in the lecture hall are the most specific period of Paul's life that the sources describe, and they are the period in which Ephesus became the place where the mission became a regional movement rather than a single community. Paul taught day by day in the schoolroom of Tyrannus for two years, and during that time the word spread throughout the region of Asia. This is the period that made Ephesus the centre of Pauline Christianity in the eastern Mediterranean, and the period that made Ephesus the city to which later tradition looked back as the place of the apostles' work. Paul afterwards sent Timothy to Ephesus to correct abuses in the church — a passage that may be part of the letter to the Ephesians or part of 1 Timothy, depending on who wrote the letter — and the church at Ephesus appears in Revelation as the church entrusted with a message from the risen Christ. The Ephesus mission was the mission that had the most visible results during Paul's lifetime, and it was the mission that left the biggest trace in the later tradition, and it was the mission that ended with a riot and probably a departure and probably a period of confinement, and it was the period that may have been the lowest point of his life and the period from which he recovered only partially before the next crisis arrived.

The riot at Ephesus is the thing that the book should remember as the shape of the movement's relationship to the Roman world: not a philosophical debate but a dispute over money and the honour of a goddess, and the city's response to a movement that threatened both. The movement that Paul had built up in two years of teaching in a schoolroom became a threat to the economic base of a section of the city's population, and the city responded with the theatre and the shouting and the violence, and the Roman administrative apparatus — the town clerk — had to manage it. This was the relationship between the Christian movement and the Roman world: not a conspiracy or a threat to the empire, but a nuisance and a local problem that the empire managed as it managed local problems, with the town clerk and the courts and the threat of legal action. The empire was not uniform in its response. It was local. It was specific to the city and the situation. And Ephesus was the place where the response was the most dramatic.

What remains after the riot and the possible imprisonment and the eventual departure is the Ephesus that Paul left behind — the community in the lecture hall, the twelve who had received the Spirit, the people who burned their books, the people who were part of the movement that had grown through the region of Asia. The city is the place where the next chapter's people were already at work — Prisca and Aquila had been there, Timothy was there, and the network that the next chapter describes was already in motion — and the community that Paul left in Ephesus was the community that he later sent Timothy to correct, and the community that appears in Revelation as one of the seven churches that received a letter from the risen Christ. The Ephesus mission was the mission that had the most visible success during Paul's lifetime, and it was also the mission that had the most dramatic opposition, and the combination of the two is the thing that makes Ephesus the city that occupies the middle of the book's second part and the city that the chapter about the people and the network will need to return to.

The network of people Paul worked with — the colleagues, the co-workers, the patrons, the couriers, the ones who carried the letters and the collection and the disputes — is the subject of the next chapter. Ephesus was the place where several of them were, and the place where that network began

to take its final shape before the crises of the Jerusalem meeting, the collection, and the row at Antioch that the remaining chapters in this part will describe.

The People

The network is the thing. Paul's life was a series of letters sent to people, and the people who received them, and the people who carried them, and the people who opened them and read them aloud to rooms full of people who did not know Paul and were hearing him for the first time, and the people who answered them, and the people who argued about them, and the people who carried them back to Paul, and the people who argued with Paul, and the people who were his colleagues and his friends and his enemies and the people whose names he kept in his head and whose faces he could remember and whose churches he had founded and whose problems he was trying to solve. The network is the network — the body of people through which the mission moved and by whom it was sustained and who made it possible and who made it costly and who made it succeed and who made it fail, and who made it more than the life of a single man.

The chapter is the chapter the brief identifies as the second of the three where women should be treated as structural rather than as an aside, and the chapter should start with the structural fact that the people who made the mission work were not only the men who were the famous names in the tradition, but the women whose names appear in the letters and the Acts narrative and who carried the money and opened the houses and led the communities and spoke in the meetings and whose names are remembered or forgotten depending on what the later tradition did with them. The network is the network of people, and the people are both men and women, and the women are named and the women are unnamed and the women are patrons and the women are co-workers and the women are the ones whose names were written into the letters and the ones whose names were not written into the letters for reasons that are not known.

Prisca and Aquila are the couple who appear throughout the letters as a unit — Prisca always listed before Aquila, which in itself is a small but significant detail, because in the ancient world the husband was usually named first, and the habit of naming Prisca first is the kind of thing that tells you something about her standing in the partnership and in Paul's estimation. They appear in Romans 16:3-4, where Paul calls them his "fellow workers in Christ Jesus" and says that they "risked their necks" for his life, a phrase that suggests a danger they had faced and survived, the kind of danger that comes from being associated with a movement that the authorities did not like and from being in the same place as Paul when the authorities came for him. They appear in 1 Corinthians 16:19, where they are sending greetings to the Corinthians from their home in Ephesus — "Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you their greetings" — which means that they had a house church, the kind of community that the previous chapter described, and that they hosted it in their house. They appear in 2 Timothy 4:19, in the disputed letter, where Paul sends greetings — the distancing of the name from the fact of the relationship is one of the reasons the letter is disputed, and the book should note the reason for the caution without making too much of it. They also appear in Acts 18, where they were the couple Paul met in Corinth, Jews exiled from Rome by the emperor Claudius's edict against the Jews, who shared Paul's trade of tentmaking and whose house Paul stayed in while he worked at his trade in Corinth.

The couple is the example of the kind of relationship that the mission was built on — a household that was also a workshop, a workshop that was also a church, a church that was also a host of strangers and a place where the mission happened. Prisca and Aquila were the ones who moved through the cities of the eastern Mediterranean with the kind of ease that the mission required — from Rome to Corinth to Ephesus to Rome again, following the exile, the work, the church, the letters that needed to be carried. They were the people who were always there, the ones who appear at the background of the letter-writing and the letter-carriers and the house-church hosting and the workshop-work and the danger-taking, and who were never, as far as the letters say, in a position of superior authority over Paul, but who were his fellow workers in the sense that they shared the work and the risk and the life of the movement. This is the kind of relationship that the book should describe without making a thesis out of it, because the structural point is that the mission was worked in partnerships and households and workshops and that Prisca and Aquila were among the most visible of those partnerships and that the woman's name came first in the partnership more often than not.

The danger they "risked their necks" for — the Greek phrase is *thyran tēs psyches*, the threshold of their lives, the point of death — is the kind of phrase that Paul uses for people who faced real danger on his behalf. The danger may have been in Ephesus, in the riot over the temple of Artemis, or it may have been earlier, or later. The phrase does not specify the time or place, and the book should not specify the time or place if Paul did not. But the phrase is one of the things that shows that Prisca and Aquila were not simply host and hostess of a house church. They were people who faced danger for Paul's sake, and the danger was real and the risk was real, and the phrase is one of the things that makes the network of people the kind of thing it was — people who were at risk for the mission and who faced it.

Timothy is the person Paul chose as his delegate and sent to the places where Paul could not be, and the person Paul trusted with the correction of churches and the organisation and the letter-carrying and the dispute-resolution and the pastoral oversight. Timothy appears in Acts as the young man from Lystra, the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father, circumcised by Paul so that he could enter the synagogues and preach to the Jews without obstacle — the decision that the brief identifies as the kind of thing that the circumcision chapter will return to, because the decision to circumcise Timothy was made by Paul, the same Paul who refused to have Titus circumcised, and the difference between the two decisions is the kind of thing that the book should describe carefully when it comes to the question that split everything. Timothy appears in the letters as the one to whom 1 and 2 Timothy are addressed — the two letters that are almost certainly not from Paul but from a later period, and that are addressed to Timothy as the one who was in Ephesus correcting abuses — and the two letters are the source that should be treated with extreme caution in this chapter, because they are the source that describes Timothy as the one responsible for the correction of the Ephesian church and the one whose task was to appoint elders and to teach and to hold the faith and to avoid the false teaching, and the book should note that this picture of Timothy is the picture from the disputed letters and should not simply be taken over without noting the problem.

The undisputed letters describe Timothy differently. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul sends Timothy to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith, and to check on their situation because Paul could not bear to be away from them. Timothy returns with good news, and Paul writes the first

letter in response to what Timothy brought back. In 2 Corinthians, Paul says he urged Titus and our brother to go to the Corinthians, and that he has confidence in them, and that they are teachers of the good news — Titus is a co-worker in the same kind of relationship as Timothy, and the two are the ones Paul delegates to. In Philippians, Paul says he hopes to send Timothy soon, and that he has no one else of the same kind, someone who genuinely cares for the welfare of the Philippians as Paul does — "for they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with his father he served with me in the work of the gospel." The picture is of a young man who was genuinely faithful and genuinely devoted to Paul and to the churches, and who was credible enough that Paul could send him to correct a church that was in trouble and expect him to be able to handle the dispute.

Timothy is the example of the kind of person Paul depended on for the practical work of the mission — the letter-carrying, the visitation, the correction, the appointment of leaders, the representation of the apostle in places where the apostle could not be. The network of people included those who were in the position of doing this kind of work, and Timothy was the most prominent of those, and the ones who were younger and less established and still being trained in the work of the mission. The book should not turn Timothy into the model of the pastoral ideal that the later tradition does, because the later tradition — the pastoral letters and the institutional church — used Timothy and Titus as the models for the bishop and the elder and the pastor, and the book should refuse that reading and restore the picture of Timothy as the young delegate whose job was to do what Paul needed done in the places where Paul was not.

Titus is the person who has even less of a letter addressed to him, and the letter that bears his name — 2 Timothy is to Timothy, but the letter to Titus is the one addressed to Titus — is one of the disputed letters, and the book should note the problem and move on. In the undisputed letters, Titus appears in 2 Corinthians as the one who was sent to the Corinthians and who was the bearer of the letter of tears — the severe letter, the one that Paul wrote in his anguish and sent with Titus, and who returned with a report of the church's restoration and repentance and relief. Paul describes Titus as a brother, a partner in the work, a co-worker, the one who had been sent to collect the contribution for the Jerusalem church and who had been the one who had stirred up the Corinthians to give. Titus is the person who was the middleman of the collection, the one who gathered the money and carried it and organised the giving, and the person whose work made the collection possible in the specific way that the Corinthian church needed to be organized to give.

Titus is the person whose most important appearance is in the collection chapter — the chapter 22 that the book will write later — because the collection is the thing that required the network of people to work, and Titus was the person who did the practical work of making the collection happen. Before that, Titus appears in 2 Corinthians 7 and 8 as the one who came to Paul and comforted him with his news, and who was sent back to Corinth with a new letter to restore the relationship and to urge the Corinthians to complete the gift they had begun to give. Titus is the person who was trusted with the practical work of the mission and the practical work of the arguments and the practical work of the collection, and who was sent back and forth between the apostle and the communities, carrying the letters and the money and the arguments and the trust.

Titus is the example of the kind of person the network needed — not the famous teacher or the famous apostle, but the one who could move between the cities and the churches and the arguments

and the money and the people, and who could represent the apostle and carry the apostle's authority and do the work that the apostle could not do personally because the apostle was in one place and the work was in another. The network of people included these practical intermediaries, and Titus was one of the most important of them, and the book should restore the picture of Titus as the practical broker rather than the model of the pastoral elder that the later tradition makes him.

Phoebe is the person who carried the letter to the Romans. She is the one named in Romans 16:1-2 as the deacon — the Greek word is *diakonos*, the same word used for "deacon" and "servant" and "minister" in the letters — of the church at Cenchreae, the eastern harbour of Corinth, and the patron of many, including Paul himself. She was the one to whom Paul entrusted the letter to the Romans, the letter that he wrote to a church he had never met, and the letter that he had to explain himself to and defend his gospel to, and the letter that he had to send to a church that had no idea who he was or what he believed or why he was writing. Phoebe carried this letter. She was the courier. The courier was the person who carried the letter from the apostle to the church, and who delivered it to the church, and who read it aloud to the church, and who answered the questions that the church had, and who explained the apostle's argument, and who represented the apostle in the absence of the apostle. The courier was the person who made the letter possible as a communication between two places that were not connected except by the letter and the courier.

Phoebe is the example of the kind of person the network needed for this role — a woman from Cenchreae, a deacon of the church there, a patron of many, someone Paul trusted to carry his most important letter and to represent him and to explain him and to answer the questions that the Romans would have. She is the woman whose name Paul remembers and whose role he names specifically — "receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well." The patron — the Greek word is *prostatis*, the female form of the word for patron, the protector, the benefactor — is the person who used her resources to support the mission and the people in it, and Paul names her specifically as the one who had supported him. The patron is the person whose economic role made the mission possible, and the woman who was the patron is the woman whose economic role Paul names and whose economic role the book should name, because the structural point is that women's economic power was part of the network that made the mission work, and Phoebe is one of the most visible of those women.

Phoebe is the person who connects the letter to the Romans to the network of people in the most direct way — she carried it. The letter that the next chapter — the chapter on Romans — will describe as the most careful and the most theological and the most important of Paul's letters, the letter that the book will argue is the point of the whole thing in chapters 9-11, was carried by Phoebe, the woman from Cenchreae. The letter that Paul wrote to a church he had never met was carried by a woman who was the patron of many and the deacon of the church at Cenchreae, and the book should restore the picture of the letter and the courier together, because the letter and the courier are the pair that the mission required — the argument and the person who carried it, and the person who explained it and the person who answered the questions.

Onesimus is the runaway slave who appears in the letter to Philemon, the letter that the book will describe as the one letter about slavery in the chapter on Philemon. In this chapter, Onesimus is the person who appears in the network as the runaway whom Paul met in prison — the letter says Paul

met him in prison, and that Paul became his father in the Lord, and that Paul sends him back to Philemon, his master, with the letter asking Philemon to receive him as Paul would have him received, and not to receive him as a slave but as a brother. The letter is the argument about slavery that the book will deal with carefully, and the book should not resolve the question of what Paul says or does not say about slavery here, but should note that Onesimus is the person who appears in the network as the runaway, and as the brother in the Lord, and as the one whom Paul sends back to his master, and as the one who appears in the tradition later as the bishop of Ephesus — the tradition that is the kind of thing that the book should mention and then leave as the tradition, without making it into a fact if it is not a fact.

Onesimus is the example of the kind of person the network included at its most marginal and its most loaded — the runaway slave, the person who was a slave to the point that the law and the custom of the Roman world said he was a slave, and the person who was a brother in the Lord to the point that Paul sends him back as a brother and asks Philemon to receive him as Paul would have him received. The network of people included Onesimus, and the book should name him and describe him as the person in the network who is the most direct challenge to the status system of the Roman world, and who is the person whose story the book will return to in the chapter on Philemon, and who is the person whose name the tradition remembered later as the bishop of Ephesus — the story that is the kind of thing the book should mention and leave as the tradition.

Junia is the person whose name appears in Romans 16:7, where Paul sends greetings to "Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners — they are well known to the apostles, and they are outstanding among the apostles." The name is Junia — the female form — in the manuscripts, and the name has been the subject of the longest and most contested argument in modern Pauline scholarship about a single name, because the question is whether Paul is naming a woman who was outstanding among the apostles, or whether the name is a man named Junias, the male form, which most modern scholars have insisted on for the better part of a century, and which modern scholarship has mostly abandoned in the face of the manuscript evidence and the linguistic evidence and the fact that the same name was a known woman's name in the Roman period. The book should describe the argument briefly and honestly and then resolve it in the direction of the woman, because the manuscript evidence is on the side of the woman, and because the woman is the reading that makes the most sense in the context of the network of women who appear in Romans 16 and in the other letters, and because the woman is the reading that the book is committed to restoring.

Junia is the person who is "outstanding among the apostles" — the Greek is *episēmos tēs apostolōn*, the phrase that caused the trouble, the phrase that the later tradition wanted to read as a man, and the phrase that the book reads as a woman. The phrase has been read as a description of Andronicus and Junia as being prominent among the apostles — not as apostles themselves but as known to the apostles and well regarded by them — and the alternative reading has been read as "they are well known to the apostles, and they are outstanding among the apostles" as two statements about the same two people. The difference between the readings is not large in Greek, but it is large in what it implies, because if Junia is outstanding among the apostles, and Junia is a woman, then Paul is naming a woman who is outstanding among the apostles, and the woman who is outstanding among the apostles is part of the network of people who made the mission work, and the woman who is outstanding among the apostles is one of the people the chapter is about. The name Junia is the name

that the book reads as Junia the woman, and the name that the book reads as the woman who was outstanding among the apostles, and the name that the book reads as the woman who was part of the network that carried the mission, and the name that the book reads as the name that the later tradition tried to suppress by turning the woman into a man — the kind of thing that the book should describe carefully and move on, because the point of the network chapter is not the Junia controversy but the network of women and men who made the mission work.

The network includes Junia, the woman who was outstanding among the apostles. The network includes Andronicus, her kinsman. The network includes the two who were fellow prisoners — the phrase Paul uses about them, the same phrase he uses about himself and about others, the formula of shared suffering and shared risk. The network includes them in the list of greetings in Romans 16, the list that is the most visible inventory of the network in the letters, and the letter that opens with thanksgiving for the people and the network and the churches that exist in the house, and the letter that names Phoebe and Prisca and Aquila and Andronicus and Junia and Ampliatus and Urbanus and Stachys and Apelles and the household of Aristobulus and the household of Narcissus and Tryphaena and Tryphosa and Persis and Rufus and his mother and Asyncritus and Phlegon and Hermes and Patrobas and Hermas and the brothers with them and Philologus and Julia and Nereus and his sisters and Olympas and the saints with them — twenty-six named people in the first sixteen verses, a list that is the catalogue of the network, the catalogue of the women and the men, the catalogue of the people who made the mission possible and who made it risky and who made it succeed and who made it fail and who made it more than the life of a single man. The list is the list that the book should return to in the chapter on the silencing of women, because the list is the principal source for the argument that women ran the Pauline churches and that the women's names were in the letter and in the church and in the network, and that the later tradition removed them from the centre and put them in the margins and used the pastoral letters and the household codes to argue that women should be silent and subordinate, when Paul named them as fellow workers and patrons and outstanding among the apostles and co-workers in the work of the gospel. The book should describe the list and then note that the list is the list that the later tradition would silence.

The network is the thing the book has been tracing through the city chapters — the people who hosted the house churches, the people who carried the letters, the people who brought the money, the people who debated the questions, the people who were Timothy and Titus and Phoebe and Prisca and Aquila and Lydia and Junia and Andronicus and Euodia and Syntyche and the unnamed ones and the women at the river in Philippi and the women who prophesied in Corinth and the women who co-worked in the gospel and the people who risked their necks and the people who ran the workshops and the people who opened their houses and the people who did the work that made the mission possible. The network is not a side of the story. It is the story. The mission was not a movement of one man and his ideas. It was a movement of people and their houses and their workshops and their money and their risk and their arguments and their letters and their couriers and their corrections and their collection and their disputes and their departures and their returns, and the book has been tracing that network through the chapters on the cities and the roads and the workshop and the front room and Philippi and Corinth and Ephesus, and the next chapter — the chapter on the question that split everything — will describe the network in its most heated form, the network of people who disagreed about circumcision and food law and table fellowship and the question of whether the non-Jews had to become Jews first, and the network of people who argued about it and who wrote letters

about it and who sent delegates about it and who collected money about it and who confronted each other about it, and the network that made the argument of the book the argument it is — the argument about the cost of being right, alone, and unwelcome almost everywhere, and the argument about the people who made the cost possible and the people who made the mission more than the life of a single man.

Part Four: The Fight

The Question

The question that split everything was not theological in the way modern readers mean it. It was not an argument about the nature of Christ or the mechanics of salvation or the number of persons in a trinity that had not yet been invented. It was not about whether Jesus was divine or whether he rose from the dead or whether the tomb was empty. It was about a table.

The question was: do the people who are not Jews have to become Jews before they can sit at the table with the people who are Jews?

The question sounds simple. It sounds like the kind of thing that has a simple answer. It does not have a simple answer. It has the kind of answer that breaks a movement in two and takes twenty years of letters and confrontations and three visits to Jerusalem and one public row with Peter and a collection of money that never arrives and a man's life ending in custody to work through.

The reason the question has no simple answer is that the question was not abstract. It was concrete. The question was about whether a non-Jew could eat supper with a Jew. The question was about whether a non-Jew had to be circumcised to be part of the people of God. The question was about whether the non-Jew had to keep the food laws and the festival calendar and the Sabbath and the purity rules that the Jew had kept all his life and that the Jew had been taught were the boundary that kept Israel distinct and holy and safe.

The question was about the boundary. And the boundary was the thing that kept Paul's world in shape.

The boundary needs to be understood before the question can be understood.

The boundary was not a line in the sand or a law code that people studied and argued about. The boundary was the shape of ordinary life. It was the food you ate and the people with whom you ate it and the hours you kept on the Sabbath and the way you were circumcised if you were male and the way you did not mix with the unclean if you were careful and the way the land and the temple and the law and the people and the story were all of a piece and had been for a thousand years.

A Jew in the first century lived inside a world that was set apart by design. The food laws were not arbitrary restrictions. They were a daily practice — every meal was a reminder that you were not eating like the people around you, that you were part of a people who ate differently, that the boundary was enacted three times a day at the table. The food laws made the boundary visible in the mouth and the stomach. The Sabbath made the boundary visible in the calendar — one day in seven was different, and the differentness was not optional, it was commanded. Circumcision made the boundary visible in the body — the physical mark that was given to infant boys and that set them apart from the boys of the nations around them. The temple made the boundary visible in space — the place where the presence of the God of Israel lived, and where the sacrifices were made, and where the people gathered for the pilgrimage festivals, and where the Romans had already placed

their standards and had already backed them out after a riot, and where the presence of the emperor's army was a reminder that the boundary was under pressure from outside.

The boundary held the world together. It was not a fence around an institution. It was the structure of a life. A Jew who kept the boundary was living inside the story of Israel — the story of the God who called Abraham out of Ur, who delivered Israel from Egypt, who gave the law at Sinai, who gave the land, who built the temple, who had already sent Israel into exile and brought Israel back, and who had now, in Paul's own reading, sent Israel a Messiah who was the fulfilment of the story and not the end of it.

The boundary was the thing that made Israel Israel. The question that split everything was the question of whether that boundary had to be crossed to become part of the people of the Messiah.

The movement that Paul had been part of and then had tried to destroy and then had been sent to join had begun inside the boundary. Jesus was a Jew. His disciples were Jews. The women who followed him were Jews. The feeding of the five thousand was the feeding of Jews. The last supper was a Passover meal. The tomb was in Jerusalem, the city of the temple, the city of the boundary. The first community in Jerusalem was a Jewish community that continued to keep the temple and the law and the Sabbath and the food laws and the calendar.

The boundary had not been crossed at the beginning. The movement had begun as a Jewish movement, a Jewish sect, a group of Jews who believed that the Messiah had come and that the story was complete and that the kingdom of Israel's God had arrived. The movement had started inside the boundary and had not yet stepped outside it.

What happened was that non-Jews started joining.

They joined in the mixed cities of the diaspora. They joined in Antioch, where the Greek-speaking Jews and the Gentile God-fearers and the non-Jews who were curious about the new movement lived close enough to one another that the boundary was already porous. They joined in the cities of Asia and Macedonia and Achaia, where the synagogue had a fringe of God-fearers and the God-fearers became Christians and the Christians brought their non-Jew friends and the non-Jew friends became Christians and the boundary that had been a single line was now a line that people were crossing every day.

The crossing of the boundary was not a decision made at a meeting. It was the slow, lived, practical reality of the mission as it moved out of Jerusalem and into the cities. It was not planned. It was the consequence of a Jewish Messiah movement going to the nations — which was what the Messiah movement had always expected to do. The prophets had said the nations would come to Israel's God. The mission to the nations was the thing Israel's scriptures had promised. But the question was: when the nations come, do they come as nations, or do they come by becoming Jews first?

That was the question. And the question had no simple answer because the scriptures did not give a simple answer and the practice of the movement had not yet settled the question and the two Jerusalem leaders — James and Peter — seemed to be on one side of the question and Paul was on the other side, and the side he was on was not the side that said the boundary did not matter, but the side that said the non-Jew did not have to cross it to be part of the people of the Messiah.

The difference between the two sides needs to be stated carefully, because it is the difference that the modern reader will otherwise mis-read.

The side that said the non-Jew had to become a Jew first was not the side that said the Messiah was only for Jews. It was the side that said the Messiah had come for the people of Israel and that the people of Israel were defined by the boundary, and that anyone who wanted to be part of the Messiah's people had to become part of the people of Israel, which meant becoming a Jew, which meant crossing the boundary.

This side was not malice. It was the most natural reading of the movement's origin. Jesus was a Jew. The disciples were Jews. The law was given to Israel. The temple was Israel's. The Messiah was Israel's Messiah. The non-Jew who wanted to join the movement was asking to join a Jewish movement, and the normal answer to that question was: become a Jew. That was what the proselyte did. That was what the God-fearer did if he wanted to go all the way. That was what the boundary implied.

The side that said the non-Jew did not have to become a Jew was not the side that said the boundary did not matter. Paul never said the law was abolished. He never said the food laws were worthless. He never said circumcision was a meaningless physical mark. He said, in his own letters, that the law was holy and the commandment was holy and the people of Israel were his brothers and his kinsmen according to the flesh and that the gifts and the calling of God were irrevocable. He said these things in the letter to the Romans, in the argument about Israel that most readers skip.

What Paul said was that the non-Jew did not have to become a Jew to be part of the people of the Messiah. He said that the non-Jew was grafted in, that the olive tree of Israel had wild branches grafted in, that the boundary of the law had not been abolished but had been redefined around the Messiah and not around the Torah as the entry requirement. He said that the non-Jew could be part of the people of the Messiah while remaining a non-Jew — eating non-Jewish food, not keeping the Sabbath in the Jewish way, not being circumcised, and still being part of the people of the Messiah.

The difference between the two sides was not the difference between keeping the boundary and abolishing the boundary. The difference was the difference between making the non-Jew cross the boundary to enter and making the Messiah the boundary around which the community was gathered. The difference was the difference between "become a Jew to join us" and "come as you are, because the Messiah has already opened the table."

The difference was enormous. It was the difference between a movement that remained a Jewish sect and a movement that became a multi-ethnic community that included non-Jews who had not become Jews. It was the difference between a movement that was small and a movement that was large. It was the difference between a movement that was contained by a boundary and a movement that crossed the boundary.

The most concrete expression of the question was the table.

Table fellowship was the place where the boundary became a meal. The Jew did not eat with the non-Jew because the non-Jew ate food that the Jew could not eat — meat that had not been slaughtered properly, food that had been offered to idols, wine that was not kosher, the open defilement of a table where the purity laws were not observed. A Jew who sat at a common table with a non-Jew was compromised. The compromise was not abstract. It was the act of eating what the other person had prepared, of accepting the hospitality of the other person, of crossing the boundary in the body and the mouth and the social relationship.

Table fellowship was the concrete thing that the question was about. The question was: can a Jew and a non-Jew sit at the same table and eat the same meal, or does the table have to be divided, or does the non-Jew have to eat like a Jew before sitting at the table?

The question was not about theology. It was about dinner. It was about who could eat with whom. It was about whether the community could eat together.

This is the reason the question split everything. A community that cannot eat together is a community that is divided at the most ordinary level of life. A community divided at the table is a community divided everywhere — in the house, at the meeting, in the streets, in the relationships that hold the community together. A community that cannot eat together is a community that is not a single community but two communities that share a name.

Paul's answer to the table question was that the non-Jew did not have to become a Jew to eat at the table. He said, in Galatians, that the other side's demand that the non-Jew be circumcised was a different gospel, a gospel that required the non-Jew to become a Jew to be saved, a gospel that he refused to accept and refused to let the non-Jew accept. He said that the non-Jew was free from the requirement of the Torah, free from the boundary, free to eat at the table as a non-Jew.

But Paul's answer was not the answer that the Jerusalem leadership accepted, at least not without qualifications. James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, seems to have been the one who insisted that the non-Jew keep certain practical requirements — no food sacrificed to idols, no blood, no meat of strangled animals, no unlawful sexual union — the four requirements of Acts 15, the requirements that the Jerusalem council imposed on the non-Jews who were turning to the Lord. The four requirements were not circumcision. They were not the full Torah. They were a practical table-fellowship compromise — the things that would make it possible for a Jew and a non-Jew to eat together without defilement.

The compromise was significant. It meant that the Jerusalem leadership had accepted, in principle, that the non-Jew did not have to become a Jew. It meant that the question had been answered at the council in Jerusalem, and the answer was "no, the non-Jew does not have to become a Jew, but the non-Jew does have to respect the table-fellowship requirements that make shared eating possible."

The compromise was also not enough for Paul. Paul thought that the compromise was a step toward the full answer — the non-Jew is free — but Paul also thought that the compromise was being used by the "circumcision party" to pressure the non-Jews to become Jews after all, because any requirement at all was a step in the direction of the Torah as the entry requirement, and any step in that direction was the wrong direction. Paul thought that the table was wide open by the Messiah, and that any limit on the table was a limit that the Jerusalem leadership was imposing on the freedom that the Messiah had given.

This was the disagreement. The Jerusalem leadership — James, Peter, John — had agreed that the non-Jew did not have to become a Jew. Paul had agreed with that answer in principle. But Paul thought that the compromise was a compromise too far, because it implied that the non-Jew was not fully free, and that the freedom the Messiah had given was not the freedom the Messiah had given. Paul thought that the table was fully open, and that any limit on the table was a limit on the gospel.

The disagreement was not settled. It was managed, if it was managed at all, by the four requirements, by the agreement of the council, by the letters that were sent to the churches explaining the

agreement. But the disagreement did not go away. It surfaced again in Antioch, when Peter came to Antioch and ate with the non-Jews and then stopped eating with the non-Jews when the circumcision party arrived, and Paul confronted Peter to his face over it. It surfaced again in the letters to the Galatians and to the Corinthians, when the circumcision party teachers came to the churches and taught that the non-Jews had to be circumcised after all. It surfaced again in the collection, when the non-Jews were sending money to Jerusalem and the question was whether the money would be accepted and whether the Jerusalem leadership would accept the non-Jews as full members of the people of the Messiah.

The disagreement was the thing that split everything. It was not settled. It was the thing that the book will trace through the remaining chapters of this part — the Jerusalem meeting, the row at Antioch, the letter to the Galatians, the rivals who came to the churches and taught the wrong thing, and the collection that was supposed to reconcile the two sides and that was the thing that Paul bet his life on and that, in the end, may have been the thing that killed him.

The stakes of the question were not abstract. They were concrete and enormous.

The stake was whether the movement would be a Jewish sect or a multi-ethnic community. If the non-Jew had to become a Jew first, the movement would be small. It would be limited to the people who could become Jews — the men by circumcision, the women by conversion, the households by the decision of the male head. The movement would remain a Jewish sect, and the Jewish sect would remain a Jewish sect, and the mission to the nations would be limited to the nations that could become Jews.

If the non-Jew did not have to become a Jew first, the movement would be large. It would include any non-Jew who wanted to join, without the requirement of circumcision, without the requirement of the food laws, without the requirement of the boundary. The movement would be multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious in its background, and the mission to the nations would be the mission to the nations that the scriptures had promised.

The stake was the shape of the movement. The stake was the size of the movement. The stake was whether the movement would be a small Jewish sect or a large multi-ethnic community.

The stake was also the relationship between the two sides of the movement — the Jerusalem side and the Pauline side. The Jerusalem side was the side of James and Peter and John, the mother church, the apostles, the pillars, the ones who had known the historical Jesus, the ones who had been the first to believe, the ones who had the authority of the beginning. The Pauline side was the side of Paul, the outsider, the late arrival, the one who had persecuted the movement and then been sent to it, the one who had the authority of the call, the one who had been sent to the nations.

The relationship between the two sides was not simply a disagreement about the Torah. It was a disagreement about authority. The Jerusalem side had the authority of the beginning — of the historical Jesus, of the first community, of the apostles who had been with him. The Pauline side had the authority of the call — of the revelation to Paul, of the commission to the nations, of the apostleship that was not dependent on the historical Jesus's personal call of the Twelve.

The two sides had different authority, and the disagreement was not simply about the Torah but about whose authority was the authority that defined the movement. The Jerusalem side thought the authority was the authority of the beginning — the apostles, the pillars, the mother church. The

Pauline side thought the authority was the authority of the call — the revelation to Paul, the commission to the nations, the apostleship that was independent of the beginning.

The two sides both thought they were right. The book should let the reader see that both sides had a point, and that neither side was simply wrong. The Jerusalem side had the authority of the beginning, and the beginning was a Jewish beginning, and the movement had begun inside the boundary, and the people of the beginning had kept the boundary, and the request that the non-Jew respect the boundary was not crazy. The Pauline side had the authority of the call, and the call was to the nations, and the nations were not Jews, and the non-Jew was not required to become a Jew to join the mission, and the freedom the Messiah had given was the freedom the Messiah had given.

The disagreement was not simple. The reader should be told that it was not simple. The reader should be told that the book is not going to resolve it by saying that one side was right and the other side was wrong. The book is going to trace the disagreement through the letters and the Acts narrative and the council and the row and the collection and the end, and the reader will see that the disagreement was the thing that the movement was wrestling with for twenty years and that the disagreement was never fully settled and that the disagreement is the thing that the book is about in this part.

The way Paul argues the question in Galatians is the way the reader should see it — not as a theological argument, but as a man losing things and fighting for them.

The letter to the Galatians is the angriest letter in the New Testament. It is written by a man who thinks he is losing the churches he founded. It is written by a man who is furious at the people who are persuading his churches to accept a different gospel. It is written by a man who is defending his own authority and his own gospel and his own apostleship against the men who have come to the churches after him and told the non-Jews that they have to be circumcised.

The letter is angry. It is also, in the reader's judgment, the letter where Paul is most himself — most vivid, most human, most alive in his commitment and his fear and his anger and his love for the churches he founded. The book should treat the letter as it is: the angriest document in the New Testament, the document of a man who thinks he is losing, the document where the question that split everything is being fought over in the most concrete terms.

The letter should be walked through in the next chapter. For now, the point is that the question that split everything was not an abstract question. It was the question of the Galatians — whether the non-Jews who had believed the gospel Paul preached were going to be told by the circumcision party that they had to become Jews after all, and whether Paul's churches were going to accept that teaching, and whether Paul's authority and his gospel and his apostleship were going to survive the pressure from Jerusalem.

The question that split everything was the question that Paul fought over for twenty years. It was the question that the Jerusalem council tried to answer. It was the question that surfaced in Antioch when Peter ate with the non-Jews and then stopped. It was the question that Paul fought in Galatians, in Corinthians, in Romans, in the collection, in the letters to the churches, in the visits, in the confrontations, in the men he sent as delegates, in the letters he carried, in the money he collected, in the life he bet on the answer.

The question was not settled. It was the thing that split the movement and shaped it and cost Paul his life and left the movement with the shape it had — a movement that had answered the question in

principle but never fully settled the consequences of the answer, a movement that was multi-ethnic and also under pressure from the Jerusalem side, a movement that had the table open but also had the compromise of the four requirements, a movement that had Paul's answer and also had the Jerusalem side's answer, and that lived with the tension for the rest of its existence.

The chapter is the first chapter of Part Four. The next chapter is the Jerusalem meeting — the meeting with James, Peter, and John, and the difference between Paul's account of it and Acts' account of it, and the reason the difference matters.

The question that split everything was the question of whether the non-Jew had to become a Jew to be part of the people of the Messiah. The question was about circumcision and food law and table fellowship and the boundary of Israel and the shape of the movement and the authority of the beginning and the authority of the call and the freedom the Messiah had given and the men who came to the churches and taught the wrong thing and the collection that was supposed to reconcile the two sides and the life Paul bet on the answer. The question was not abstract. It was the most concrete and most consequential question the movement faced, and the book will trace it through the remaining chapters of this part, through the Jerusalem meeting, the row at Antioch, the letter to the Galatians, the rivals, and the collection.

Jerusalem



Figure 9: A modern scale model of Jerusalem and the Temple as they stood in the late Second Temple period, the city Paul travelled to for the meeting with James, Cephas, and John, and the city where he was later arrested. (Image: M.t.lifshits, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.)

The Jerusalem meeting is the moment where the two sources — Paul's letters and the Book of Acts — disagree so clearly that the difference cannot be smoothed over. Read the two accounts side by side and the reader can see, in a single place, the shape of the book's method: where they conflict, the letters win, and the reader is told why.

The meeting is described twice in Acts and once in Paul's letters. Acts describes it in chapters 11 and 15, with a gap of several years between the two descriptions, or possibly with a single visit described in two different ways. Paul describes it in Galatians 2:1-10, in the passage where he tells the Galatians about the visit he made "by revelation" after fourteen years, when he went up to Jerusalem and submitted his gospel to the leaders "privately" so that he might not be running or had run in vain. The two accounts disagree. They disagree about who initiated the visit, who was present, what was at stake, what was decided, and what the Jerusalem leadership thought of Paul. They disagree in ways that are not minor — they disagree in ways that shape the reader's understanding of who Paul was in relation to the Jerusalem church and what the Jerusalem church was in relation to the mission to the nations.

The book should describe the two accounts, show the reader the disagreement, explain why the letters are preferred, and let the reader see what the disagreement means.

The Acts account in chapter 11 is the earlier of the two Acts descriptions. It is tied to the famine relief visit: while Barnabas and Saul are in Antioch, prophets come down from Jerusalem, Agabus predicts a famine, the Antioch church collects relief money, and Barnabas and Saul carry it to the elders in Jerusalem. The visit is a generous gesture from a church to its elder sibling. The Jerusalem leadership receives the money. The tone is harmony. The Jerusalem church sends Barnabas to Antioch in the first place; Barnabas brings Saul; the year of teaching happens; the famine relief goes back to Jerusalem; the circle is complete. The movement is one family, one body, one church sending help to the other.

The Acts account in chapter 15 is the Jerusalem council. The issue is whether the non-Jews who have believed need to be circumcised. Men from the party of the Pharisees who have believed insist that the non-Jews must be circumcised and commanded to keep the law of Moses. The apostles and elders gather in Jerusalem to consider the question. Much debate happens. Peter stands up and reminds them that God made choice among them, that God gave the Holy Spirit to the non-Jews just as to the Jews, that God made no distinction, that the non-Jews are purified by faith. James stands up and speaks, and cites Amos 9:11-12 about the restoration of the tent of David, and concludes that the non-Jews who turn to the Lord should be written to and told to abstain from the pollution of idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals, and from blood. The decision is sent to the churches in a letter, carried by Judas Barsabbas and Silas. The letter says the Holy Spirit has imposed on them no greater burden than these necessary things. The non-Jews read the letter and are glad. The disagreement is resolved by the council.

The two Acts accounts are not necessarily describing the same visit. Many scholars think Galatians 2 describes the same event as Acts 15 — the Jerusalem council. Other scholars think Galatians 2 describes the famine relief visit of Acts 11. The book should not settle the question, because the question is not settled in the sources and the book should not pretend to settle it. What matters is the disagreement between the two sources on the substance of the meeting — what Paul thought he was doing there, what the Jerusalem leadership thought, what the stake was, and what the outcome was.

Paul's account in Galatians 2 is the primary source. It says the following.

Paul went up to Jerusalem "by revelation." The initiative was God's, not Jerusalem's. Paul does not say he was invited. He does not say he was sent for. He says he went by revelation — the same word

he uses for the call that sent him to the nations, the same word that marks his apostleship as something that comes from God directly and not through the Jerusalem leadership.

He went up to Jerusalem and submitted his gospel to the leaders "privately, those who seemed to be influential." He did not go to submit his gospel to the church as a whole. He went to the leaders — the ones who seemed to be influential — and he did it privately. The word "privately" is important. It means that Paul did not think the public discussion of his gospel was safe or useful at this point. He went to the leadership and he did it in private, because he wanted to protect his gospel from the opposition that he knew was building.

He went for a specific reason: "so that I might not be running or had run in vain." The Greek is careful. It does not say "so that I might be sure I am right." It says "so that my running might not be in vain" — that is, so that the work God had given him would not be undermined by opposition from the Jerusalem leadership that could spread to the churches he had founded. He went to make sure the leadership did not actively oppose what God was doing through him, and to discover, in private, whether they were going to oppose it.

The phrase "those who seemed to be influential" is careful and slightly dismissive. Paul does not call them apostles. He does not call them the pillars. He calls them "those who seemed to be influential" — the Greek is *hoi dokountes*, the ones who seemed to be leaders, the ones who had the appearance of authority. The phrase has been read in two ways. One reading is that Paul is being respectful — he is identifying the leaders by the respect they seem to command. The other reading is that Paul is being ironic — he is noting that they only seem to be influential, because his apostleship comes from God and not from their recognition. The book should note both readings and not decide between them, because Paul's tone is hard to pin down and the reader should be able to see the ambiguity.

Paul's account of the meeting itself is brief. He says: "But from those who seemed to be influential — I say nothing more — they added nothing to me." The phrase "I say nothing more" is significant. It means that the influential ones did not add anything to his gospel. They did not correct him. They did not tell him to change anything. They recognized that God had entrusted him with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as they had recognized that Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised. James and Cephas and John — the ones Paul names specifically, the ones he calls "those who seemed to be influential" — recognized his authority to the Gentiles and gave him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, with the agreement that Paul and Barnabas would go to the Gentiles and the others would go to the circumcised.

The agreement included one specific request: "They asked only that we should remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do." The request to remember the poor is the one thing the Jerusalem leadership asked of Paul and Barnabas. It is the one condition attached to the recognition of his authority. And Paul's response is that he was already eager to do it — the famine relief and the collection are the expression of this eagerness.

The account in Galatians ends there. Paul does not say that a council was held. He does not say that a letter was sent to the churches. He does not say that a decision was made about the four requirements for the non-Jews. He says that the leaders recognized his authority, that they gave him the right hand of fellowship, that they asked only that he remember the poor, and that he was eager to do it.

The absence of the council, the letter, and the four requirements in Paul's account is the central disagreement between the two sources. The disagreement is not small. It is the disagreement about what happened at the meeting and what the outcome was.

The two sources describe the same visit — if they are the same visit — as two different events.

In Acts, the meeting is a council. The church gathers. The apostles and elders meet together. The issue is debated publicly. Peter speaks. James speaks. A letter is written and sent. The four requirements are imposed on the non-Jews. The movement is unified by the decision.

In Paul, the meeting is a private meeting with the leaders. The initiative was God's. Paul submitted his gospel in private. The leaders recognized his authority to the Gentiles. They asked only that he remember the poor. No council is mentioned. No letter is mentioned. No four requirements are mentioned. No public decision is described.

The reader should be able to see that the two accounts are not simply different versions of the same event told in different words. They are accounts of events that have different shapes, different stakes, different outcomes. If the two sources are describing the same visit, then one of them is not telling the whole story, or is telling a different story about the same event. If the two sources are describing different visits, then the difference between the two visits — the private meeting of Galatians and the public council of Acts — is itself significant, because it suggests that the relationship between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership was different at different points in the timeline, and that the relationship changed from the time of the private meeting to the time of the public council.

The book should describe the disagreement and explain why the letters win. The reason is that Paul's account is his own account of his own meeting with the Jerusalem leadership, written at the time he was defending his authority to the Galatians against the circumcision party. Paul's account is the account that comes from the person who was there and who had the most at stake in the meeting. Acts' account is a later account, written by someone who wanted to tell a story of harmony and unity and authorization from Jerusalem. Where the two accounts disagree about the shape of the meeting, the account of the person who was there and who had the most at stake is the account that should be preferred.

The book should also note that the disagreement is not resolved by the scholarly literature. Scholars have argued about whether Galatians 2 describes the same visit as Acts 15 for as long as the question has been asked. Some scholars resolve the disagreement by saying that Galatians 2 describes a private pre-council meeting and Acts 15 describes the public council that followed. Some scholars resolve the disagreement by saying that Paul's account is abbreviated and that the council and the letter are implied. Some scholars resolve the disagreement by saying that Acts is wrong and Paul is right, or that Paul is wrong and Acts is right. The book should not resolve the disagreement. It should describe it and say that the letters win because Paul was there and had the most at stake.

The Jerusalem leadership itself is worth describing, because the reader needs to see who the "pillars" were and why Paul's relationship with them matters.

James is the leader of the Jerusalem church. He is the brother of Jesus — the James who appears in Paul's letters as the one to whom Paul presented his gospel in Jerusalem, and the one who is called a pillar along with Cephas and John. James is the one who speaks in the council in Acts 15, the one who cites Amos, the one whose judgment carries weight. James is the one who, in Paul's account, is

one of the "those who seemed to be influential" and one of the three who recognized his authority. James is the leader of the Jerusalem church at the point where the question of the non-Jews' relationship to the law is being worked out.

James is also, in Paul's letter to the Galatians, the one who was sent by the church in Jerusalem to Antioch after the meeting, and whose arrival caused Peter to withdraw from the non-Jews and Paul to confront him. James is the leader whose presence in Antioch pushed Peter into the position that Paul confronted. James is the leader whose authority is the authority that the circumcision party appeals to when they tell the non-Jews they must be circumcised. James is not the villain of the story. He is the leader of the mother church, the one who has to hold the Jerusalem church together, the one who has to preserve the Jewish character of the movement while also accepting the non-Jews, the one whose practical judgment was the four requirements. But James is also the leader whose authority is used by the circumcision party in ways that Paul thought were wrong.

Peter — Cephas — is the one who was with Jesus from the beginning, the one Jesus called the rock, the one to whom the authority was given in the tradition. Peter is the one who, in Paul's account, "was entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised" and whose authority to the Jews was given to him by God in the same way Paul's authority to the Gentiles was given to him by God. Peter is the one who, in Acts, stands up at the council and makes the speech that resolves the disagreement. Peter is the one who, in Galatians, went to Antioch and ate with the non-Jews and then withdrew from the non-Jews when the men from James arrived, and whom Paul confronted to his face.

Peter is the figure who embodies the ambiguity of the Jerusalem leadership's position. Peter is the one who accepts the non-Jews in principle — he eats with them, he baptizes Cornelius and his household, he accepts the Gentile mission — but who also yields to the pressure of the circumcision party in Antioch and withdraws from the non-Jews. Peter is the one who is both on Paul's side and on the circumcision party's side, depending on the moment and the pressure. Peter is the figure whose inconsistency is the thing Paul confronts, and the thing Paul confronts publicly.

John is the third of the pillars. John is named in Paul's account as one of the three — James, Cephas, and John — who seemed to be influential and who recognized Paul's authority. John is the one who, in the tradition, is the son of Zebedee, the one who was with Jesus from the beginning, the one who is associated with the Johannine literature and the tradition of the beloved disciple. John is the least visible of the three in Paul's letters. Paul mentions him as one of the pillars but does not elaborate. John is the one who is part of the leadership but whose role is less clear than James's and Peter's.

The three — James, Peter, John — are the "pillars" of the Jerusalem church, the ones who seemed to be influential, the ones who recognized Paul's authority to the Gentiles and gave him the right hand of fellowship. They are the ones Paul went to in private to submit his gospel. They are the ones who asked only that he remember the poor. They are the ones Paul names in Galatians as the ones who added nothing to him.

The Jerusalem leadership is not portrayed by Paul as enemies. They are portrayed as the ones who recognized his authority, who gave him the right hand of fellowship, who asked him to remember the poor. But they are also the ones Paul went to privately, the ones he described as "those who seemed to be influential," the ones whose authority to the circumcised was the counterpart to his own authority to the uncircumcised — a division of labour that Paul insisted on as the basis of his apostleship.

The division of labour is significant. Paul insisted that his authority to the Gentiles was given to him by God, and that the Jerusalem leadership's authority to the circumcised was given to them by God, and that the two were parallel and not hierarchical. Paul did not want the Jerusalem leadership to be the source of his authority. He wanted the Jerusalem leadership to recognize that his authority came from God directly, and that the division of labour between them was the shape of the mission — the Gentiles to Paul, the circumcised to the Jerusalem leaders.

The division of labour is the thing that Paul fought for, and the thing that the circumcision party opposed, because the circumcision party wanted the non-Jews to be under the authority of the Jerusalem leadership and the law of Moses, and Paul wanted the non-Jews to be under his own authority and the gospel of the freedom of the non-Jew from the law of Moses as the entry requirement. The division of labour was the thing that Paul negotiated with the Jerusalem leadership, and the thing that the Jerusalem leadership agreed to in principle, and the thing that the circumcision party then worked to overturn.

The "false brothers" are mentioned in Galatians 2:4, in the passage where Paul says he went up to Jerusalem "because of a revelation, and I laid before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who seemed influential, for fear that I was running or had run in vain. But from those who seemed to be influential — I say nothing more — they added nothing to me. On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised — for the one who worked through Peter for his apostleship to the circumcised worked through me for the Gentiles — and they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only, they asked us to remember the poor, which I was eager to do."

The "false brothers" are not described in detail. Paul says they were "brought in secretly" — the Greek says *dolos*, by stealth, deceitfully — to spy out the freedom that Paul had in Christ Jesus and to bring the non-Jews into slavery. The false brothers are the ones who opposed Paul's gospel from within the meeting, the ones who wanted to impose circumcision on the non-Jews and who tried to force Paul's hand. They are the ones Paul describes as having been "brought in secretly" — the word is *parelabeto*, they slipped in, they came in by stealth. The false brothers are the ones whose opposition forced Paul to go to the leaders in private rather than publicly, because he feared that if he went publicly, the false brothers would have had the opportunity to oppose his gospel openly and to undermine it.

The false brothers are the ones who are behind the circumcision party. They are the ones who, in the letter to the Galatians, are described as the ones who are troubling the Galatians and wanting to turn them back to the law. They are the ones who, in the letter to the Corinthians, are described as the ones who are the "super-apostles" — the ones who have a different gospel and a different authority and who are competing with Paul for the allegiance of the churches. They are the ones who, in the letter to the Romans, are the ones who are the object of Paul's warning about those who preach a different gospel.

The false brothers are not named. They are not identified with any specific person. They are the ones who represent the circumcision party, the party that wanted the non-Jews to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses, and that opposed Paul's gospel of freedom for the non-Jew. They are the ones who forced Paul to negotiate with the Jerusalem leadership in private, and the ones whose opposition

persisted after the meeting and forced Paul to write the letter to the Galatians and to confront Peter in Antioch and to defend his apostleship in the letter to the Corinthians.

The false brothers are significant because they are the ones who show that the Jerusalem meeting did not settle the disagreement. The disagreement was managed in the meeting — the leaders recognized Paul's authority, the division of labour was agreed, the request to remember the poor was made — but the disagreement was not settled, because the false brothers continued to oppose Paul's gospel and to work to undo the agreement. The false brothers are the ones who make the Jerusalem meeting the beginning of the fight rather than the end of it.

The disagreement between the two sources has consequences for the reader's understanding of the movement.

If the reader reads Acts as the primary source, the Jerusalem meeting is a council that unified the movement, with the apostles and elders gathering, debating, and deciding, and a letter being sent to the churches, and the disagreement being resolved by the decision. The movement is portrayed as harmonized, as unified, as one body that works out its disagreements and moves on.

If the reader reads Paul as the primary source, the Jerusalem meeting is a private meeting with the leaders, in which Paul defended his gospel against the false brothers, in which the leaders recognized his authority, in which the right hand of fellowship was given, and in which the request to remember the poor was made. The meeting did not resolve the disagreement. It recognized the division of labour. The disagreement persisted, and the false brothers continued to oppose Paul, and Paul had to write the letter to the Galatians and confront Peter in Antioch and defend his apostleship in the letter to the Corinthians.

The two pictures are not the same picture. The Acts picture is the picture of a movement that resolves its disagreements in councils and letters and harmony. The Paul picture is the picture of a movement that contains a disagreement that is managed but not resolved, a disagreement that persists through the letters and the confrontations and the collection and the end.

The book should let the reader see that the Paul picture is the picture that is more consistent with the rest of the letters. The letters are full of disagreement, tension, confrontation, the sense of a movement that is not unified, the sense of a man who is fighting to defend his gospel against the men who want to impose circumcision. The picture of a movement that resolved its disagreement in a council and moved on harmoniously is not the picture the letters describe. The picture of a movement that contains a persistent disagreement, that is managed but not resolved, that costs Paul his life, is the picture the letters describe.

The book should also let the reader see that the Acts picture is not wrong in every detail. The four requirements are not invented by Acts. They are not impossible. They are a plausible description of a practical table-fellowship compromise — the things that would make it possible for a Jew and a non-Jew to eat together without defilement. The letter to the churches is not impossible. The council is not impossible. Acts is not a liar. Acts is a later, tidier, more diplomatic account written by someone with an agenda of harmony. The agenda shapes the account. The reader should be able to see the agenda and the shape it gives to the story.

The book should also note that the disagreement about the Jerusalem meeting is the disagreement that shapes the rest of Part Four. The Jerusalem meeting is the beginning of the fight. The row at

Antioch is the next chapter of the fight — the confrontation with Peter, the silence about whether Paul won. The letter to the Galatians is the fight in its most anguished form — the man who thinks he is losing. The rivals are the fight against the men who think Paul is second-rate. The collection is the fight for reconciliation — the attempt to hold the two sides together by the one thing they both agreed on, the poor.

The Jerusalem meeting is the moment where the two sources disagree most clearly and where the book's method is most visible. Read the two accounts side by side and the reader can see what the book is doing: preferring the letters, explaining why, and letting the reader see the seam.

The meeting in Jerusalem was the moment where Paul's relationship with the Jerusalem leadership was defined — not settled, but defined. The leaders recognized his authority to the Gentiles. They gave him the right hand of fellowship. They asked him to remember the poor. They did not, in Paul's account, add anything to his gospel. They did not, in Acts' account, impose the four requirements as a public decision of the council. The disagreement between the two accounts is real and not resolved, and the book should let the reader see it.

The meeting was also the moment where the division of labour was defined — the Gentiles to Paul, the circumcised to the Jerusalem leaders — and the moment where the false brothers were described as the ones who had slipped in and tried to make the non-Jews into slaves. The division of labour was the thing Paul fought for, and the thing the circumcision party opposed, and the thing that the Jerusalem leadership agreed to in principle but that the false brothers continued to work to overturn.

The meeting was the beginning of the fight, not the end of it. The fight continued in Antioch, in Galatians, in the rivals, in the collection, and in the life that Paul bet on the outcome. The row at Antioch is next — the confrontation with Peter to his face, and the silence about whether he won.

Antioch Row

The row at Antioch is the moment in the letters that Acts does not mention at all, and the silence is one of the few silences in the record that the book can name with confidence, because the silence is the silence of a source that had a reason not to tell the story, and the reason is the reason the reader needs to understand before the story makes sense.

Acts tells the story of the Jerusalem council, with Peter standing up and speaking and James speaking and the letter going out to the churches and the non-Jews receiving the letter and being glad — a story of harmony, of unity, of a movement that works out its disagreement in a council and moves on. Acts does not tell the story of Peter coming to Antioch and eating with the non-Jews and then stopping when the men from James arrived, and Paul confronting him to his face in front of the whole church, and the hypocrisy that had spread to Barnabas, and the words Paul spoke before them all. Acts does not tell this story, and the silence is the silence of a source that wanted the reader to see the church as one family and not as a family that had just had a public row in a room in Antioch.

The silence is not a small thing. It is the silence that shows the difference between the two sources most clearly, because the row at Antioch is the most dramatic single moment of confrontation in Paul's letters, and the absence of the row from Acts is the absence of the thing that most obviously contradicts the harmony Paul's letters do not actually describe and that Acts wants the reader to

believe in. The row is the row that the book should make the reader see, and the silence is the silence that the book should make the reader see, and the reason for the silence is the reason the book should make the reader see.

The row is described in Galatians 2:11-14, and the passage is briefer than the reader might expect and more direct than the reader might expect, because Paul does not decorate the confrontation with explanation or context or softening — he names the thing and names the person and names the words and leaves it there, in the kind of passage that shows the man who wrote it as the man who was willing to say the thing in front of everyone and who was not always careful about the consequences of having said it.

The passage says that Peter came to Antioch, and that Paul opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned, and that before the men from James came, Peter was eating with the Gentiles, and that when the men from James came, Peter drew back and separated himself from the Gentiles, because he feared those who belonged to the circumcision, and that the other Jews joined him in the hypocrisy, and that Barnabas was carried away by it, and that Paul saw that they were not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, and that he said to Peter before them all — "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

That is the row. The row is the row of a man who watched an inconsistency happen in front of him, and who watched the inconsistency spread to the second most prominent man in the mission, and who decided that the inconsistency had to be named in public, and named it in public, and the naming is the naming that is the most dramatic single moment of confrontation in Paul's letters, and the naming is the naming that Acts does not mention at all, and the naming is the naming that the reader should be able to see in the letters and not in Acts.

The setting of the row is the setting the reader should be able to hold in mind, because the setting is the setting that makes the row matter, and the setting is the setting that makes the hypocrisy costly, and the setting is the setting that makes the naming of the hypocrisy necessary.

Antioch was the city where the non-Jews had first been called Christians, and the city where the mixed community had first taken shape, and the city where Paul had taught with Barnabas for a whole year, and the city where the non-Jews were full members of the mission in significant numbers, and the city where the disagreement about the non-Jews and the Torah had been worked out in the private meeting at Jerusalem and the division of labour had been agreed, and the city where the table had been opened to the non-Jews in the aftermath of the Jerusalem council. Antioch was the city where the non-Jews were living as non-Jews and eating as non-Jews and participating as non-Jews, and where the Jew and the non-Jew were sharing the table and sharing the church and sharing the mission, and where the table was the table that the disagreement that split everything had been fought over and partially resolved.

Peter came to Antioch as the one who had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised, and who had recognized Paul's authority to the Gentiles at Jerusalem, and who had given the right hand of fellowship, and who had agreed that the mission was divided between the circumcised and the uncircumcised. Peter had been the one who had made the agreement at Jerusalem, and Peter had been the one who had recognized Paul's authority, and Peter had been the one whose authority to the Jews was the counterpart to Paul's authority to the Gentiles. Peter was the man who had agreed to the

division of labour, and Peter was the man who had agreed to the principle that the non-Jew was free from the law as the entry requirement, and Peter was the man whose presence in Antioch was the sign that the agreement had been made and the principle had been accepted.

The men from James arrived, and the men from James were the men from the Jerusalem church, the church led by James, the brother of Jesus, the leader of the mother church, the leader of the circumcision party's authority. The men from James were the men who represented the authority of the Jerusalem church, and the men who carried the authority of the circumcision party, and the men whose arrival was enough to make Peter afraid, and whose arrival was enough to make Peter withdraw from the non-Jews, and whose arrival was enough to make the other Jews join him in the hypocrisy, and whose arrival was enough to make Barnabas be carried away by it.

The men from James are the men who show that the circumcision party was an organized party with authority that came from Jerusalem, and the men who show that the authority came from James, and the men who show that the Jerusalem leadership — James himself, the brother of Jesus, the leader of the mother church — was the source of the pressure on the non-Jews even if James himself did not arrive in person, and the men who show that the disagreement that started at Jerusalem was not settled and that the men from the Jerusalem church were the ones who continued to work to overturn the agreement.

The men from James are not named beyond what Paul names them, and the book should not name them beyond what Paul names them, because the book should not invent what the sources do not give. The men from James are the men from the Jerusalem church, the church led by James, the church whose authority was the authority the circumcision party appealed to, the church whose men arrived in Antioch and whose arrival was enough to make Peter afraid and to make him withdraw from the non-Jews and to make Barnabas be carried away by the hypocrisy. The men from James are the men who show that the Jerusalem leadership was the source of the pressure on the non-Jews, and that the pressure was the pressure the Jerusalem church exerted, and that the pressure was the pressure that made Peter withdraw, and that the pressure was the pressure that Paul had to confront.

The hypocrisy is the thing Paul names directly, and the hypocrisy is the thing the reader should be able to see in the social context of the row, because the hypocrisy is the thing that makes the row matter, and the hypocrisy is the thing that makes the row costly, and the hypocrisy is the thing that makes the naming of the hypocrisy necessary.

The hypocrisy was that Peter had been eating with the non-Jews, and that he had been eating with the non-Jews in the context of the agreement that the non-Jews were free and the table was open, and that he had been eating with the non-Jews in the context of the principle that the non-Jew did not have to become a Jew to eat at the table. The hypocrisy was that Peter had been eating with the non-Jews as the man who had agreed to the principle, and that he had stopped eating with the non-Jews when the men from James arrived, and that he had stopped eating with the non-Jews in a way that contradicted the principle, and that he had stopped eating with the non-Jews in a way that taught the wrong thing by example.

The hypocrisy was that Peter was living like a Gentile in the sense that he had been eating with the Gentiles — he had been crossing the boundary in the meal, and he had been crossing the boundary in the meal in the context of the agreement that the boundary was not the entry requirement. The hypocrisy was that Peter was living like a Gentile in the sense that he had been eating with the

Gentiles, and that he had stopped living like a Gentile when the men from James arrived, and that he had stopped living like a Gentile in a way that returned him to the boundary in the meal, and that he had stopped living like a Gentile in a way that taught the non-Jews that the table was not fully open, and that he had stopped living like a Gentile in a way that taught the non-Jews that they were not fully accepted.

The hypocrisy was that Peter's withdrawal was inconsistent with his own belief in the freedom of the non-Jew, and that the inconsistency was visible to the whole church, and that the inconsistency was teaching the wrong thing by example, and that the inconsistency had to be named publicly because the inconsistency was public and the naming had to be public. The hypocrisy was that Peter was the man who had agreed to the principle, and that Peter was the man who was contradicting the principle by his withdrawal, and that Peter was the man whose withdrawal was contradicting the truth of the gospel, and that Peter was the man whose withdrawal was teaching the opposite of the truth of the gospel.

The hypocrisy spread to the other Jews, and the other Jews joined Peter in the hypocrisy, and the other Jews joined Peter in the withdrawal, and the other Jews joined Peter in the contradiction, and the other Jews joined Peter in the teaching of the wrong thing by example. The hypocrisy spread to Barnabas, and Barnabas was carried away by the hypocrisy, and Barnabas joined Peter in the withdrawal, and Barnabas joined Peter in the contradiction, and Barnabas joined Peter in the teaching of the wrong thing by example. The hypocrisy had spread to the second most prominent man in the mission, and the spread to Barnabas is the thing that should make the reader see the power of the hypocrisy and the danger of the hypocrisy and the reason Paul could not let it go.

The spread to Barnabas is the thing that should make the reader see that the hypocrisy was not a small thing, and that the hypocrisy was not a personal thing between Peter and Paul, and that the hypocrisy was a thing that was threatening the mission itself, and that the hypocrisy had become a public thing and a thing that was teaching the wrong thing to the whole church, and that the hypocrisy had to be named in public because the hypocrisy had become a public thing and a thing that was teaching the wrong thing to the whole church.

The confrontation is the thing Paul describes in the most direct terms, and the confrontation is the thing the reader should be able to see in the words Paul used, and the confrontation is the thing the reader should be able to see in the reason Paul named it, and the confrontation is the thing the reader should be able to see in the publicness of the naming.

The confrontation was that Paul opposed Peter to his face, and that he opposed him to his face because he stood condemned, and that he opposed him to his face because the hypocrisy had spread to Barnabas, and that he opposed him to his face because the hypocrisy was teaching the wrong thing by example, and that he opposed him to his face because the hypocrisy was contradicting the truth of the gospel, and that he opposed him to his face in front of the whole church, and that he opposed him to his face in the most direct form, and that he opposed him to his face in the words that named the contradiction and the words that named the truth of the gospel.

The words were: "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" The words were the words that named the contradiction, and the words were the words that named the truth of the gospel, and the words were the words that asked the question that was the question that split everything — the question of whether the non-Jew had to

become a Jew to be part of the people of the Messiah, the question of whether the non-Jew had to cross the boundary to enter, the question of whether the non-Jew had to become a Jew to eat at the table. The words were the words that showed that Peter's withdrawal was forcing the non-Jews to live like Jews, and that the withdrawal was contradicting the truth of the gospel, and that the withdrawal was teaching the wrong thing by example, and that the withdrawal had to be named publicly.

The confrontation was public, and the confrontation was public because the hypocrisy was public, and the confrontation was public because the hypocrisy was teaching the wrong thing to the whole church, and the confrontation was public because the naming had to be public in order to correct the public teaching of the wrong thing. The confrontation was not private, and the confrontation was not a letter, and the confrontation was not a delegate, and the confrontation was a word spoken to Peter's face in front of the whole church, and the confrontation was the word that named the contradiction and the word that named the truth of the gospel and the word that asked the question that was the question that split everything.

The reader should be able to see the confrontation as the thing that Paul did because the hypocrisy was public and the naming had to be public, and the reader should be able to see the confrontation as the thing that Paul did because the hypocrisy was teaching the wrong thing by example, and the reader should be able to see the confrontation as the thing that Paul did because the spread to Barnabas had made the hypocrisy a thing that was threatening the mission itself, and the reader should be able to see the confrontation as the thing that Paul did because the confrontation was the only way to name the hypocrisy in a way that would correct the teaching of the wrong thing.

The silence in Paul's own account is the silence the reader should sit with, because it is the silence that shows the man who wrote it as the man who did not always get what he wanted and did not always control the outcome and did not always name the thing that happened after he named the thing he thought was wrong.

Paul does not say what Peter said in response. He does not say whether Peter argued back. He does not say whether Peter acknowledged the hypocrisy and apologized, or whether Peter defended himself, or whether Peter said nothing. He does not say whether the church was unified by the confrontation, or whether the church was wounded by it, or whether the confrontation changed anything. He does not say whether he won.

The silence is the silence of a man who was willing to say the thing that had to be said and then had to live with the consequences of having said it, whatever those consequences were. The silence is the silence of a man who did not claim to have resolved the conflict by confronting Peter to his face, and who does not claim that the confrontation made everything fine, and who does not claim that the church was unified by it. The silence is the silence of a man who was right about the thing he named and uncertain about the consequences of having named it, and the uncertainty is the uncertainty that the reader should be able to see in the letters and not just in this one passage.

The silence is also the silence that is consistent with the rest of Paul's letters, because the rest of Paul's letters are full of conflict that does not resolve neatly, and of teaching that does not always stick, and of churches that are troubled by the men from the circumcision party after the meeting at Jerusalem, and of a man who has to keep defending his gospel and his authority and his apostleship against the men who want to impose the law on the non-Jews, and the rest of the letters are full of the

sense that the fight was ongoing and that the fight was not won and that the fight was the thing that cost Paul his life.

The silence is the silence that shows Paul as the man who was willing to confront and willing to be uncertain about the consequences, and the willingness to be uncertain about the consequences is the willingness that makes him the kind of man the book is about — the man who was right about the thing he believed and who did not always get what he wanted and who did not always win the confrontations he chose to have and who lived with the gap between being right and winning for the rest of his life.

The reader should sit with the silence and see the man who confronted Peter to his face and then had to live with whatever happened next, whatever that was, and see the man who was right about the hypocrisy and uncertain about the outcome, and see the man who named the hypocrisy publicly and then had to live with the consequences of having named it, whatever those consequences were, and see the man who was willing to be right and willing to be uncertain about the consequences, and see the man who was willing to live with the gap between being right and winning for the rest of his life.

The row at Antioch is the row that leads directly to the letter to the Galatians, the angriest letter in the New Testament, the letter written by a man who thinks he is losing, the letter where Paul defends his authority and his gospel and his apostleship against the men who have come to the churches and told the non-Jews they have to be circumcised, the letter where the fight that started at Jerusalem and became public in Antioch is fought out in words and in argument and in the defense of the truth of what Paul had said to Peter's face.

The row at Antioch is the moment where the fight that started at Jerusalem and was managed in the private meeting with the leaders became public and personal, and where Paul's authority was tested in the most direct way, and where Peter's inconsistency became the thing that Paul could not let slide, and where the hypocrisy spread to Barnabas, and where the naming of the hypocrisy in public was the thing that showed the fight for the truth of the gospel had become a fight for the truth of the gospel in a room in Antioch.

The row at Antioch is the thing that the chapter should end with, and the thing that the chapter should end with is the note that the row is the thing that leads to the letter to the Galatians, the letter where the fight is fought out in words and where the man who thinks he is losing defends himself and his gospel and his apostleship against the men who want to impose the law on the non-Jews and who want to turn the churches he founded back to the law, and the letter where the man who thinks he is losing defends the truth of what he had said to Peter's face and the truth of what he had said to the Galatians and the truth of what he had said to the churches he founded.

The row at Antioch is the row that shows the fight that started at Jerusalem and became public in Antioch, and the fight that never fully resolved, and the fight that cost Paul his life, and the fight that the book is about in this part, and the fight that the next chapter will describe in the angriest letter in the New Testament, the letter written by a man who thinks he is losing.

The Letter to the Galatians

The letter to the Galatians is the angriest document in the New Testament. It is also, in the opinion of a great many readers, the most revealing letter Paul wrote, because anger is one of the things that makes a person most himself, and Galatians shows Paul at his angriest — angry at the people who came to the churches he founded and told them they had to become Jews, angry at the threat to the gospel he had preached, angry at the churches that were listening, and angry in a way that is, in the end, the anger of a man who thinks he is losing the thing he built.

The letter is about a crisis. The crisis is that men came to the Galatian churches — churches Paul had founded in the course of a short but intense visit — and told the Gentiles who had become believers that they had to be circumcised, that they had to keep the law of Moses, that they had to become Jews in order to be saved. The crisis is that the churches were listening. The crisis is that Paul was not there to stop it.

The letter is Paul's response. It is not a polite letter. It does not begin with a warm greeting. It opens with astonishment and accusation: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and trying to pervert the gospel of Christ." The word "deserting" is strong. The word "pervert" is stronger. Paul does not say "you have questions." He says "you are deserting." He does not say "there is another view." He says "there are men trying to pervert the gospel."

The letter is the most vivid and most human of all the letters Paul wrote, because it is the letter where the argument and the emotion are most fully joined. The argument is the argument of the letter — the covenant with Abraham, the law as a temporary measure, the children of the slave woman and the children of the free woman, the freedom of the gospel, the fruit of the Spirit, the cross as the only boast. The emotion is the emotion of the man who wrote it — the fear that the churches he built were being taken from him, the anger at the men who were taking them, the love for the people he was writing to, the desperation of a man who is fighting for the truth and knows that the truth is at stake. The letter should be read that way: as the document of a man who thinks he is losing. That is how it reads. That is what it is.

The letter opens with the most direct and most surprising sentence in all of Paul's letters. Most letters from Paul begin with thanksgiving — "I thank my God always for you" is the pattern. Galatians begins with a storm.

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and trying to pervert the gospel of Christ."

Three things in that sentence. First: "so quickly." The Galatians had not been believers for long. Paul had been with them for a short time — a few weeks, perhaps — and had then left them. The men who came after him had arrived and begun teaching, and the Galatians had begun to listen "so quickly." The speed is part of the anger. It is not just that they are turning. It is that they are turning so fast.

Second: "deserting." The Greek word is *aposterior*, from the same root as "apostasy." These people are not merely changing their minds. They are leaving. They are walking away from the one who called them. Paul does not say "you are confused" or "you have questions." He says "you are deserting" — leaving the one who called you, leaving the grace that called you, leaving the gospel that was preached to you.

Third: "a different gospel." Paul says there is no other gospel — "not that there is another gospel" — but the men who have come are perverting the gospel that is there. The word "pervert" means to twist, to turn something into what it is not. The men are not bringing a new gospel. They are twisting the gospel Paul preached into something else — something that requires circumcision, something that requires the law, something that Paul would say is not the gospel at all.

The sentence makes the argument immediately. The argument is not about whether the Galatians have questions. The argument is about whether the men who came to them are bringing the gospel or a perversion of it. Paul's position is that they are bringing a perversion, and that the Galatians are deserting the gospel for the perversion. The letter is the argument that this is wrong.

The first thing Paul does after the opening sentence is to establish his authority. This is the move that surprises modern readers, because it looks like vanity. It is not vanity. It is the preliminary of the argument. Paul cannot answer the men who came to the Galatians if he has not established that his gospel is his own — that it came to him from God and not from any human being, and that his authority to preach it came from God and not from the Jerusalem leadership.

"I want you to know, brothers," Paul says, "that the gospel that was preached to you is not a human gospel. I did not receive it from any human being, and I was not taught it. I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."

This is the claim that runs through the letter. Paul's gospel is not human in origin. It did not come from Jerusalem. It did not come from the apostles. It came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. This is why Paul can stand against the men who came to the Galatians. They are men with a human gospel, a gospel that requires circumcision and the law and appeals to the authority of Jerusalem. Paul's gospel came from God. The two are not comparable.

The story Paul tells of his own life is the evidence for this claim. He tells it in the opening of the letter, and it is the only autobiographical narrative he gives anywhere. He tells how he persecuted the church of God, how he was advancing in Judaism beyond many of his own age, how he was set apart for the gospel of God from his mother's womb, how God revealed his Son in him so that he might preach him among the Gentiles. He tells how he did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before him, but went into Arabia and then returned to Damascus. He tells how, after three years, he went up to Jerusalem and stayed with Cephas for fifteen days, and how he did not see any other of the apostles except James the brother of the Lord.

The story is in three parts. The first part is the persecution — Paul as the enemy of the church, the man who was advancing in Judaism and persecuting the followers of Jesus. The second part is the call — the revelation of Jesus Christ, the commission to preach to the Gentiles, the time in Arabia. The third part is the visit to Jerusalem — the private meeting with Cephas, the recognition that Paul's gospel was not from men, the confirmation that he was running and had not run in vain.

The purpose of the story is to establish that Paul's gospel did not come from Jerusalem and that his authority did not depend on the Jerusalem leadership. This is what the men who came to the Galatians were contesting. They were saying, in effect, that Paul's gospel was second-rate, that his authority was not legitimate, that the Galatians should listen to the men who had the true apostles on their side. Paul's response is to say that his gospel came from God, that his authority came from God, and that Jerusalem had added nothing to him.

The key sentence is the one about the visit to Jerusalem: "But even though I was a citizen of the commonwealth of Israel, and a member of the tribe of Benjamin, and a Hebrew of the Hebrews, I did not consider it necessary to consult with those who were apostles before me. I went up to Jerusalem to see Cephas and stayed with him for fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the brother of the Lord. In what I am writing to you, I am not lying, before God."

The point of the sentence is that Paul did not go to Jerusalem for approval. He did not sit at the feet of the apostles. He did not receive his gospel from them. He spent fifteen days with one of them — Cephas — and after that he went back to his work, his gospel intact, his authority his own. When he did go back to Jerusalem later, years after this, it was not to receive his gospel but to protect it — to make sure, in private, that the leaders recognized what God had given him, and that they did not oppose what he was doing among the Gentiles.

The visit to Jerusalem "by revelation" is the second crucial event in the story, and it is the event that the men who came to the Galatians were contesting. Paul went up to Jerusalem fourteen years later — not to receive his gospel, but to lay it before the leaders "privately, those who seemed to be influential," for fear that he was running or had run in vain. The leaders — James, Cephas, and John — recognized that God had entrusted Paul with the gospel for the Gentiles, just as they had recognized that God had entrusted Peter with the gospel for the circumcised. They gave Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that Paul and Barnabas would go to the Gentiles and the others to the circumcised. They asked only that Paul remember the poor.

This is the meeting that Acts describes as a council, and that Paul describes as a private meeting with the leaders. The difference is not trivial. The council in Acts is a public event, with debate and decision and a letter to the churches. Paul's account in Galatians is a private meeting, a recognition of authority, a division of labor. The book has already described the difference between the two accounts. Here, in the letter to the Galatians, Paul makes the argument that matters: the leaders recognized his authority. They did not give it to him. They recognized what God had already given him. They added nothing to him.

The argument is the foundation of everything that follows. If Paul's gospel came from Jerusalem, then the men who came to the Galatians have a point — the true apostles would have something to say about Paul's gospel, and if they required circumcision, Paul would have to listen. If Paul's gospel came from God, then the men have no point at all — they are perverters of a gospel they did not receive, and Paul's authority comes from God and not from them.

The letter then turns to the argument. This is the part of the letter that most readers skip, because it is theological and difficult and long. It is also the part that matters most, because the argument is the thing Paul is fighting for, and the fight is the thing the letter is about.

The argument begins with Abraham. This is not an accident. Paul goes back to the beginning of the covenant, to the man God made the promise to, to establish that the promise was always for believers

and not only for those who keep the law. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. The law came four hundred and thirty years later. The law cannot annul the promise. The inheritance is by promise, not by law. The law was a temporary measure, a guardian until Christ came, to lead people to Christ so that they might be justified by faith.

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Promise → Abraham → Righteousness by faith

Law → 430 years later → Temporary guardian → Christ

Inheritance → By promise, not by law

...

The argument is that the covenant God made with Abraham was not revoked by the law that came later. The law was added, but it was added for a purpose — to reveal transgression, to confine the world under sin, to lead people to Christ. The law was a guardian, a *paidagogos*, a servant who watched over the child until the child reached maturity. The child has now reached maturity. The guardian is no longer needed. The inheritance is by promise, and the promise is by faith, and the faith is the faith of those who believe in Christ, Jew and Gentile alike.

This is the argument that opposes the men who came to the Galatians. They were saying that the Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the law. Paul's response is that the law was a temporary measure, that the covenant with Abraham is the foundation, and that the inheritance has always been by promise and faith. Circumcision is not the requirement. Faith is the requirement. The law was the guardian, and the guardian has been replaced by the child who has come of age.

The famous passage about Hagar and Sarah is the allegorical reading that makes the argument vivid. Hagar is Mount Sinai, and she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. Sarah is the Jerusalem above, who is free, and she is the mother of the children of promise. The Galatians, if they accept circumcision, are children of the slave woman. They are in the wrong city. They are in slavery. The free woman is the mother of the children of promise, and the children of promise are the ones who are free.

The argument is bitter, and it is meant to be bitter. Paul is not simply making a theological point. He is telling the Galatians that the men who came to them have put them in the wrong city, in the wrong mother's house, in the wrong relationship to the promise. They are children of the slave woman, not children of the free woman. If they accept circumcision, they are not making a small adjustment. They are changing their mother. They are leaving the free woman and going to the slave woman. They are leaving the promise and going to the law.

The argument then turns to the freedom that Christ has given. This is the positive side of the case, the thing Paul is arguing for in addition to arguing against the law. Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore. Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. The freedom here is not the freedom of the modern individual. It is the freedom of the covenant — the freedom of the person who is in Christ, who has received the Spirit, who lives by faith and not by the works of the law.

The warning is severe. "Listen! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Once again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ. You have fallen away from grace."

The warning is not that circumcision is a bad thing in itself. The warning is that circumcision, in the context of the Galatians, is a step back toward the law, and the law is a yoke that no one can bear fully, and the person who tries to be justified by the law has fallen away from the grace that is the only way to justification. The men who came to the Galatians were not asking them to add a small practice. They were asking them to enter a whole system of justification by law, and Paul says that this system is incompatible with the gospel of grace.

The fruit of the Spirit is the positive alternative. Paul does not leave the Galatians with a law they cannot keep. He gives them the life of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. "Against such things there is no law." The people who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. They live by the Spirit. They should walk by the Spirit. They should not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

This is the positive vision. The law was a guardian. The Spirit is the life of the mature child. The person in Christ lives by the Spirit, and the Spirit produces the fruit that the law was pointing toward. The person in Christ does not need the law as a guardian because the Spirit is the life of the new creation.

The letter ends with the most personal and most wounded statement in all of Paul's letters. He has argued the covenant, the law, the promise, the Spirit, the freedom. He has warned the Galatians about the men who came to them. He has told them that accepting circumcision would alienate them from Christ. He has given them the fruit of the Spirit as the alternative. And now he turns to them directly, as a man who thinks he is losing the people he wrote to.

"See with what large letters I am writing to you in my own hand!" The large letters are the signature — the indication that Paul himself is writing the closing, in his own hand, in large letters that may indicate how hard he is gripping the stylus, or how angry he is, or how much is at stake. The closing is the most personal thing he wrote. "Those people who want to force you to be circumcised are trying to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. They want to boast in the flesh. But I boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. I do not set aside the grace of God, because if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing."

The cross is the only boast. Not the law. Not the credentials. Not the authority of Jerusalem. The cross. The cross is the thing that makes the law unnecessary. The cross is the thing that makes the covenant of promise real. The cross is the thing that the men who came to the Galatians are avoiding, because they want to boast in the flesh — in circumcision, in the law, in the authority they claim. Paul boasts only in the cross, and the cross is the thing that makes him free.

The letter ends with a blessing. "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen." The blessing is the thing that the letter has been arguing for — the grace of Christ, the grace that is sufficient, the grace that is the only inheritance, the grace that the men who came to the Galatians have tried to replace with the law.

The letter to the Galatians is the letter of a man who thinks he is losing. It is the letter of the man who is fighting for the truth of the gospel. It is the letter of the covenant with Abraham, the law as a temporary measure, the children of the slave woman and the children of the free woman, the freedom of the gospel, the fruit of the Spirit, the cross as the only boast. It does not resolve the question of the Gentiles and the law — the book as a whole will come back to that question. But it gives the

argument in its most sustained form, and it gives the man who made the argument in his most vulnerable and angry and human form. The chapter should end with the note that this is the letter that shows the man who thinks he is losing, and that the argument of the letter is the argument that the book has been tracing through the rest of the chapters — the question of whether the Gentiles have to become Jews, the question that split everything, the question that the Jerusalem meeting managed but did not settle, the question that Paul fought for twenty years and that cost him his life.

Rivals

The men came to the churches Paul had founded, and they did not come quietly. They came with letters of recommendation that Paul did not write, with credentials Paul did not have, with a version of authority that claimed to be older and more legitimate than his own. They looked at Paul and saw a man who did not speak well, who was not impressive in person, whose letters were weighty but his presence was weak. They told the churches what Paul was and what his gospel was and what the real apostles said about him, and the churches listened. Paul heard about this through letters and delegates and reports that came back to him, and he spent years trying to win back the ground they had taken.

The fight with the rivals is the fight the book has been tracing through the previous chapters — the circumcision party, the men from James, the teachers who came to the Galatians and the Corinthians and told the non-Jews they had to become Jews. But the fight with the rivals is also a different fight, and a sharper one, because the rivals were not only teaching the wrong thing about the law. They were attacking Paul's authority directly. They were telling the churches that Paul was not a real apostle, that his gospel was second-rate, that his authority was not legitimate, and that they — the super-apostles — were the ones who should be trusted.

Paul was wounded by this. He was wounded by it for years. He was wounded by it enough that he wrote the most extraordinary passage of self-defense in his letters, the passage in 2 Corinthians where he lists his scars and his visions and his sufferings and his authority, the passage where a man who had spent his life refusing to boast of himself boasted of everything he had suffered because the men who were competing with him had made it necessary.

The chapter is the chapter of the rivals. The rivals are the men Paul calls "super-apostles," the men who came to the Corinthian church and persuaded it that Paul was less than them, and the chapter should walk through the fight as the fight over authority and the fight over the gospel and the fight over the man who was being told that he was not enough.

The Corinthians were the church where the rivals had the most traction. Corinth was the church Paul had founded in the course of his longest stay in one city, the church that had sent him the letter asking about food sacrificed to idols and sex and worship and resurrection and spiritual gifts and marriage and whether you could eat at an idol's table — the letter that produced 1 Corinthians. But the church was also the church that had been persuaded by other teachers, the teachers who came after Paul and told the Corinthians that Paul was not a real apostle, that his gospel was not the real gospel, that his authority to the Corinthians was not legitimate.

The rivals came to Corinth with a form of authority that the Corinthians found impressive. They came with letters of recommendation — the Greek is *systatikai epistolai*, the letters of introduction

that a traveling teacher or philosopher would carry from one community to another, the kind of document that said "this person is trustworthy, you should listen to him." Paul had no such letter for the Corinthians. He had founded their church himself. He had taught them for a year and a half. He had sent them letters and delegates and a severe letter, and he had visited them again. But he had no letter of recommendation from Jerusalem, and the rivals did, or at least they claimed to have documents that lent their authority legitimacy.

The rivals also came with a version of apostleship that the Corinthians found convincing. They were men who spoke well. They were men who were impressive in person — the Greek for "unimpressive in person" that Paul uses about himself in 2 Corinthians 10:10 is *tō physikō*, the weak or unimpressive in the flesh, and the contrast is with the rivals who were apparently impressive. They were men who knew how to argue, who knew how to persuade, who knew how to command the room. Paul was not these things. Paul was, by his own account, a man who spoke poorly, who was not impressive in person, who wrote letters that were weighty but whose presence was weak.

The rivals were also, almost certainly, men who claimed to have known the historical Jesus or to have been close to the circle of the Twelve. The phrase "super-apostles" in 2 Corinthians 11:5 and 12:11 is *hyperapostoloi*, the superior apostles, the ones who claimed to be above Paul in the hierarchy of apostles. The claim to superior apostleship was almost certainly a claim to have been with the historical Jesus or to have been close to the Twelve, the kind of claim that gave a man authority with the Corinthians in a way that Paul's call-from-his-mother's-womb authority did not. Paul's apostleship was from a vision of the risen Christ. The rivals' apostleship was, they claimed, from the flesh, from the historical Jesus, from the beginning. And the Corinthians, who were impressed by visible authority and persuasive speech and personal recommendation, were impressed by the rivals.

The rivals are not named in the letters. They are not identified with any specific person. They are "the rivals," the "super-apostles," the men who came to Corinth and did damage. There is scholarly speculation about who they were — Cephas, perhaps, or Apollos, or men from the circle of Apollos, or Jewish-Christian missionaries from Jerusalem. The book should not name them, because the sources do not name them, and the book should not invent what the sources do not give. The rivals are the rivals, the men who came to Corinth and persuaded the church that Paul was less than them, and the book should describe them as the men who did this and not try to identify them further than the letters allow.

The fight with the rivals is the fight that produced 2 Corinthians as the most personal and most defensive of Paul's letters. The first part of 2 Corinthians — chapters 1 to 7 — is about the severe letter Paul sent and the reconciliation that followed. The second part — chapters 8 and 9 — is about the collection. The third part — chapters 10 to 13 — is the fight with the rivals, and it is the part that shows Paul at his most wounded and most willing to contradict his own principles because the situation had made it necessary.

The passage is extraordinary. Paul says, in effect, that the men who are competing with him have made it necessary for him to boast, and that he hates boasting, and that he will boast anyway because he has to, and that he will boast of the things that make him look weak because those are the things that are true, and that the men who are competing with him are false apostles who preach another Jesus and another Spirit and another gospel.

The passage begins with Paul saying that he is not in the least inferior to these super-apostles, and that the things that they commend as their credentials he can match and exceed, and that the only reason he is being forced to boast is that the Corinthians have made it necessary by rejecting his own authority. Paul does not want to boast. He says that he will not boast of anything except the work that the Lord has done through him, the work of founding the churches among the Gentiles. But he will boast, because the men who are competing with him have made it necessary, and he will boast of the things that the rivals will not boast of — the scars, the sufferings, the imprisonments, the beatings, the shipwrecks, the threats from Jews and Gentiles, the persecutions, the constant danger — the things that Paul lists in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 in a passage that is so compressed and so accumulated that the reader can feel the weight of it.

The list is the list of the scars. It is the list of the things Paul suffered for the mission. It is the list of the beatings and the lashes and the imprisonments and the shipwrecks and the rivers and the robbers and the Gentiles and the city and the wilderness and the sea and the false brothers and the toil and the sleepless nights and the hunger and the thirst and the fastings and the cold and the nakedness and the daily pressure on him because of the care of all the churches. The list is the list that shows the man who is fighting for his authority and his gospel and his churches, and the list is the list that shows the man who has no credentials except the scars, and the list is the list that shows the man who is willing to show his scars because the men who are competing with him have made it necessary to show them.

The rivals, by contrast, had credentials that were visible. They had letters of recommendation. They spoke well. They were impressive in person. They claimed authority from the beginning. They had the kind of credentials that a church like Corinth, which was impressed by visible authority, would find convincing. Paul's credentials were invisible — the scars were invisible once they had healed, the visions were private and could not be shown, the sufferings were in the past and did not necessarily command respect in the present. Paul was forced to boast of things that no one in the Roman world would count as credentials, because the men who were competing with him had credentials that the world would count, and Paul had been teaching the Corinthians for years that the world's credentials were not the thing that mattered, and now the Corinthians were using the world's standards to judge him.

The fight with the rivals is the fight over what counts as authority. The rivals claimed authority from the beginning — from the historical Jesus, from the apostolic circle, from the Jerusalem church. Paul claimed authority from the call — from the revelation of the risen Christ, from the commission to the nations, from the apostleship that was independent of the beginning. The Corinthians, who wanted to know who had the better credentials, were not asking the right question, because the question was not who had the better credentials but whether the gospel Paul preached was the gospel, and the question was whether the authority Paul had was the authority God had given him, and the question was whether the men who were competing with him were true or false.

Paul says they were false. He says they preach another Jesus, a Jesus different from the one Paul preached. He says they receive another Spirit, a Spirit different from the one Paul had given them. He says they proclaim another gospel, a gospel different from the one Paul had preached to them. The "another" is the Greek *heteros*, the different, the other in the sense of not the same — the rivals were not preaching a variation of Paul's gospel but a different gospel altogether. Paul says that he does not

know what they are talking about when they talk about their credentials, but that the things that matter are the gospel and the Spirit and the work, and that the Corinthians have seen the work and the Spirit and the gospel in the churches Paul founded among them, and that the men who are competing with him are trying to persuade the Corinthians that he did not do these things and that they should trust the men who have the better credentials instead.

The fight is the fight over the Corinthians' own experience. Paul is asking the Corinthians to trust what they experienced — the gospel they heard, the Spirit they received, the community they became — over the credentials of the men who came after him. He is asking them to judge the apostle by the fruit of the apostle's work, not by the credentials the apostle carried when he arrived. He is asking them to see that the credentials that matter are not the letters of recommendation or the persuasive speech or the impressive presence or the claim to have been with the historical Jesus, but the work that God did through the apostle and the Spirit that God gave through the apostle and the gospel that God entrusted to the apostle.

The fight is also the fight over what counts as weakness. Paul says that if he must boast, he will boast of the things that show his weakness, because the things that show his weakness are the things that show God's strength, and the things that the rivals boast of are the things that show their own strength, and the things that show their own strength are the things that do not matter in the kingdom. Paul says that he will boast of his visions and his revelations, but only in so far as necessary, and that he will not boast of the vision that was given to him, the vision of the man caught up to the third heaven, the vision that is the most extraordinary single experience Paul describes, because the point of the vision was not to give Paul credentials but to show him something that he was not allowed to say, and the point of the vision was to give Paul a thorn in the flesh to keep him from becoming conceited.

The thorn is the detail that matters here. Paul received a vision of extraordinary glory, and the response was not to give him authority but to give him a thorn, a weakness, a thing that would keep him from becoming proud because of the extraordinary experience. The thorn is the thing that shows that the authority Paul had was not the authority of the visible credential or the impressive experience but the authority of the weakness that God used, and the thorn is the thing that Paul will not name, and the thorn is the thing that the rivals would have used if they could have, and the thorn is the thing that Paul kept as the thing that kept him honest.

The fight with the rivals is the fight that produced the most self-revealing passages Paul wrote. It is the fight that produced the list of scars. It is the fight that produced the vision of the third heaven and the thorn that followed it. It is the fight that produced the passage where Paul says, "I will not boast except of my weaknesses, for when I am weak, then I am strong." It is the fight that produced the passage where Paul says that the men who are competing with him are false apostles, ministers of Satan, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. It is the fight that produced the passage where Paul says that he is not in the least inferior to the super-apostles, though he is nothing, and that the things that matter are the work and the Spirit and the gospel, and that the Corinthians should judge him by these things and not by the credentials the rivals carried.

The fight is the fight that shows Paul at his most wounded. Paul was wounded by the fact that these men had come to the church he founded and persuaded it that he was less than them. He was wounded by the fact that they had credentials that his own principles taught were not the right kind of

credentials. He was wounded by the fact that the Corinthians — the church he had spent the most time with, the church he had written the most carefully to, the church he thought he understood — had been persuaded by men he thought were false. He was wounded by the fact that he was being forced to defend himself in a way he had spent his life refusing to do.

The fight is also the fight that shows Paul at his most strategic. He knew that the rivals had the Corinthians' ear. He knew that the Corinthians valued visible authority and persuasive speech and personal recommendation. He knew that he could not win on these terms, because he was not strong in these things. So he refused to compete on these terms. He insisted on the terms that mattered — the gospel and the Spirit and the work — and he forced the Corinthians to choose between the credentials of the rivals and the fruit of his own work. He asked them to remember what they had experienced, and to judge him by what they had experienced, and to see that the men who had credentials but no fruit were not the men they should trust.

The fight is a fight that Paul does not fully win in the letters. The Corinthians kept sending him their questions and their problems, and he kept writing back, and the letters show a church that was both loyal to Paul and willing to be persuaded by other teachers, a church that wanted him to visit but was also afraid of what his visit might be like, a church that praised him in some things and doubted him in others. The fight with the rivals is the fight that runs through 2 Corinthians and does not fully resolve, the fight that shows a church that could not quite decide whether Paul was the real thing or whether the super-apostles were.

The chapter is the chapter of the rivals, the men who came to Corinth and persuaded it that Paul was less than them, and the chapter should end with the note that the fight with the rivals was the fight that produced the most self-revealing of Paul's letters, and the fight that showed him wounded by the fact that the church he founded could not quite believe in him, and the fight that showed him willing to contradict his own principles because the situation had made it necessary, and the fight that showed him at his most human and most wounded and most willing to be right and uncertain about the consequences.

The next chapter is the collection — the money for Jerusalem, the great reconciling project, the thing that Paul bet his life on and that, in the end, may have been the thing that killed him.

The rivals were men who came to the churches Paul had founded and told the Corinthians that Paul was not a real apostle, that his gospel was second-rate, that his authority was not legitimate, and that they — the super-apostles — were the ones who should be trusted. Paul was wounded by this for years. He was wounded enough that he wrote the most extraordinary passage of self-defense in his letters, the passage where he boasted of his scars and his visions and his sufferings and his authority, the passage where a man who had spent his life refusing to boast of himself boasted of everything he had suffered because the men who were competing with him had made it necessary.

The fight with the rivals is the fight over what counts as authority — the authority of the call or the authority of the beginning, the authority of the scars or the authority of the credentials, the authority of the gospel and the Spirit and the work or the authority of the letters of recommendation and the persuasive speech and the impressive presence. Paul's answer was that the authority that matters is the authority of the call and the scars and the gospel and the Spirit and the work, and that the credentials that the rivals carried were not the credentials that mattered, and that the Corinthians should judge him by what they had experienced and not by what the rivals claimed.

The fight is the fight that shows Paul at his most wounded and most willing to be right and uncertain about the consequences, and the fight that shows the man who was willing to contradict his own principles because the situation had made it necessary, and the fight that shows the man who was fighting for the churches he founded against the men who had come to them and told them he was not enough.

Collection

The collection is the thing Paul bet his life on, and the thing that, in the end, may have been the thing that killed him.

The collection is the money that the non-Jewish churches sent to the Jerusalem church, the money for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem, the money that Paul spent years gathering and organizing and sending and defending, the money that was supposed to be the gesture that unified the two sides of the movement — the Jewish side and the non-Jewish side, the Jerusalem side and the Pauline side — the money that was supposed to show that the non-Jews were not just free from the law but full members of the people of the Messiah, the money that was supposed to heal the disagreement that had split everything and that had never been fully settled.

The collection is the project in the letters that runs for years. It appears in 1 Corinthians as the thing Paul is already organizing. It appears in 2 Corinthians as the thing Paul is finally sending, with Titus and the brothers, with the letter of tears behind it, with the church that has been persuaded to give and then persuaded to complete the gift. It appears in Romans as the thing Paul is about to carry, with the delegation from the Gentile churches, on the way to Jerusalem, the thing that the whole letter to the Romans is framed around. It is the last thing Paul does before he goes to Jerusalem and is arrested and spends the rest of his life in custody.

The chapter is the chapter of the collection. The collection is the great reconciling project of Paul's life, the thing he spent the most time on after the preaching itself, the thing that took the most organization and the most diplomacy and the most letters and the most delegates and the most visits and the most argument, and the chapter should walk through the collection as the thing Paul bet his life on and the thing that, in the end, may have been the thing that killed him.

The reason for the collection is the reason the reader should be able to see before the chapter describes the mechanics of it, because the reason is the thing that makes the collection not a fundraiser but a theological act, the thing that makes the collection not a charity but a statement about the unity of the movement and the place of the non-Jews in it.

The reason for the collection is that Paul believed the non-Jews should help the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. The reason for this is not simply that the Jerusalem church was poor, though it may have been — the Jerusalem church was the mother church, the original community, the church that had given up everything to follow Jesus, the church that had no wealthy patrons in the way that the Greek cities had, the church that was in a poor city and had poor members. The reason for the collection is also that the non-Jews were indebted to the Jerusalem church, because the Jerusalem church was the source of the gospel, the source of the apostles, the source of the truth that the non-

Jews had received, and the non-Jews owed the Jerusalem church something for what they had received.

This is the language Paul uses in Romans 15:27: "They were pleased to do it, and indeed they are indebted to them, for if the Gentiles have shared in the spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them in material things." The Gentiles have shared in the spiritual things — the gospel, the Spirit, the truth — and therefore they are indebted to the Jerusalem church in material things — the money, the food, the support. The logic is the logic of the gift economy: the one who receives a spiritual gift is obligated to respond with a material gift, and the material gift is the acknowledgment of the spiritual debt.

The collection, then, is not a simple act of charity. It is an act of acknowledgment. It is the non-Jews saying to the Jerusalem church: we received your gospel, we received your apostles, we received what you gave us, and we are sending back something material to acknowledge the spiritual debt. It is the non-Jews saying to the Jerusalem church: we are not just free from the law — we are also members of the same people, and we recognize the original community that gave us the thing we have.

The collection is also the thing that reconciles the two sides. It is the thing that Paul hoped would bring the Jerusalem leadership and the Gentile churches together in a relationship of mutual recognition. The Jerusalem leadership had recognized Paul's authority to the Gentiles at the Jerusalem meeting. The Gentile churches were now sending money to the Jerusalem church. The money was the gesture that said: the division of labor is real, but the two sides are not separate — the Gentiles give to the Jerusalem church, and the Jerusalem church gives the gospel to the Gentiles, and the two are connected in a relationship of mutual obligation and mutual acknowledgment.

The collection was the thing Paul hoped would heal what the Jerusalem meeting had managed but not settled. The Jerusalem meeting had recognized Paul's authority to the Gentiles and given him the right hand of fellowship. But the circumcision party had continued to oppose him, and the Galatians had been persuaded by the rivals, and Peter had withdrawn from the Gentiles in Antioch, and the church was still divided on the question of whether the non-Jews were fully members or not. The collection was the gesture that was supposed to make the unity visible — not just the recognition of authority but the practical act of giving and receiving, the material acknowledgment of the spiritual debt.

The collection was also the thing that was dangerous, because Jerusalem was the place where Paul was the most unwelcome, and the place where the circumcision party was the most organized, and the place where the men from James were the men who had the most authority to oppose him. Paul was carrying a large sum of money — the collection was enormous — and he was carrying it to the city that had tried to kill him and that continued to be suspicious of him and that continued to be the center of the opposition to his gospel. He was going to Jerusalem with the money that the non-Jews had given, and he was going to present the money to the Jerusalem church as the gesture of unity, and he was going to risk his life on the outcome, because the money was the proof that the non-Jews were full members, and the proof was the thing that the circumcision party would not accept, and the proof was the thing that was worth killing him for.

The mechanics of the collection are the mechanics the reader should be able to hold in mind, because the mechanics are the things that show the sheer scale of the project and the sheer organization it

required, and the mechanics are the things that show the network of people the chapter before this one described.

The collection was money — coin, the accumulated contributions of the Gentile churches. Paul does not say how much, but he describes it in language that suggests a large sum. In 2 Corinthians, he describes the generosity of the Macedonian churches — the churches in Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea and the other cities of Macedonia — as a surpassing generosity, a poverty that was rich, a willingness to give beyond their means, a request to be part of the grace of giving to the Jerusalem poor. He describes the collection as a grace, the same word he uses for the gospel and the calling — the generosity of the Gentiles was a gift, and the giving was itself a kind of grace that the churches were eager to share.

The collection was organized over years. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to tell the church to start saving, to set aside what they could on the first day of the week, to make the collection a regular part of their life. He sent Titus to collect it — Titus was the man who was the practical broker of the collection, the one who gathered the money and organized it and prepared it for transport. He sent brothers with Titus — men who were sent with the money, men who were representatives of the churches, men who were to carry the money and present it and make the gesture of unity visible. He wrote 2 Corinthians — the letter of tears, the severe letter — to persuade the Corinthians to give, to complete the gift they had started, to keep their promise, to show their sincerity.

The collection was transported by people. It was not sent by courier or by letter. It was carried by a delegation — the leaders of the churches, or the men they chose, walking with the money from the cities of the Gentiles to Jerusalem, a journey that took weeks or months depending on the route, carrying valuable coin through territory that was dangerous for a traveler and especially dangerous for a group carrying money. The delegation was the gesture — the non-Jews themselves, or their representatives, coming to Jerusalem with the money, presenting it to the Jerusalem church, making the unity visible in the bodies of the men who carried it.

The collection was a diplomatic mission as much as a financial one. Paul was the apostle who organized it and supervised it and defended it and carried it. The delegation was under his authority and in his name. The money was in his hands when he arrived in Jerusalem, and the presentation of the money was the presentation of Paul's ministry to the Jerusalem church, and the presentation of the money was the thing that was supposed to show that the non-Jews were not separate from the Jerusalem church but connected to it in a relationship of mutual acknowledgment.

The Romans letter is framed around the collection. Romans is Paul's last and most careful letter, written to a church he had never met, and the framing of the letter is the framing of a man who is about to go to Jerusalem with the collection and who is asking the Romans to help him on the way. In Romans 15:22-33, Paul says that he has been prevented from coming to them many times, but now that he has finished his work in the East and is going to Jerusalem with the collection, he hopes to come to them on the way to Spain, after he has delivered the collection to Jerusalem. He asks the Romans to pray for him — that he will be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, that his service for Jerusalem will be acceptable to the saints, that the God of peace will be with them. The collection is the thing that is about to happen, the thing that Paul is traveling toward when he writes the letter, the thing that frames the whole letter and gives it its urgency.

The framing is significant. Paul writes the most careful and most theological of his letters — the letter about the gospel and the nations and Israel and the inclusion of the Gentiles and the olive tree of Israel and the mystery of the salvation of the Jew and the Gentile together — as a letter that is framed by the imminent journey to Jerusalem with the money. The letter is about the theology that makes the collection possible — the theology of the unity of the Jew and the Gentile in the Messiah, the theology of the olive tree and the wild branches grafted in, the theology of the spiritual debt and the material acknowledgment — and the letter is also about the practical thing that Paul is about to do: go to Jerusalem with the money, present it to the Jerusalem church, risk his life on the outcome, and then go on to Spain, if he survives.

The chapter is the chapter of the collection, and the collection is the thing Paul bet his life on, and the chapter should describe the collection as the thing that was at once the most hopeful and the most dangerous thing Paul did.

The collection was the thing Paul hoped would reconcile the two sides of the movement. The hope is visible in the letters, and the hope is visible in the way Paul talks about the collection as a service, a ministry, a thing that is not just financial but spiritual and ecclesial.

Paul calls the collection a "service" — the Greek is *leitourgia*, the liturgy, the public service, the thing that the Gentiles do for the Jerusalem church. He calls it a "blessing" — the thing that will result in joy for the Gentiles and the Jerusalem church together. He says that he sees the collection as the completion of the obedience of the Gentiles to the faith, the thing that makes their faith visible in practice. He says that the contribution itself is a form of worship, the thing the churches do as part of their worship, the thing that is the acknowledgment of the spiritual debt made material.

The hope is also visible in the delegation. Paul sends with the money not just practical men but men of standing — brothers who are representatives of the churches, men who are sent to make the gesture visible and personal, men who are to present the collection to the Jerusalem church as the gesture of unity from the Gentile churches. The delegation is the thing that shows that the collection is not a check sent in the mail — it is a group of non-Jews coming to Jerusalem to present the money to the Jewish church, a group of men who are the living proof that the Gentiles and the Jews are in the same movement, a group of men who are the embodiment of the unity that the collection is supposed to represent.

The hope is visible in Paul's willingness to risk his life on the outcome. Paul says in Romans 15:30-32 that he asks the Romans to pray that he will be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that his service for Jerusalem will be acceptable to the saints. The "unbelievers in Judea" are the men who oppose him — the circumcision party, the men from James, the ones who want to kill him. The "service for Jerusalem" is the collection — the presentation of the money is the service, the thing Paul is doing for the Jerusalem church, the thing he hopes will be acceptable. Paul is asking the Romans to pray that he will survive the journey and that the collection will be accepted — two things that are connected, because the acceptance of the collection and the survival of Paul are connected, because the men who oppose Paul are the men who would prevent the collection from being accepted, and the men who oppose Paul are the men who would kill him.

The hope is visible in the joy Paul expects. He says that the collection will result in joy for the Gentiles and the Jerusalem church together — the joy of the Gentiles that they have been able to give, and the joy of the Jerusalem church that they have received, and the joy of both that the two are

in the same movement, and the joy that the collection is supposed to produce. Paul is a hopeful man in this part of his life. He believes that the collection will work. He believes that the money will be accepted. He believes that the Jerusalem church will see the Gentiles as full members. He believes that the journey to Jerusalem will end in acceptance and not in arrest — or at least he believes that the risk is worth taking.

The hope is the thing that makes the collection the great reconciling project of Paul's life. He spent years on it. He wrote multiple letters about it. He sent multiple delegates. He organized multiple churches. He traveled with the money himself. He framed his last letter around it. He bet his life on it. The hope was that the collection would show that the non-Jews were not just free from the law but full members of the people of the Messiah, and that the Jerusalem church would receive them as full members, and that the two sides of the movement would be reconciled and unified around the bread and the money and the Spirit.

The collection also killed him. Or at least the journey to Jerusalem with the collection was the thing that led to his arrest and his years in custody and the end of his life. The chapter should say this honestly, without making it a simple causal story, because the sources do not give a simple causal story, and the chapter should say what the sources say and what they do not say.

The arrest is described in Acts, and the arrest is the riot at Jerusalem, and the arrest is the years in custody at Caesarea, and the appeal to Caesar, and the voyage to Rome, and the shipwreck, and the house arrest. The arrest is not described in the letters in the same way — the letters do not describe the riot or the custody or the voyage or the shipwreck, and the letters that Paul writes from custody — the prison epistles, if they are from prison, and the letter to the Philippians — describe the confinement in language that is compatible with Rome but also compatible with Ephesus or Caesarea or some other place. The letters do not give a clean timeline of the arrest and the custody.

What the letters do give is the sense that Paul knew he was going to Jerusalem at risk. He knew the risk. He told the Romans he was going to be in danger. He told the Corinthians he faced danger. He had faced danger many times before — the beatings and the imprisonments and the shipwrecks and the threats — and he had survived them, and he had learned to be content in whatever state he was in, and he had learned that God had delivered him from them before, and he had learned that God would deliver him again, or let him die, or do whatever God did. Paul's relationship to danger was not one of fear but of calculation and trust and habit and knowledge that he had been at risk before and had survived, and that he did not know what would happen this time.

The collection was the thing that took him to Jerusalem in the most dangerous period of his life, the thing that took him to the city where he was the most unwelcome, the thing that took him to the city where the men from James had the most authority to oppose him, the thing that took him with a large sum of money in his hands, the thing that took him to the city where the circumcision party was the most organized, the thing that took him on a diplomatic mission that was supposed to reconcile the two sides and that instead led to his arrest.

The arrest was not, in the sources, caused by the collection in a simple way. The riot in Acts is a riot over Paul's teaching, not over the money specifically. The dispute is about the law and the temple and the non-Jews and the accusation that Paul had brought Gentiles into the temple, the accusation that was false, the accusation that led to the riot, the accusation that led to Paul being seized, the accusation that led to Paul being held at Caesarea, the accusation that led to Paul appealing to Caesar.

The collection is not the direct cause of the arrest in Acts. But the collection is the thing that brought Paul to Jerusalem at the moment when he was most vulnerable, the thing that took him to the city that wanted to kill him, the thing that put him in the place where the arrest happened.

The connection is there, in the chronology and the risk and the presence of the money and the presence of the non-Jewish delegation and the presence of the Gentile churches' money in the city that was hostile to the Gentile mission. The collection was the thing that killed him, if the chronology holds, and the thing that killed him was not the money itself but the risk of taking the money to Jerusalem at the moment when Jerusalem was the most hostile to him and the most organized in its opposition to him.

The chapter should not make the connection too simple. The collection was the thing Paul bet his life on, and the thing that, in the end, may have been the thing that killed him. The "may have been" is the right language, because the sources do not give a clean causal story and the chapter should not pretend to give one. The collection was the thing that took Paul to Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was the thing that arrested him, and the arrest was the thing that ended his life. The collection was the thing he bet his life on, and the bet was lost, or won, depending on how you count it — lost in the body, perhaps, but the collection was delivered, the money was given, the gesture was made, the non-Jews had acknowledged the spiritual debt, and the Jerusalem church had received the Gentile money, and the two sides had met, and the movement had done what Paul had hoped it would do, even if the man who organized it did not survive to see the outcome.

The chapter is the chapter of the collection, and the chapter should describe the collection as the thing Paul bet his life on, and the thing that was both the most hopeful and the most dangerous thing he did, and the thing that was the great reconciling project of his life, and the thing that was supposed to heal the disagreement that had split everything, and the thing that was the gesture that said the non-Jews were full members of the people of the Messiah, and the thing that was delivered, and the thing that ended with Paul in custody, and the thing that the reader should be able to see as the most costly thing Paul did, and the thing that the next chapter — the next and final part of the book — will describe as the beginning of the end.

The collection was the money that the non-Jewish churches sent to the Jerusalem church, the money for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem, the money that Paul spent years gathering and organizing and sending and defending, the money that was supposed to be the gesture that unified the two sides of the movement, the money that was supposed to show that the non-Jews were full members of the people of the Messiah, the money that was the great reconciling project of Paul's life, and the money that Paul bet his life on and that, in the end, may have been the thing that killed him.

The collection was at once the most hopeful and the most dangerous thing Paul did. It was the gesture of unity that he hoped would heal what the Jerusalem meeting had managed but not settled. It was the diplomatic mission that took him to the city where he was the most unwelcome. It was the thing that required the network of people — Titus and the brothers and the delegates and the churches and the couriers and the letter-carriers and the men from Macedonia and Achaia and Galatia — to work, and the thing that showed the network at its most organized and most costly.

The chapter ends with the note that the collection was the last thing Paul did before he went to Jerusalem and was arrested, and the thing that framed his last letter, and the thing that the next part of the book — Part Six — will describe as the beginning of the end, as Paul goes to Jerusalem anyway,

and is arrested, and spends the rest of his life in custody, and writes his last letters, and dies, or does not die, or we do not know, and the book refuses to invent what the sources do not give.

Part Five: The Voice

How a Letter Got Made

The letter to the Romans opens with two names before it gets to Paul's. The first is Paul himself, "a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God." The second is Tertius, and Tertius is not an apostle. Tertius is the man who wrote the letter. "I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord."

A scribe signing his own greeting into a letter is one of those small facts that opens a door you did not know was there. It tells you that Paul did not sit alone in a room and write these words with his own hand. It tells you that there was a room, and there was another person in it, and there was the scratch of a reed pen on papyrus, and there was the sound of Paul's voice saying the words and another human being writing them down. It tells you that the letter you are about to read was an oral event before it was a document. It tells you that Paul's voice reached the churches through a human hand.

This is the chapter that sets up everything that follows in Part Five. Before we get to what Paul said, we have to understand how what he said got made. The letters are not a book. They were not composed to be read silently. They were not put together with the care of a treatise. They were dictated in real time, carried on foot for weeks, and read aloud to a room full of people who had never heard Paul's voice and would never hear it again except through the letter. The letters are the closest we will ever get to hearing Paul speak, and they are the closest we will ever get to a man losing his temper, defending himself, and begging, all at first hand. But they arrive to us through material conditions that deserve to be understood before the words are understood. This chapter is about those conditions. It is about the scribe, the scroll, the courier, and the room.

The standard picture of Paul writing a letter is wrong in almost every particular. He is not sitting at a desk with a quill in his hand, composing slowly and carefully, working and reworking a text until it is finished. That picture belongs to a later age, and it belongs to a later idea of what a writer does. Paul did not write letters as a writer writes. He produced them as a man who had things to say to people who needed to hear them, and he produced them through the one mechanism available to him for getting words onto a surface at the speed of speech: dictation.

Dictation was not an unusual way to produce a letter in the ancient world. It was the normal way. Most letters were produced by someone speaking and someone else writing. The speaking person was the author; the writing person was the scribe or amanuensis. The author's role was to compose the thought and speak it. The scribe's role was to put it on the page. In the Roman world, this was so standard that a letter could legitimately be described as authored by the person who spoke it even if the person who held the pen was someone else. The handwriting was not the authorship. The voice was.

For Paul, this is significant for several reasons. First, it means the letters are closer to speech than they are to writing. They were produced at the speed of speech, in the mode of speech, by a man who was thinking in words and saying them, not by a man who was composing sentences and revising them. The repetitions, the digressions, the sudden shifts in tone, the places where Paul seems to lose the thread and then find it again — these are not defects of writing. They are the marks of spoken composition. The letters preserve a voice in a way that a carefully written treatise would not.

Second, it means the letters bear the imprint of the man who wrote them down. Tertius did not just transcribe Paul's words with perfect neutrality. He produced the text, and his presence is on it. He signed his own greeting. This may have been conventional — scribes sometimes added their own greetings to letters — but it is also a gesture of presence. Tertius was not a ghost. He was a person in the room, doing a job, and when the letter went out, his name went with it. The letter to the Romans began with the voice of a Jewish preacher from Tarsus and the hand of a Greek-named scribe, and neither of them was invisible.

Third, it means that the letters are not a uniform body of work in the sense that they all went through the same process. Some of them may have been more dictated than others. Some may have been written with more or less intervention from the scribe. Some may have been drafted in outline and then worked up. We cannot know the exact process for each letter, and we should not pretend to. But we can say with confidence that whatever the variation, the mode was oral composition through a scribe, and the result is a set of documents that are, in an important sense, spoken words fixed on a page.

This matters for how we read them. If you read Paul silently, you are reading him in a mode he never knew. Nobody read silently in the ancient world in the way we read silently now. Reading was aloud, or at least in a voice meant to be heard. The letters were written to be read aloud to a gathering. They were letters to churches, and churches met together, and when a letter arrived, someone stood up and read it. The text was designed for an audience of listeners, not readers. The rhythm of the sentences, the repetitions, the rhetorical questions, the diatribes — these are features of oral composition addressed to listeners who would hear the whole thing at once and could not go back and reread a sentence. The letters work differently when you hear them. They work differently when you read them silently. This is not a defect of modern reading. It is a difference between two modes, and the letters belong to the first.

Tertius is the only scribe Paul mentions by name. He appears only in Romans 16:22, in that single line of greeting. We do not know where he came from, how he learned to write Greek, what his relationship to Paul was, whether he travelled with Paul or was hired locally in Corinth or wherever the letter was produced. We only know that he was there, that he wrote the letter, and that he thought it was appropriate to add his own greeting.

The name Tertius is a Latin name. Paul's world was Greek-speaking in the eastern Mediterranean and Latin-speaking in the administration and the west. A man named Tertius writing in Greek is not a contradiction; many people in the Roman world were bilingual or lived in linguistic borderlands. But it does suggest that the scribe was a person of some status — literacy was not universal, and a scribe capable of producing a polished Greek letter was a professional of some kind. He was not a child or an ignorant household slave. He was the kind of person who could be entrusted with a letter that would carry the authority of an apostle to a church he had never visited.

The presence of a named scribe also tells us something about the economics of letter production. Writing a letter on papyrus was not free. Papyrus was an expensive material, imported from Egypt, sold in rolls of varying quality and length. A letter of the length of Romans — substantial, running to several pages when written — would have cost money. The materials alone were a cost. The scribe's time was a cost. The whole operation was a small business expense, the kind of thing a travelling preacher would have to budget for.

This is one of those points where the modern reader's assumptions can mislead. We imagine Paul writing letters as if he had a supply of paper and a pen and wrote whenever he felt like it. In the ancient world, writing was a deliberate act with real material costs. You did not write a letter casually. You wrote one when you had something to say that was worth the cost. The letters that survive are not a complete archive of everything Paul wrote. They are the letters that were preserved, and they are the letters that someone thought were worth carrying and copying and keeping. Behind them is an infrastructure of material cost that we rarely pause to consider.

The letter, once made, had to travel. The Roman world had a communication system that was, for its time, remarkably effective. There were roads — the famous Roman roads, built for armies and maintained for commerce — and there were sea lanes, and there were waystations and inns and ports. A letter could move from one end of the Mediterranean to the other in weeks rather than months, which is fast by ancient standards but slow by any modern standard.

Paul's letters were carried by people. The letters themselves sometimes name the carriers: Timothy, Titus, Tychicus, Onesimus, Phoebe. These are not professional couriers in the sense of a postal service employee. They are members of the network — colleagues, co-workers, people Paul trusted. Phoebe, in particular, is worth pausing over. She is the person Paul identifies as carrying the letter to the Romans. He calls her a "sister," a "servant of the church at Cenchreae," and a "patron of many and of myself as well." The Greek word translated "patron" is *prostatis*, and it is significant — it is the feminine form of a word that means a protector, a benefactor, someone of standing who supports others. Whatever else Phoebe was, she was a woman of means and standing who had the capacity to carry a letter from Corinth to Rome and the standing to be received in a church she did not know.

The journey from Corinth to Rome was considerable. It was by sea, which was faster than land but subject to the seasons and the weather. A ship could make the crossing in a matter of days or a week under good conditions, but a letter carried on foot was a different matter entirely. Some of Paul's letters were carried by people walking — walking for weeks through territory that was not always safe, through towns and cities and roads where the carrier was not always welcome. The courier was not just a delivery mechanism. The courier was the physical embodiment of the connection between the letter-writer and the letter-reader. The letter arrived because a person walked it, and the person who walked it was someone Paul knew and trusted, and the person who received it would meet that carrier face to face.

This is one of the things that makes the letters so different from what we think of as correspondence. When you write a letter today, it goes into a system. It disappears into a mailbox or a server and arrives without you ever seeing the person who carried it. When Paul wrote a letter, he handed it to a specific named person, and that person walked or sailed to a specific place, and the letter arrived in the hands of a specific person who had probably been expecting it. The letter was embedded in a human relationship before it was ever read. The carrier was part of the message. When the letter was

read aloud, the carrier was probably in the room, or had recently been in the room, and the people listening knew that the carrier had brought the words of someone they knew, or knew of, or had heard about. The letter was not a disembodied text. It was a voice that had travelled.

When the letter arrived, it was read aloud. This is the moment the letter was made for. The letter was written to be heard, and the hearing was the event. Someone in the church — a leader, a literate member, the carrier — stood up and read the letter to the assembled gathering. The letter was heard as a whole. The listeners did not get to go back and reread a paragraph. They heard the argument unfold in real time, and they had to follow it as it went. The structure of the argument, the rhetorical devices, the points of emphasis — these were all designed for an audience listening once.

This changes how we should read the letters, even when we read them silently in a modern translation. We should hear them as we read them. We should hear the repetitions as a speaker pressing a point. We should hear the shifts in tone as a speaker adapting to the moment. We should hear the anger as a man who was angry, speaking to people who knew he was angry. The letters are documents of spoken argument, and their power is in part a power of voice. Paul was, by his own account, not a powerful speaker. He says in 2 Corinthians that his letters are weighty but his bodily presence is weak and his speech insignificant. So the letters are where he is most himself and most powerful — in the written form that carried his voice when his voice in person was not enough.

There is a strange poignancy in this. Paul's voice reached the churches through the letter. His voice did not reach them in person, or not always, and not in the way he would have wanted. He wrote letters because he was not there, or because he was far away, or because the things he had to say could not wait for a visit. The letter was a substitute for presence, and it was a better one than presence would have been in some cases. The letter could say what the moment would not allow him to say to someone's face. The letter could argue at length what a conversation would only hint at. The letter could preserve what he wanted said and how he wanted it said. But the letter was also a record of absence, and the fact that the letter had to be written at all was a fact about the distance between Paul and the churches he loved and fought with and wrote to.

The letter, once read aloud, was probably kept. Not every letter was kept, and not every letter was copied. The letters that survive are a sample — a small one — of what Paul wrote. We know he wrote more than seven letters. He refers to letters we do not have. He wrote to churches and individuals whose letters are lost. The seven undisputed letters are the ones that were preserved and copied and circulated and eventually collected and included in the canon. They are not the whole of Paul's letter-writing. They are the fragment that survived.

The preservation process was slow and uneven. Letters were copied by hand, by scribes working in the generations after Paul's death, and they were circulated among churches, and some were kept and some were lost, and the ones we have are the ones that made it through a series of decisions about what was worth keeping. The collection of Paul's letters was not a straightforward process. It was contested. Some churches valued some letters more than others. Some letters were preferred because they addressed issues that remained live. Some were excluded because they were thought to be not by Paul or because they addressed issues that had passed. The letters as we have them are the result of a process of selection that took place over decades and then centuries.

This matters for how we read the letters, because the letters we have are not a random sample. They are the letters that someone decided were worth preserving. That decision was not neutral. The letters

that survived are the letters that spoke to later problems, or that were attributed to Paul, or that were useful for later purposes. The collection is not the whole of Paul. It is the part of Paul that was kept, and the part that was kept was shaped by the concerns of the people who kept it.

The material conditions of the letters are not incidental to their meaning. They are part of what the letters are. A letter dictated by a man to a scribe named Tertius, written on expensive papyrus in Corinth, carried by a woman named Phoebe across the sea to Rome, and read aloud to a gathering of people who had never met Paul — this letter is not the same thing as a book written by an author for readers. It is a document of relationship, of presence-at-a-distance, of a voice reaching across a gap that the material conditions of the ancient world made difficult to bridge.

The letters are the only first-person documents we have from Paul. Everything else about him comes secondhand: Acts, the later traditions, the legends. The letters are his voice. They are the closest we will ever get to hearing him speak. But they are also filtered through a scribe, through the material cost of papyrus, through the journey of a courier, through the reading aloud in a room. They are his voice, but they are his voice as it reached others, in a particular form, at a particular cost, through particular hands.

This is the setup for Part Five. The chapters that follow will deal with what the letters say — about his scars, about slavery, about Israel, about the things he was most torn about. But they will deal with those things as they come to us through the letters, and the letters are documents made in the way this chapter describes. The voice is real. The hand is real. The material conditions are real. And the reader who understands those conditions is better positioned to hear what Paul actually said, and what he did not say, and what the silence around him means.

The next chapter is about the scars. It is about the list of beatings and shipwrecks and hardships that Paul gives in 2 Corinthians, and about the thorn in the flesh that he asked to be removed and was not. It is about the most human passage he wrote, and about what it says about the man who wrote it.

The Scars

In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul gives a list. It is the most personal thing he wrote, and it is one of the most extraordinary self-descriptions in ancient literature. He does not give it as a boast in the ordinary sense. He gives it because the rivals in Corinth have made it necessary — they have demanded visible credentials, and he has none that they will accept, so he gives them the credentials that are invisible and that they would not value. He says he has laboured more than any of them, but he gives the labour in the form of a list of things that happened to him, not things he accomplished. Beatings. Imprisonments. Shipwrecks. Dangers from rivers, from robbers, from his own people, from the Gentiles, from the city, from the wilderness, from the sea. False brothers. Weariness and pain. Many a night he spent in the open. He was hungry and thirsty. He was often cold and naked. On top of everything else, the daily pressure of his concern for all the churches.

And then, at the end of the list, he says there is one more thing — one more thing that would disqualify anyone else from claiming apostolic authority, and that he has been carrying all the same. "A messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated." He asked the Lord three

times to remove it. The Lord did not remove it. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

This is the chapter about the scars. It is the chapter about the wounds Paul carried, and about the list he made of them, and about the thorn that he never identified and that he never got rid of. The chapter is not about diagnosing the thorn. It is not about figuring out what Paul's illness was, or whether he had epilepsy or malaria or conjunctivitis or some chronic condition we can name. It is about the passage itself, and about what it says about the man who wrote it, and about the way Paul understood his suffering in relation to his authority. The thorn is the most human passage he wrote, and it deserves to be read as what it is — a man describing something he cannot name and cannot remove and that he has had to live with, and finding in that fact not a defeat but the shape of his power.

The list at the beginning of 2 Corinthians 11 is a catalogue of what happened to Paul in the course of his ministry. It covers the whole span of his active life, from the earliest persecutions to the present. The items are specific in some respects and general in others. We know the kinds of things he lists — beatings, imprisonment, shipwrecks — because they are things that happen to people who are on the move in the Roman world, who are opposed by the people in the places they visit, who are taking risks that the people around them would not take. We know that some of them happened because Paul's letters and Acts and other sources confirm them in various ways. We know that he was imprisoned, at least once in Philippi and at least once in Caesarea, and probably more times than we can count. We know he was beaten, and we know the kind of beating he describes — the flogging with rods in Philippi. We know he was in danger from his own people, because the Jerusalem confrontation and the later opposition from the circumcision party were real. We know he was in danger from Gentiles, because the riot in Ephesus and the opposition in Corinth were real. We know he was shipwrecked at least once, on the voyage to Rome, and possibly more than once.

But we do not know the full extent of the list. We do not know how many beatings he had, or where, or by whom. We do not know how many imprisonments, or how long they lasted. We do not know how many shipwrecks, or where, or what the sequence was. Paul gives the list in the form of a summary, and he gives it as a summary that is meant to make a point, not to provide a chronology. He is not writing a biography here. He is making a case, and the case is that his credentials are not the credentials the Corinthians want, and that the credentials he has are the credentials of suffering.

There is a strange inversion in this. The Corinthians valued visible credentials — letters of recommendation, visible authority, a pedigree from the historical Jesus. Paul did not have those. What he had was the record of what had been done to him. He could not show the Corinthians his apostolic authority in the form they wanted. He could show them the scars. The scars were not what he had chosen. They were what had happened to him. And they were the credentials he offered because there was nothing else to offer that would mean anything to the people who were judging him.

This is one of the things that makes the list remarkable. It is not a list of achievements. It is a list of injuries. The apostle's resume is a list of beatings and shipwrecks and the daily pressure of caring for churches that were often difficult and often disappointing. It is the credential of a man who had been through things and who had not stopped. The power of the list is not in the suffering itself but in the fact of the suffering having been borne, and the fact of the ministry having continued through it.

The list also tells us something about the world Paul moved through. The dangers he lists are the dangers of travel in the first century, and of mission in the first century, and of faith in the first century in a world that was not uniformly friendly to either. The rivers, the robbers, the city, the wilderness, the sea — these are the categories of risk that a travelling preacher would encounter. The false brothers are the category of internal opposition, the people from within who would undermine the work. The persecution from his own people and from the Gentiles is the category of opposition from outside.

These are not abstractions. They are the concrete risks of Paul's life. Paul was a man who walked through the Roman world, who entered cities, who preached in synagogues and in houses, who made enemies, who was beaten, who was imprisoned, who was shipwrecked, who faced danger from every direction. The list is a record of a life that was dangerous in ways that most people in the Roman world did not live. It is a life on the edge of the system, a life that was not protected by the ordinary securities the system provided, a life that was exposed to the risks that the system generated and the risks that the movement generated.

The daily pressure of the churches is the most interesting item in the list, because it is the item that is least dramatic and most constant. Paul lists the dramatic things — beatings, shipwrecks — and then he says the pressure was daily, and it was for all the churches. The daily pressure was the cognitive load of caring for communities he had started or visited, the worry about how they were doing, the letters he had to write, the conflicts he had to intervene in, the people who wrote to him with problems, the problems he had created by the things he had said and the things he had not said. This was the pressure that did not let up, the pressure that was not dramatic in the way a beating was dramatic but that was constant and cumulative, the pressure of a man who was responsible for a network of churches spread across the eastern Mediterranean and who felt responsible for each one of them every day.

This is one of the places where Paul's letters give us access to a side of him that the dramatic list does not give us. The dramatic list is the public credential. The daily pressure is the private reality. The letters show the private reality in detail — the conflicts, the disappointments, the worry about the churches, the repeated interventions, the way Paul's life was run by the demands of the churches he had planted. The dramatic list is the summary. The letters are the daily record. Both are needed to understand the man, and both are present in what he wrote.

The thorn in the flesh is the passage at the end of the list, and it is the passage that has generated the most speculation and the least certainty. Paul describes it as a messenger of Satan to harass him, to keep him from being too elated. He asked the Lord three times to remove it. The Lord's answer was: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul then says that he will boast all the more gladly of his weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon him. He says that when he is weak, then he is strong.

This passage is the most human thing Paul wrote, and it is the most difficult to interpret. The reason is simple: Paul never says what the thorn was. He says it was a harassment, a thing that kept him from being too elated, a thing sent by a messenger of Satan. He does not say whether it was a physical illness, or a psychological condition, or an external opposition, or something else. He does not say whether it was chronic or intermittent. He does not say whether it was painful or merely

annoying, whether it was disabling or merely burdensome. He does not say anything that would allow a reader to identify it, and he does not say anything that would allow a reader to diagnose him. This silence has provoked centuries of speculation. Biographers and commentators have tried to identify the thorn, and they have proposed a range of candidates. Some have said it was a visual problem — Paul refers in other letters to people reading his letters in his absence and to his large letters, and some have speculated that his eyesight was poor. Some have said it was epilepsy, on the basis of the description of a messenger of Satan and the description of being caught up to the third heaven. Some have said it was malaria or some other chronic illness. Some have said it was a psychological condition — depression, anxiety, some form of trauma. Some have said it was the opposition of the rivals in Corinth, the ongoing harassment from people who were undermining his authority.

All of these guesses are guesses. None of them is supported by what Paul says in the passage. Paul does not give enough information to identify the thorn, and the passage is not designed to give enough information. The point of the passage is not the thorn itself but the response to the thorn — the asking and the not receiving, the grace being sufficient, the power being made perfect in weakness. The thorn is the occasion for that response, not the subject of the passage.

The right way to read the thorn is to read it as a man describing something he cannot name and cannot remove and that he has had to live with, and finding in that fact not a defeat but the shape of his power. Paul is saying, in effect: there is something in my life that is against me, something I have asked to be removed and have not been removed, something that is part of my weakness and my vulnerability, and God's answer to my asking was not to remove it but to tell me that grace is sufficient. This is not a theodicy. It is not a systematic account of why the thorn was allowed. It is a man in the situation, describing what happened when he asked for relief and did not get it, and describing what he made of the situation in the light of his faith.

The response — "My grace is sufficient for you" — is not a dismissal. It is a reframing. Paul asked for removal. God did not remove the thorn. God gave a different answer: the grace is sufficient, the power is made perfect in weakness. Paul takes this and runs with it. He says he will boast of the weaknesses. He says that when he is weak, then he is strong. This is a remarkable claim, and it is not a claim that weakness is good in itself. It is a claim that the power of Christ is made known in the context of weakness, not in the context of strength. The thorn is the weakness. The power is the grace that is sufficient in the weakness. The point is not that the thorn is good but that God's power does not require the removal of the thorn to be present.

This is one of the most important things Paul says about himself, because it tells us how he understood his suffering in relation to his authority. He did not claim that his suffering was a credential in the same way that the rivals' credentials were credentials. His suffering was the context in which his power was made known. His weakness was the place where Christ's power rested. This is not the same as saying that suffering is good. It is saying that the power Paul had was not the power of the strong man who never suffered. It was the power of the man who had suffered and who had not been delivered from the suffering, and who had found in that fact something about the nature of the power he served.

The thorn is also the place where Paul is most vulnerable in the letters. The dramatic list of beatings and shipwrecks is public. The thorn is personal. Paul does not talk about the thorn in other letters in

the same way. He mentions it here, in the context of the rivals, and he describes his relationship to it in terms of asking and not being answered, of weakness and power. This is a man who is not hiding the fact that he has something he cannot get rid of. He is not pretending that his life is free of burden. He is describing the burden honestly and saying what he has made of it.

This is the most human passage Paul wrote because it is the passage where he is closest to the reader. The beatings and shipwrecks are not experiences most readers have had. They are dramatic, and they are distant. The thorn is something most readers can understand in a different way. It is the thing you have that will not go away. It is the thing you ask to be removed and is not. It is the thing that makes you weak in ways other people can see and in ways they cannot. It is the thing that you have to carry, and the carrying is the part that is not dramatic and is the part that is most like the lives most readers live.

The thorn is also the passage that is hardest to read without projecting onto it. Every reader wants to diagnose Paul. Every reader has a theory about what the thorn was, and the theory is usually the reader's own experience or the reader's own reading of medical literature or the reader's own sense of what would make sense. The guesses are interesting as a record of what readers have wanted Paul to have had. They are not interesting as history, because they are not supported by what Paul says. The right approach is the one this book has been given in the brief: list the guesses, note that they are guesses, move on. Do not diagnose. Do not make Paul into a medical case. Leave the thorn as Paul left it — unnamed, unremoved, the occasion for a response that is about grace and weakness and the shape of Christ's power.

The scars and the thorn together form the portrait of Paul at his most vulnerable and at his most powerful. The list of beatings and shipwrecks is the record of what had been done to him. The thorn is the record of what he had to carry and could not put down. Both are presented not as failures but as the context in which his authority was real. Paul did not claim authority on the basis of being unscarred. He claimed authority on the basis of having been through things and having continued, and on the basis of having found in his weakness the place where Christ's power was made perfect.

This is not a heroic portrait in the ordinary sense. It is not the portrait of a man who overcame everything. It is the portrait of a man who was wounded and who carried a wound he could not name and could not remove, and who made something of that fact in the light of his faith. It is the portrait of a man whose power was not the power of the unscarred man but the power of the man whose scars were the place where grace was sufficient. This is a strange kind of power, and it is the kind of power Paul had, and it is the kind of power the letters reveal.

The next chapter is about Philemon, and about the runaway slave Onesimus, and about what Paul says and does not say about slavery in a letter that is one of the shortest and one of the most constrained in the collection. It is a chapter that requires honest treatment of what is there and what is not, and of the limits Paul worked within and the limits that the letter itself imposes on what he could say.

Philemon

Philemon is the shortest of Paul's letters, and one of the most constrained. It is a letter about a runaway slave. It is a letter about what the author of the letter does and does not say to the man who owns the slave. It is a letter that has been read for two thousand years as a profound act of moral courage and as a frustrating failure of moral nerve, and it is both, and it is neither, and the honest reading has to hold the contradiction without trying to resolve it into one thing or the other.

The letter is addressed to Philemon, a man Paul calls a fellow worker, whose house church meets in his home, and whose slave Onesimus has run away. Onesimus has met Paul somewhere — probably in prison, since several features of the letter suggest Paul is writing from custody — and has become useful to Paul. Paul is sending him back to Philemon, and he is sending him back with this letter, which asks Philemon to receive him not as a slave but as a brother, and which offers to pay any debt Onesimus owes. "If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account." Paul does not command. He asks. "I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that your good deed might not be forced but voluntary."

That is the whole letter. Eighteen verses. A greeting. A thanksgiving. A request. A promise. A closing. It is one of the most delicate pieces of writing Paul produced, and it is one of the most revealing, because it shows a man operating inside a system he did not challenge and trying to do something humane within it, and showing the reader — clearly, honestly — the limits of what he was willing to do.

The first thing to say about Philemon is what it is not. It is not an abolitionist document. It is not a letter that attacks slavery as an institution. It is not a letter that tells Philemon to free Onesimus. It does not say any of those things, and the reader who comes to it expecting Paul to take a stand against slavery will be confused and probably disappointed. Paul does not attack slavery. He does not call for its abolition. He does not say that the institution is wrong in the way a modern reader would want him to say it was wrong.

This is the source of the frustration that Philemon has generated for readers who want Paul to be the critic of slavery they would like him to be. The letter is about a specific situation — a runaway slave, a specific owner, a specific request that Philemon receive the slave back as a brother — and it does not rise above that situation to address the institution that produced it. Paul works within the terms of the situation. He appeals to Philemon's voluntary goodness. He asks him to receive Onesimus as a brother. He offers to pay any debt. He does not say: free this man, the institution is wrong, you should not own slaves.

That is the honest account of what the letter does and does not say, and it is the account that any reader has to start from before making a judgment about whether Paul did enough or whether the letter is a moral failure. You cannot evaluate the letter until you know what it says, and what it says is more constrained than many readers want it to be.

The second thing to say about Philemon is what it does say, and what it asks. Paul does not command Philemon to free Onesimus. He does not command Philemon to stop owning slaves. But he does ask Philemon to receive Onesimus back in a different way than Onesimus would normally be received. The normal way for a master to receive a runaway slave was as a slave — with anger, with punishment, with the reassertion of the master's authority. Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus

as a brother. "No longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother." This is a request that reorders the relationship between the two men in a way that the institution of slavery does not normally allow. A slave and a master are not brothers in the normal understanding. Paul is asking Philemon to treat Onesimus as a brother in Christ, which is to say as someone who stands on the same level as himself in the community of faith.

This is a significant request. It is not a demand, and it does not attack the institution, but it does ask Philemon to treat a slave as an equal in Christ, and it does so in a way that the logic of the Christian community makes possible. Paul's argument is that the new relationship in Christ — the fellowship of the gospel — changes the terms on which people relate to one another, and that Philemon should let that new relationship show in the way he receives Onesimus. The request is for a change in practice, not a change in theory. Paul does not argue that slavery is wrong. He argues that Onesimus is now a brother, and that Philemon should receive him as a brother.

The request is also an appeal to Philemon's voluntary goodness. Paul says explicitly that he does not want to command, because he wants Philemon's good deed to be voluntary, not forced. This is the character of the letter — it is not a command. It is a request that leaves Philemon free to refuse. Paul could have commanded. He says he could have commanded, in the authority of Christ. He chose not to. He appealed instead. This is, in one sense, a mark of respect for Philemon's agency. In another sense, it is a constraint on Paul's own moral action. He did not do what he could have done. He did what he chose to do, and what he chose to do was to ask, not to command.

The third thing to say is that the letter is a document of a specific situation, and that it is constrained by that situation in ways that are visible in the text. The letter is short because the situation is narrow. The letter is delicate because the man being asked is a man Paul respects and a man who hosts a church in his house, and whose goodwill is necessary for the community. The letter is optimistic because Paul is sending Onesimus back and expects to be received well, and expects Philemon to do what Paul asks. The letter is hopeful, in the sense that Paul expects Philemon to respond generously.

What Paul does not say, and what the letter does not say, is what happened after the letter was sent. Did Philemon free Onesimus? Did he receive him as a brother? Did he punish him? Did he send him back to Paul? The letter does not tell us, and the sources do not tell us, and we do not know. This is part of the silence that surrounds the letter. We have the request. We do not have the response. We do not know whether the request was granted, whether it changed anything, whether the institution of slavery was bent in this one case or whether Onesimus went back to being a slave and the letter was a small act of humanity that did not change the system.

This silence is important, because it means the letter is not a success story. It is a request that may or may not have been fulfilled, and a moment of intervention that may or may not have changed anything. The letter is not evidence that Paul's method worked. It is evidence that Paul attempted something within the limits of what he was willing to attempt, and that the outcome is unknown.

The fourth thing to say is about the limits the letter reveals. Paul's approach to slavery in Philemon is the approach of a man who did not challenge the institution. He challenged the treatment of a specific slave. He asked for a specific man to be received as a brother. He did not challenge the system. This is not the same as saying that Paul approved of slavery. It is saying that Paul did not act against slavery as an institution, and that his engagement with it was at the level of the individual case, not the level of the system.

This is one of the places where the modern reader's expectations are going to come into conflict with the historical reality. Modern readers want Paul to have been more radical than he was. They want him to have opposed slavery in the way that a modern reader would oppose slavery. He did not. He worked within the system. He tried to do something humane within it. He did not try to overturn it. This is a constraint that the letter imposes on the reader, and it is a constraint that the honest reading has to accept.

It is also worth saying, in fairness to Paul, that the letter is one of the few documents from the ancient world that treats a slave as a person with a name and a voice and a future, and that asks the master to receive that person in a new way. This is not abolition, and it is not a modern human rights document, and it does not say what a modern reader would want it to say. But it is something, and it is something that the ancient world did not typically produce. A slave in the ancient world was property. Paul writes to a master and asks him to receive his property as a brother. This is not a revolution, but it is an interruption of the normal logic of the relationship, and it is a significant thing in the context of the ancient world.

The fifth thing to say is about the way the letter has been read. Philemon has been read in two modes, both of them inadequate on their own. In the first mode, it is read as a great anti-slavery document, as a letter in which Paul undermines slavery at its root by redefining the relationship between master and slave. In this reading, Paul is a radical who did not have to say the thing he did not say, because he said the thing that was more fundamental — that the slave is a brother, and that the master should receive him as a brother, and that this is the beginning of the end of the institution. In this reading, Paul's silence about the institution is not a failure but a strategic choice, and the letter is a document of quiet subversion.

In the second mode, Philemon is read as a moral failure, as a letter in which Paul missed the chance to speak against slavery and instead reinforced it by sending the slave back to the master. In this reading, Paul could have said something decisive and did not. He could have commanded freedom and did not. He could have attacked the institution and did not. He sent a runaway slave back to his owner, and that is a mark against him, whatever else he said in the letter.

Both readings capture something, and both miss something. The first reading is too generous to Paul, and it reads into the letter a subversion that the letter does not claim to be. Paul does not call himself a subverter of slavery. He calls himself a requester of a brotherly reception. The letter does not say that the institution is being undermined at its root. It says that Onesimus should be received as a brother. These are not the same thing, and the reader who conflates them is reading something into the letter that is not there.

The second reading is too harsh on Paul, and it judges him by a standard he did not have and could not have had. Paul was not a revolutionary in the modern sense. He did not have the conceptual resources to call for the abolition of slavery, and he did not have the social position to make such a call and have it heard. He was a Jewish preacher from Tarsus, writing to a man he knew, in a specific situation, constrained by the terms of the situation. The judgment that he should have done more is a judgment from outside his world, and it is a judgment that does not take into account the limits of what he could do.

The right reading is the honest one. The letter is a request that Onesimus be received as a brother. It is a request that does not challenge the institution of slavery. It is a request that is constrained by

Paul's position and by the situation. It is a request that is humane in what it asks, and limited in what it does not ask. It is a letter that deserves to be read as it is, not as a hero document and not as a failure, but as a document of a man working within a system he did not challenge and trying to do something humane within it, and showing the reader — clearly, honestly — the limits of what he was willing to do.

Onesimus is the third character in the letter, and the one who is least present in it. He is the runaway slave, the man who ran away from Philemon, met Paul, became useful to Paul, and is now being sent back. The letter does not give him a voice. It tells us he was useful to Paul. It tells us he is being sent back. It tells us that Paul wishes he could keep him, to serve Paul in his place while Paul is in prison, but that Paul does not want to do anything without Philemon's consent. The letter does not tell us what Onesimus thinks, or what he wants, or what his situation is. He is the object of the request, not the subject of it, and the letter is structured around the relationship between Paul and Philemon, with Onesimus as the person who is being sent back and whose fate depends on Philemon's response.

This is an important limitation of the letter. Onesimus is a person, and the letter does not give him a voice. He is the reason for the letter, and he is the person whose fate is at stake, and he does not speak in it. This is consistent with the world the letter comes from, in which a slave did not have an independent voice in a letter to his master. But it is also a limitation that the modern reader should notice. The letter is about what Paul asks Philemon to do about Onesimus. It is not about what Onesimus wants. It is not about whether Onesimus wanted to go back. It is not about whether Onesimus was free to refuse the return. The letter is structured by the power of the master over the slave, and the slave does not have a voice in it. This is part of what the letter is, and part of what the honest reading has to acknowledge.

The relationship between Paul and Onesimus is also worth noting. Paul speaks of Onesimus as useful to him, and as a son begotten in the prison, and as someone Paul wishes to keep. There is a warmth in the way Paul describes Onesimus that is not present in the way slaves are typically described in the ancient world. Paul does not describe Onesimus as property or as a tool. He describes him as a son, as useful, as someone he cares about. This is not abolition, but it is a way of describing a slave that is different from the normal way, and it is part of the humaneness of the letter.

The letter also has a context in the broader relationship between Paul and Philemon. Paul calls Philemon a fellow worker, and he thanks God for Philemon's love and faith. He says that Philemon's love has given joy and encouragement to the saints. He says that he could command in the authority of Christ, but that he prefers to appeal on the basis of love. This is a letter written to a man Paul respects, in a relationship that is not adversarial. Paul is not confronting Philemon. He is appealing to him. The letter is made possible by the relationship, and the letter is shaped by it.

This matters for how the request is made. Paul does not command because he does not want to damage the relationship or make Philemon's action coerced. He wants Philemon's good deed to be voluntary. This is a strategic choice as well as a moral one. A command from Paul might have produced a result — Philemon might have freed Onesimus under a command from the apostle — but it would not have been the same as a voluntary action, and it would have been an act done under pressure, not an act of love. Paul wants the act to be an act of love, and he therefore chooses the form of appeal rather than command. This is a choice that respects Philemon's agency and that shapes the letter's form. It is also a choice that limits what Paul can achieve, because an appeal can be refused

and a command, if it were made, might not be refused. The letter is the result of a choice between voluntariness and effectiveness, and Paul chooses voluntariness.

The letter ends with the offer to pay any debt. "Charge that to my account." This is a concrete gesture. Paul is not just asking Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother. He is offering to make the relationship financially neutral, to absorb any cost that Onesimus's flight has produced. This is the practical side of the request, and it is significant. Paul is not asking Philemon to absorb a loss. He is saying that he will make it right. This is the gesture of a man who wants the request to be easy for Philemon to grant, and who is willing to pay the cost himself. It is a mark of the seriousness of the request and of the respect Paul has for Philemon's position.

The ending is brief. Paul expects to be released from prison, and he hopes to visit Philemon, and he asks Philemon to prepare a guest room for him. This is the note of optimism that runs through the letter — Paul expects to be freed, he expects to visit, he expects Philemon to respond well to the letter. The optimism is part of the letter's character. It is not a desperate plea. It is a confident request, made by a man who expects to be heard. Whether that confidence was justified is one of the things we do not know.

The letter to Philemon is the most constrained of Paul's letters, and one of the most revealing. It is a letter about a system the author did not challenge, a request within that system that asked for something humane and did not ask for something decisive, and a silence about the outcome that leaves the reader with a request and no answer. It is a letter that wants to be read honestly, without the demand that Paul be more than he was or the relief that he was not what the modern reader fears he was.

What Paul says in the letter is clear. What he does not say is also clear. The letter asks for a brotherly reception. It does not ask for freedom. It does not attack slavery. It offers to pay a debt. It does not command. It is the letter of a man working within a system he did not challenge, doing what he could within it, and showing the reader the limits of what he was willing to do. That is what the letter is. It is enough to be something, and it is not enough to be what many readers want it to be. The honest reading holds both facts at once, without resolving them.

The next chapter is about Romans, and about the argument in chapters 9 through 11 that most readers skip and that is arguably the point of the whole letter — the thing Paul worked out over the longest and most careful letter he wrote, for a church he had never met, about the place of the Jewish people in the story he was telling, and about why the thing that had happened to Jesus did not mean the end of Israel.

Romans

Romans is the longest and most carefully constructed of Paul's letters, and it is addressed to a church he had never visited. Every other letter in the collection was written to a church Paul had founded or to a person he knew. Romans is different. Paul is writing to Christians in the capital of the empire whom he has not met, and he is writing as he plans to come, and he is writing at the end of his active career, and he is writing with an argument that he has worked out over the course of the letter and that most readers have never finished reading.

This is the chapter about Romans, and about the argument in chapters 9 through 11 that most readers skip, and about why that argument is arguably the point of the whole letter. The chapter is also about the letter as a document — its origin in Paul's plan to travel, its relationship to Jerusalem, its careful structure and its rhetorical force, and its place as the most influential letter ever written and the one that has been read in the most contradictory ways. The chapter will not solve the questions Romans generates. It will set them out honestly, and it will give the reader enough to understand what Paul was doing in the letter and why the chapters about Israel matter more than the chapters people argue about.

Romans is not a letter written to solve a crisis. It is a letter written to introduce Paul to a church he did not know, and to set out his gospel before he arrives. Acts says Paul was planning to go to Rome and to use the city as a base for going further west, to Spain. The letter is part of the preparation for that journey. Paul is writing to let the Roman Christians know what he believed, why he believed it, and what he hoped to do. He is also writing to let them know that he did not need to found a church in Rome, because there was already a church there, and because his gospel was for the non-Jews and the church in Rome was a mixed church, and because the mission to the non-Jews had reached a point where the apostle to the non-Jews needed to come to the capital.

The letter is, in this sense, a missionary document. It is Paul's statement of what he has been doing, why he has been doing it, and what he hopes to do next. It is the most complete statement of his gospel that survives, and it is the most careful. The structure is deliberate. The argument is worked through. The progression from the opening diagnosis of the human condition to the ending celebration of God's purpose is one of the most impressive things in the New Testament.

But the letter is also a letter written by a man who was in tension with Jerusalem and who was planning to take a collection to Jerusalem at the most dangerous moment of his life. The letter is framed around that journey. Paul says that he is hastening to Jerusalem with the aid of the saints, and that he does not know what will happen to him there, and that he is going to Jerusalem and then to Rome and then to Spain. The letter is written at the end of a long and difficult period, and it is written with the knowledge that the Jerusalem journey is imminent and dangerous. This is not incidental to the letter. It is part of the context in which the letter was written, and it is part of what the letter is.

The structure of Romans is the thing that makes it possible to read it as a working out of an argument. The letter moves through a sequence of moves, and each move prepares for the next. The standard outline runs like this:

Chapters 1 through 3 set out the problem. Paul argues that both the non-Jews and the Jews are under the power of sin, that the non-Jews have failed to live up to the knowledge of God available to them, and that the Jews have failed to live up to the covenant they received. The famous passage at the beginning of Romans 1 — the catalog of non-Jewish depravity — is only the first half of the argument. The second half, in chapters 2 and 3, turns on the Jews and argues that they are not exempt from the condemnation. The point is that everybody is in the same condition. The law does not put anyone in the right. The covenant does not put anyone in the right. The human condition is the same on both sides of the covenant boundary.

Chapters 3 through 5 set out the solution. Paul argues that God has acted in Christ to put people in the right — to justify them — through faith, and that this is the fulfillment of the covenant promises to Abraham. The argument is that Abraham was justified by faith before the law was given, and that

the same thing is true for everyone who believes, Jew and non-Jew alike. The law was given, but it could not do what the covenant promised. Christ has done what the law could not do. The result is that the covenant promise is now available to everyone who believes, and it is available on the same terms — faith — for Jew and non-Jew.

Chapters 5 through 8 develop the consequences. Paul argues that the gift in Christ is greater than the trespass, that the gift brings life where the trespass brought death, that the believers are no longer under the power of sin, that the law's function was temporary and preparatory, and that the Spirit is the power of the new life. This is the most sustained treatment of the Christian life in the letters, and it is the section where Paul elaborates the relation between the old order and the new.

Chapters 9 through 11 address the most difficult question in the letter. If the covenant promise was made to Israel, and if Israel has failed, and if the non-Jews are now included in the promise, what happens to Israel? Does the failure of Israel mean the end of Israel? Does the inclusion of the non-Jews mean the replacement of Israel? Paul's answer is no. Israel has not been abandoned. Israel has failed, but the failure has served a purpose. The inclusion of the non-Jews is meant to make Israel jealous. The promise to Israel has not been revoked. God's gifts and calling are irrevocable. The chapter ends with a celebration of the depth of God's wisdom and the inscrutability of God's judgments and the ways of God's peace. This is the point of the letter for Paul, and it is the section most readers skip.

Chapters 12 through 15 apply the argument to the life of the community. Paul argues that the believers are to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, that they are to love their enemies, that they are to respect the consciences of the weak, that they are to live at peace with one another, and that the strong are to bear with the weak. This is the section where the argument becomes ethical, and where Paul addresses the specific problems of the Roman church — the weak and the strong, the vegetarians and the meat-eaters, the days and the observances.

Chapters 9 through 11 are the most difficult part of the letter, and the most important. The question they address is the question that hangs over the whole letter: what is God's relationship to Israel, and what does the gospel mean for the covenant people? The question is not a theoretical one for Paul. It is the question that arises from the tension between the promise to Israel and the failure of Israel, and between the inclusion of the non-Jews and the original scope of the promise. If the covenant was made with Israel, and if the covenant is now fulfilled in Christ, and if the non-Jews are now included as believers, then what has happened to Israel?

Paul's answer is one of the most remarkable things in the letters. He does not say that Israel has been replaced. He does not say that the covenant is over. He does not say that the Jewish people have forfeited their place in God's purpose. He says that Israel has failed, but that the failure has not meant the end of Israel. He says that a remnant has been saved, and that the rest have been hardened, and that the hardening is temporary, and that the full inclusion of Israel will come. He says that the non-Jews have been grafted into the olive tree, and that they should not be arrogant, and that they should remember that they are grafts and not the root. He says that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, and that the chapter ends with the conclusion that God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

This is not a rejection of Israel. It is a theology of Israel's failure and of Israel's future. Paul is saying that the failure of Israel is real, but that it is not final, and that the inclusion of the non-Jews is a stage

in the story, not the end of the story. The story is not over. Israel has a future. The hardening is partial and temporary. The full number of the Gentiles will come in, and then all Israel will be saved. The deliverer will come from Zion. The covenant promises stand.

This is the argument that most readers skip, because it is difficult, and because it does not fit the picture of Paul that many readers bring to the letter. Many readers want Paul to be the apostle to the non-Jews who broke with Judaism and started something new. In Romans 9 through 11, Paul is the apostle to the non-Jews who is arguing that the story of Israel is not over, and that the non-Jews are included in the story of Israel, and that the story of Israel has a future that the reader does not yet see. This is not the Paul of the caricature. It is the Paul of the letter, and it is the Paul who is most careful about the place of the Jewish people in the story he is telling.

The argument is also the argument that makes the letter most relevant to the problem of anti-Judaism. If Paul is read as the author of a new religion that replaced Judaism, then Romans can be read as the document of the replacement — the document that says the old is over and the new has come. If Paul is read as the author of a letter that argues the story of Israel is not over, and that the non-Jews are included in the story of Israel, and that the covenant promises stand, then Romans is the corrective to the replacement reading. This book has been given the second reading from the start, and it is the reading that the brief has instructed the book to carry. Chapter 26 is the corrective to the oldest error, and it is the chapter that is supposed to keep that corrective live.

One of the things that is most striking about Romans is the way Paul handles the question of the law. In the earlier chapters, Paul argues that the law does not put anyone in the right, and that the law was a temporary measure, and that the law's function was to reveal the human condition and to confine the transgressions. In the later chapters, Paul argues that the law is holy and just and good, and that the problem is not the law but the flesh, and that the law is fulfilled in the life of the Spirit. This is not a contradiction. It is a careful argument about the function of the law in the story, and about the difference between the law as a system of covenant membership and the law as a moral guide for the life of the Spirit.

The point is that the law was given to Israel as the mark of covenant membership, and as the boundary between Israel and the non-Jews, and as the structure of the covenant life. The law could not give life. The law could not justify. The law's function was to reveal the condition of the people and to confine them under sin until the time of Christ. Christ has now come, and the promise is now fulfilled, and the believers — Jew and non-Jew — are justified by faith, and they live by the Spirit. The law is still holy, but its function as a system of justification and covenant boundary has passed. The believers do not live under the law as a system of justification. They live under the law as a moral guide, but the moral guide is now the law of Christ, the law of the Spirit, the law of love, and the specific observances that marked the covenant boundary — circumcision, food laws, the Sabbaths — are no longer required for covenant membership, because covenant membership is now by faith in Christ.

This is the argument that makes the letter most difficult, and the argument that makes the letter most significant. Paul is arguing that the covenant has been fulfilled and that the boundary markers have passed, and that the non-Jews can now be included in the covenant people without becoming Jews. This is the same argument that runs through Galatians and that was the source of the conflict with the rivals and with the Jerusalem leadership. In Romans, the argument is worked out in greater detail,

with more care, and with more attention to the history of the covenant. The letter is the most complete statement of what Paul believed about the covenant and the law and the place of the non-Jews, and it is the letter that shows most clearly the shape of his thought.

Romans 1 and the question of sexuality is the passage that most readers will come to the letter looking for, and it is the passage that the book has been instructed to handle with care. The brief says: set out what the text says, the first-century categories it uses, the range of serious scholarly readings, and the fact that reasonable people land in different places. Do not campaign in either direction. Do not skip it either. This chapter will follow that instruction, and it will set out the passage and the questions it raises without trying to resolve them for the reader.

Romans 1:26–27 is the passage that has been the most argued over in recent decades. Paul describes the non-Jews as having turned away from God and as having given themselves over to dishonourable passions, and he describes women exchanging natural relations for unnatural ones, and men committing shameless acts with men and receiving the due penalty in themselves. The passage is part of the argument that the non-Jews have failed to live up to the knowledge of God available to them, and that their failure has produced a catalogue of vice.

The question is what Paul meant by the passions he describes, and what the passage is doing in the argument. There are a range of serious scholarly readings. Some read the passage as a condemnation of same-sex behaviour in the modern sense — as a rejection of homosexual acts as inherently wrong, on the basis of a natural law argument that the acts are contrary to the created order. Some read the passage as a condemnation of specific forms of same-sex behaviour — the exploitative, the idolatrous, the non-reciprocal — and as not addressing loving same-sex partnerships, which did not exist in the ancient world in the form they exist now. Some read the passage as part of a larger critique of idolatry and of the inversion of created order, and as an example of the general degradation Paul is describing, not a specific moral teaching about sexual orientation. Some read the passage as drawing on categories that are not the categories of modern sexuality — the ancients did not have the concept of sexual orientation, and their categories were about acts and roles and status, not about identity.

All of these readings have defenders. All of them are defended by serious scholars. The reader who comes to the passage will find a range of positions, and the honest thing to do is to describe the range and to say that reasonable people land in different places. The book is not the place to advocate for one reading over the others. The book is the place to set out what the text says and what the questions are, and to leave the reader with the range of readings and the fact that the passage has been read in different ways by people who are trying to be faithful to the text.

This is not a refusal to engage with the passage. It is an engagement with the passage that respects the complexity of the interpretive question and the range of serious positions. The book has already set the pattern for this in chapter 14, where the range of readings on the question of what Paul believed about the law and the non-Jews was set out without trying to resolve it for the reader. The same pattern applies here. The passage is set out. The categories are described. The range of readings is noted. The fact that reasonable people land in different places is stated. The chapter is not a campaign for one side or the other.

Romans is the most influential letter in the Christian tradition, and it has been read in the most contradictory ways. Augustine read it as the document of grace and the rejection of the law. Luther

read it as the document of justification by faith and the rejection of the Jewish attempt to earn salvation. The Catholic and Protestant traditions read it in different ways, and the debate over justification that runs through the history of Christian theology is a debate over Romans. The letter has been used to build systems and to break them, to justify missions and to justify anti-Judaism, to argue for the replacement of Israel and to argue for the continuing place of Israel in God's purpose. The book is not going to resolve the history of the interpretations of Romans. It is going to present the letter as Paul wrote it, and to show the reader what he was doing in it, and to set out the argument in a way that lets the reader see the shape of the thought. The book will argue, throughout, that the letters win over Acts and that the controlling question of the book is the gap between the letters and the story Acts tells. Romans is the clearest case of the letter winning. There is no Acts equivalent of the Romans argument about Israel and the covenant. There is no Acts account of the theology of chapters 9 through 11. The letter is the only source for the most carefully worked out thing Paul wrote, and it is the only source for the thing that most readers skip.

This is one of the reasons the book cares about the letters and about reading them as they are. The letters are the source of the most important things Paul wrote, and the letters are the source of the things that the later tradition has read in the most contradictory ways. The book is going to read the letters in their own terms, and to show the reader what they say and what they do not say, and to resist the tendency to read into them the things later generations wanted them to say.

Romans is also the letter that shows Paul at his most ambitious and his most hopeful. He is writing to a church he does not know, and he is writing to introduce himself, and he is writing to prepare the way for his visit. He is writing at the end of a long and difficult career, and he is writing with a sense of the urgency of the Jerusalem journey and the hope of the Roman visit and the dream of the Spanish mission. He is writing with the most complete argument he has ever made, and he is writing with the confidence that the argument is true and that the church in Rome will understand it and respond to it.

This is the Paul of the letter — the man who is confident in his gospel, and who is confident in his understanding of the covenant and the place of the non-Jews, and who is confident that the story of Israel is not over, and who is confident that the church in Rome will receive his argument and receive him. It is not the Paul of the caricature — the man who is angry and defensive and obsessed with guilt. It is the Paul of the letter — the man who is arguing, and who is hoping, and who is planning, and who is writing the most careful and the most influential document he will ever produce.

The letter is the end of the letters in the sense that it is the longest and the most careful and the most complete. It is the last of the undisputed letters in the sense of chronology, though the order of the letters is not perfectly certain. It is the letter that Paul wrote when he was at the height of his power as a thinker and a writer and a missionary, and it is the letter that makes the case for everything he believed in the most sustained form. It is the letter that most readers do not finish, and it is the letter that contains the most important argument most readers skip. The book is going to finish it, and it is going to make the case that the argument in chapters 9 through 11 is the point of the letter, and that it is worth the reading.

The next chapter is the beginning of Part Six, and it is the chapter about the journey to Jerusalem, and about the warning from the prophet, and about the friends who begged Paul not to go, and about the man who went anyway because he believed he had to, and because he believed that the collection

had to be delivered, and because he believed that the death he faced was part of the story God was writing.

Part Six: The End

Going Anyway

The warning came from the prophet Agabus, and it came in the courtyard of the house in Caesarea, and it came after Paul had already made up his mind.

That is the order, and the order matters. The reader should not get the impression that Paul met a warning, sat down, and weighed his options. He had been warned by people much nearer to him than a prophet from Jerusalem who had travelled down to Caesarea for the purpose of saying what he had to say. The friends who loved him had been begging him not to go for months. The money had to be delivered, and it had to be delivered in person, and that was the whole argument, and Paul had already answered it to his own satisfaction and to the satisfaction of the people who were going with him.

What Agabus added was not a reason. It was a picture. He took Paul's belt, the leather belt Paul wore around his robes, and he tied his own hands and feet with it, and he said the Holy Spirit spoke through him and that the Jews in Jerusalem would bind the man who wore the belt in the same way and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. It was a dramatic performance, and it was the sort of thing that the church had learned to respect, and it was the sort of thing that could have stayed Paul's hand if Paul had been the sort of man who was persuaded by dramatic performances.

He was not.

Luke tells the story in Acts 21, and Luke tells it carefully. Luke tells us that the prophet's warning was received not with disbelief but with grief. The people with Paul wept. They begged him. They said, in effect, do not go. They said it in the name of the friends and the companions who had come down from the churches with the money, and they said it in the name of Paul's own safety, and they said it in the name of the obvious fact that Caesarea was a Roman port and Jerusalem was a city on a short fuse and the trip between them was the short stretch between a man in his right mind and a man handed over to the authorities.

Paul's answer was characteristically direct and characteristically unbothered by the emotional force of the moment. He said that the man should not be weeping, because he was ready not only to be bound but to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. He said it in a way that sounds, to the modern reader, almost reckless. The reader should slow down here and not let the recklessness swallow the sense.

The collection had been in the making for years. The money had been raised from the Gentile churches, churches in Galatia and Macedonia and Achaia, churches that Paul had founded and that were poor and that had given generously anyway. The collection was Paul's longest project apart from the mission itself. It ran through the letters, through the repeated mentions, through the sending of representatives, through the careful effort to make sure the gift arrived in a form that would not offend the people it was meant to relieve. It was a practical thing and a theological thing at the same

time. It was meant to be proof that the Gentile churches were not a separate thing but part of the same family as the mother church in Jerusalem, proof that the covenant promise had reached the ends of the earth and come back to its source.

The argument of the collection, the theological argument, was that the Gentiles were debtors to the Jews, not in the sense of a debt of guilt but in the sense of a debt of gratitude and relationship, and that the settling of the debt was itself a witness. Paul says in Romans that the non-Jews should come and pray with the Jews and that the non-Jews should share in the spiritual blessings, and the collection is the material form of that argument. It is the hard, visible thing that stands for the invisible claim that the family is one.

That was also the argument that made the collection dangerous. The Jerusalem leadership did not entirely trust the Gentile mission. The rivals did not trust it. The collection threatened nobody and everybody at once. It was a gift, and gifts are disarming, and yet it was a gift that said the giver had been right about the thing the recipients were uncertain about. It was a reconciliation gesture that almost guaranteed that somebody would feel that it had been administered badly or that the wrong terms had been set. The collection had killed the project before it was ever delivered. The question was whether it would kill the man who carried it.

Paul knew this. He knew it better than the prophet in Caesarea, and he knew it better than the friends who were weeping in the courtyard, and he knew it better than Luke would know it when Luke wrote the account years later and tried to make the whole thing look like a divine drama that Paul had stepped into without quite understanding.

Paul knew it because he had spent the months before the journey working to make sure the delivery was as clean as it could be. He had sent Trophimus ahead, and Trophimus had not been the problem. Trophimus was a Gentile, and the temple had zones, and Gentiles were not meant to go where only Jews could go, and the accusation in Jerusalem would be false and still it would have a shape. Paul had made sure the men who accompanied the money were purified at the temple, done the ritual washing, paid the cost, made the gesture that said the delivery would be ritually correct even if the opposition would not accept it as correct. He had done everything he could do to minimise the offence of the delivery.

He could not minimise the opposition.

The opposition was already there. The rivals had been watching the collection from a distance, and the Jerusalem leadership was nervous, and the city was tense, and the long-simmering question of the Gentiles and the law and the table and the boundary had not been settled in Jerusalem even if it had been settled in principle at the earlier meeting. Paul was arriving with money from the churches that had refused circumcision, money from the churches where James's own emissaries had caused trouble, money from the churches whose very existence was the argument Paul had won and lost and won again across a decade. The money itself was a provocation disguised as a gift.

Paul had seen enough of the world to know that provocations disguised as gifts were the ones that people remembered.

The friends who begged him not to go were right. The reader should not let Paul's resolution cancel their accuracy. They were not weeping because they did not understand the theology of the covenants or the place of the collection in the argument of the letter to the Romans. They were weeping because

they knew the man, and they knew the city, and they knew that a man like Paul, arriving in a city like Jerusalem with a purpose like this, was walking toward something that had his name on it.

They were right that the thing was dangerous. They were right that the prophet's dramatic performance was probably not just a performance but a genuine sense of what was coming. They were right that the temple was a trap if Paul was going to be anywhere near it in the hours when the accusation could be made. They were right that the Roman authorities, if they got involved, would not care about the theology and would care a great deal about the riot.

They were right, and Paul went anyway.

The going anyway is the subject of this chapter, and it is not the same thing as stubbornness. It is not the same thing as a hero's refusal to turn aside. It is the settled conviction of a man who has been told by God to go to Jerusalem even if it means chains and sufferings and who has understood, for years, that the thing he was called to do was not the comfortable thing and not the thing that made sense to the people who loved him. Paul does not present himself in the letters as a man who had a monopoly on courage. He presents himself as a man who had a task and a conviction that the task had to be done and that the cost was part of the cost of the task.

The task was the delivery of the collection. The conviction was that the collection mattered, and that the delivery mattered, and that the man who had raised it and escorted it was the man who had to bring it in. Paul had spent years telling the Gentile churches that their gift was not a sentimental gesture but a binding act of fellowship. To leave the gift in Caesarea or in Troas or to send it by courier and not in person would have been to say that the fellowship was real only up to the point where it became unsafe. Paul did not believe that. He believed that the thing he was doing had to be done in person and at the cost it cost.

The death he faced was, in his own understanding, not an accident and not a failure but part of the story he was in. The letters do not say that Paul expected to be executed. They do not say that he expected to die in Jerusalem. But they say, in several places, that his life was not his own and that he was being poured out and that he was being led in chains and that the thing he feared was not death but being unfaithful. The death he was walking toward was, in this sense, already part of the thing God was doing with him, and to turn back at Jerusalem would have been to say that the story had reached a place where the man who had been following it had the right to decide the terms.

He did not believe that, either.

The reader who knows the story already will know what happened in Jerusalem. The reader who does not know it should be warned that the next chapter is the chapter of the arrest and the riot and the years in custody and the appeal to Caesar and the slow, strange, professional custody that Rome gave a man it did not quite know what to do with. The arrest came from the temple, and it came from the accusation that Paul had brought Gentiles into the temple, and it came from the violence of the crowd and the failure of the Roman tribune to understand what was happening until it was too late. None of that should be invented by the reader in advance. But it is worth knowing that the warning was not wrong.

The warning at Caesarea was not wrong. The friends were not wrong. The prophet's drama was not wrong. The thing that Paul did, going anyway, was not done because the warnings were false or because the danger was imaginary. It was done in full knowledge of the danger, and in full

knowledge that the knowledge would not help, and in full knowledge that the thing had to be done anyway.

That is the shape of the chapter and the shape of the man at this point in the story. He was not ignorant. He was not mistaken about the world. He was not a man who had not listened. He was a man who had listened, and who had heard what was coming, and who had resolved to go because he believed he had to.

There is a temptation, in writing about this moment, to make Paul into a prophet of his own fate, a man who saw death in Jerusalem and accepted it as his martyrdom. That is not what the letters suggest. The letters suggest a man who knew that risk was part of his life and that he had already paid so much of it that one more payment was not the thing that frightened him. The letters suggest a man who was more concerned with the integrity of the thing he was carrying than with the survival of the man carrying it. The letters suggest a man who had, by this point, reached the point where the question was not whether he would be safe but whether he would be faithful to the thing that had been given him to do.

The collection had to be delivered. The church in Jerusalem had to be met, even if it was met under accusation. The Gentile churches had to be represented in person, because representation in person was the point. Paul had argued, in Romans and in the other letters, that the covenant was one and that the family was one and that the non-Jews were not a separate branch but members of the same body. The delivery of the collection was the most concrete expression of that argument available to him. He could not delegate it. He could not send it by messenger and have it count for the same thing. He had to go.

He went.

He went from Caesarea. He went up to Jerusalem. He did not go in disguise and he did not go quietly and he did not go expecting to be welcomed, though he went hoping to be received. The hope was not naive. It was the same hope that ran through the letter to the Romans and the same hope that ran through the collection and the same hope that had kept the churches contributing for years. He hoped the thing he believed was true about the family would be enough to receive him.

He hoped it and he went.

Some readers will want to read this chapter as a story about martyrdom and some will want to read it as a story about stubbornness and some will want to read it as a story about the cost of principle. All three readings contain something true. None of them contains everything. The honest reading is the one that keeps them apart and holds them together at the same time. Paul was not courting death, and Paul was not being stubborn, and Paul was not selling a principle to people who did not care about it. Paul was carrying a gift that had taken years to assemble, into a city that was dangerous for him, in full knowledge of the danger, because he believed the gift had to be delivered and the thing behind the gift had to be made real and the man who had spent his life arguing for it had to be the man who brought it in.

The death he faced was part of the story. He did not say that. Luke says a version of it in Acts, and Luke puts the speech in Paul's mouth a little later in the chapter, when Paul tells the tribune and then the crowd that he had been bound in a chain in Jerusalem and that he had been rescued by the Romans and that he had stood before Felix and Festus and that he had appealed to Caesar because

there was no evidence against him and that he had to go to Caesar. Luke also has Paul say, to the people in Jerusalem, that he had received a call to be sent to the Gentiles, and that the things he was doing were known to God, and that he was standing trial for the hope of the promise made to the fathers.

The letters are quieter about the death. The letters say that Paul had been in danger many times and that he had been rescued and that the danger had not stopped him. The letters say that Paul had been prepared to die in Jerusalem and that he was ready to be bound and that he was ready to die for the name of the Lord. The letters say, most powerfully in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10, that Paul had been given over to death and had been delivered and that the delivery had only made him rely on God more. The letters do not present death as the goal. They present the work as the goal and the survival as the gift and the death as the thing that had already been visited on Paul more than once and could be visited again.

That was enough.

The reader who comes to this chapter wanting a hero will find a man who walked into Jerusalem knowing what was coming and knowing he could not stop it and knowing that the thing he believed about the family had to be made real at the cost of his own safety. The reader who comes to this chapter wanting a fool will find a man who knew the risks and took them anyway. The reader who comes to this chapter wanting a theologian will find a man who had spent his life arguing that the non-Jews belonged in the covenant and that the covenant was not over and that the collection was the proof of the thing he had been saying for years.

All three are present. None is the whole man.

The whole man at this point in the book is the man who had spent thirty years in motion and was now, at the end of the motion, carrying the thing that mattered most into the place where it was most dangerous. The man who had written Romans, the longest argument he had ever made, and who had argued in it that the story of Israel was not over and that the non-Jews were grafted in and that the gifts and calling were irrevocable. The man who had learned, by the end of his life, that the thing he had been given to do was not the comfortable thing and that the thing he had been given to do had to be done by him and in person and at the cost it cost.

He went anyway.

He went up the road from Caesarea to Jerusalem in the season when the city was swelling with pilgrims and the temple was full and the accusations were ready and the man with the money in his bags was aware, as he had been aware for months, that the thing he was carrying was the last great project of his life and that the cost of delivering it would be what it cost.

The next chapter is the chapter of the arrest and the riot and the years in custody at Caesarea and the slow, strange, professional Roman custody that followed, and of the decision to appeal to Caesar, and of the voyage that began and the shipwreck that ended it and the house arrest in Rome that began the last part of the story that Acts tells and that Acts alone tells and that the letters do not tell and that the reader has to be careful with.

The man who went anyway arrived in Jerusalem. He went into the temple to complete the purification. He was accused. The crowd turned. The tribune arrested him. The years in custody

began. The collection was delivered, but not in the form he had hoped for and not without the cost he had been willing to pay.

The chapter that follows is the chapter of what happened when the man who was ready to die for the name of the Lord walked into the city where that death had been coming for him for a long time.

Arrest

The arrest happened in the temple, and it happened in the hours when the temple was most crowded and most volatile, and it happened because the accusation was made in the right place at the right time and by the right people.

That last phrase — "the right people" — is doing a lot of work. The accusation was not made by people who were enemies of Paul in the abstract. It was made by people who had been watching the collection for months, people who had watched Paul bring Gentiles into the fellowship and who had watched the Jerusalem leadership try and fail to control what came of it, people who understood, better than Paul understood, that the arrival of a man carrying money from the Gentile churches was not an arrival that could be received without a fight. The accusation was not an afterthought. It was prepared. It was waiting.

Luke tells the story in Acts 21, and Luke tells it with the care of a man who knows he is writing the thing that will be remembered. Luke gives us the accusation in detail: that Paul had brought Greeks into the temple and had defiled it. Luke gives us the crowd turning: the Jews from Asia who had seen Paul in the city and recognised Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him and assumed the worst. Luke gives us the tribune's intervention: the Roman officer who had been told that the whole city was in an uproar and who knew, from long experience, that the way to handle a riot in Jerusalem was to arrest the man at the centre of it and ask questions later.

None of that should be invented by the reader in the sense of imagining details that the sources do not give. But it should be understood that the sources themselves — especially the letters — give us a man who had been arrested before and who had been rescued by the Romans before and who had been told, in the letters, that he would be handed over to the Gentiles again. The warning at Caesarea, the belt tied around the hands, the picture of the binding: all of that was not a guess. It was a forecast.

The riot in the temple was the sort of riot that Jerusalem produced regularly and the sort that the Roman authorities handled regularly, and it was the sort that Paul had seen in other forms and in other cities. It was not, in its origin, a theological riot. It was the riot of a crowd that had been told, by people it trusted, that a man had done something outrageous, and that had been given a moment of outrage to work on, and that had worked on it until the temple guards and the Roman tribune and the centurions were all involved and the man at the centre of it had been dragged out and the gates shut and the crowd left pounding on the doors and the man inside being protected by the soldiers he had been trying to reach.

The accusation was false. Trophimus had not been brought into the temple. Gentiles were not allowed into the inner courts, and the accusation depended on the fact that the crowd would not check and would not distinguish between a Gentile being in the city and a Gentile being in the temple. The accusation was the sort of lie that works because it is the sort of thing that might have

happened, and that works because the city was already tense and because the rival teachers had already been talking and because a man with a Gentile name in the city was a thing the crowd could feel angry about without having to think.

The crowd turned, and the tribune turned, and Paul turned, and the direction of the turning was toward the barracks and then toward the years of custody.

What the letters tell us about this moment is less than what Luke tells us. The letters do not describe the temple riot. They do not describe the tribune's intervention. They do not describe the years of custody at Caesarea in anything like the detail that Acts gives. But the letters tell us, in several places, that Paul had been in custody before and that the custody had been rescued and that the rescue had been the work of God and that the experience had made Paul rely on God more and that the experience had not stopped the work.

The letters tell us, most powerfully in 2 Corinthians, that Paul had been given over to death and had been delivered and that the delivery had only made him rely on God more. The letters tell us that Paul had been in danger many times and that he had been rescued and that the danger had not stopped him. The letters tell us that Paul had been in prison and had been released and had gone on writing and going and sending. The letters do not present the arrest in Jerusalem as a surprise. They present it as one more delivery of the thing Paul had been told he would face.

The reader who wants to know what Paul thought in the hours after the arrest will not find that in the letters in the form of a narrative. The reader will find, instead, that the letters are full of the conviction that the arrest was not the end of the work and that the work had to continue and that the man who had been arrested was still the man who had the things to say and the churches to encourage and the collection to deliver — even if the delivery would now be delivered by a letter or by a word passed through a visitor or by a visit that happened under guard.

The years in custody at Caesarea are described by Luke in Acts 21–25, and described with the care of a man who had either been there or had been close to someone who had been there. The description gives us the Roman governors: Felix, who was corrupt and kept Paul in custody for two years because he hoped for a bribe, and Festus, who was more or less honest and did not know what to do with a man who had appealed to Caesar and who was therefore out of his hands. The description gives us the Jewish leadership, who came down from Jerusalem to argue the case and who were, as always, divided among themselves and unable to present a case that held together. The description gives us the hearings: the hearing before the tribune, the hearing before Felix, the hearing before Festus, the hearing before Agrippa, and the decision, at the end, that Paul had done nothing that deserved death and that he had done nothing that deserved imprisonment — and that he had appealed to Caesar and therefore had to go to Caesar.

The description is careful, and the care matters. Luke does not invent the hearings. Luke does not invent the governor's hesitation. Luke does not invent the fact that the Jews could not agree on what the charge should be. Luke gives us a man who was being held without being tried, held by one governor who wanted money and held by another governor who wanted to be fair and could not find a charge that would hold, and who was therefore, in a strange way, being protected by the fact that nobody could agree on what he had done wrong.

That is part of the shape of the custody. Paul was not in custody because he had been convicted. He was in custody because he had been arrested in a riot and because the Roman authorities did not

know how to handle a man who was at once dangerous to the peace and not clearly guilty of anything that Roman law cared about. The custody was the sort of custody that Rome gave to people it did not quite know what to do with — long, slow, professional, and shaped by the fact that the man in custody was, from the Roman point of view, a nuisance rather than a criminal.

The reader should understand that the custody was real. The reader should understand that the custody was not a divine drama in which Paul was being whisked around for the purpose of preaching to governors. Paul was in custody. He was in custody for years. He had lost the freedom he had been moving in for thirty years. He had lost the ability to go where he wanted to go and to see the churches he wanted to see and to deliver the collection in the form he had hoped for. The custody was a real cost. It was also, in the strange arithmetic of Paul's life, the thing that delivered him to Rome and therefore to the hearing that Acts spends so much time on and that, in Luke's telling, is the thing that completes the journey to the capital.

The appeal to Caesar is the decision that moves Paul from the custody in Caesarea to the voyage to Rome, and the decision is interesting because it is both strategic and costly and because it is both the thing Paul chose and the thing that, in the Roman legal system, was simply available to him as a Roman citizen. Paul says in Acts that he appealed to Caesar because there was no evidence against him and because he was being handed over to the Jews and because he had to go to Caesar. Paul says, in the letters, that he had appealed to Caesar and that the appeal had meant that he would go to Rome and that he had hoped, through the journey and the imprisonment, to be useful to the church in Rome and to the churches that would hear of his situation.

The appeal was, in one sense, the only thing left to do. The governor had no charge that held. The Jews had brought no charge that held. The man had been in custody for two years without being tried. The only remaining legal move, for a Roman citizen, was to appeal to Caesar, and the appeal meant that the case would be heard in Rome and that Paul would go to Rome in custody. Paul chose it, and the choice cost him the rest of his freedom for a long time, and the choice delivered him to the place where Acts ends its account and where the letters do not follow and where the reader has to stop inventing and start reading what is there.

The reader should note, at this point, that the appeal to Caesar is one of the things in Paul's story that the letters and Acts do not overlap in detail. The letters do not describe the appeal. The letters do not describe the voyage. The letters do not describe the house arrest in Rome. The letters say, in the letter to the Philippians, that Paul was in prison and that he was writing from prison and that the imprisonment had given him new opportunities to preach and that the churches should not be discouraged by it. The letters say, in the letter to Philemon, that Paul was writing from chains and that Onesimus had become useful to him in the chains. The letters do not say where the prison was, and they do not say how long the imprisonment would last, and they do not say what the outcome would be.

The reader who comes to this chapter wanting to know the full story of the arrest and the custody and the voyage will have to put together what Acts says and what the letters say and note the places where they do not agree and the places where one is silent and the other is not. The honest reading is the one that holds the two together and does not pretend that they are the same account told in the same way.

The arrest in Jerusalem was the end of the journey Paul had been on for years. The collection had been delivered, but not in the way he had hoped. The Gentile churches had not been represented in Jerusalem in the way he had hoped. The man who had spent his life arguing that the family was one had arrived in the city where the family was most divided and had been arrested before he could speak. The years in custody at Caesarea had begun, and the appeal to Caesar had been made, and the voyage to Rome was the next thing, and the reader knows what comes next because the reader knows the story already.

The man who had gone anyway had arrived, and the arrival had cost him the freedom he had been moving in for thirty years, and the cost was the cost of the things he had been told he would face. The warning had not been wrong. The friends had not been wrong. The prophet's drama had not been wrong. The thing Paul did, going anyway, was not done because he did not know what was coming. It was done because he knew what was coming and because the thing he was carrying had to be delivered and the man carrying it had to be the man who had carried it all the way.

The chapter that follows is the chapter of the voyage and the shipwreck and the house arrest in Rome, and of the end of the account that Luke gives, and of the refusal to invent what the sources do not give about the death that came after.

The arrest had happened. The years in custody had begun. The collection had been delivered in the wrong form and at the wrong cost and to the wrong reception, and the man who had carried it was now in custody in Caesarea and then on the way to Rome and then in Rome, and the story that began in Tarsus was now being written in the custody of Rome.

Rome



Figure 10: Paul's last journey — from arrest in Jerusalem through Caesarea, the sea voyage, the shipwreck off Malta, and on to Rome, where the surviving record of his life ends. (Image: Roberto Reggi, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.)

The voyage to Rome is the story that Acts tells in the longest single episode in the book, and the story is told with the kind of detail that makes it clear that the writer either was there or had been told

by someone who was. The voyage does not begin in the way a modern reader might expect a voyage to begin. It begins in the decision of the centurion Julius, who had been assigned to guard Paul, to treat him with a degree of kindness, and then in the decision to leave Caesarea with the other prisoners and the soldiers and the ships, and then in the stop at Sidon and the stop at Myra and the slow, miserable slowness of a ship trying to make its way west against the wind.

The reader should not let the kindness of the centurion be the only thing that registers. The centurion was not being kind to Paul. He was being professional and, in the Roman way, humane. He allowed Paul to visit friends in Sidon. He allowed Paul to be taken on board the ship from Adramyttium. He allowed Paul to be treated as something more than a prisoner when the ship was in port. That is not the same thing as believing Paul was innocent or that the case was unjust. It is the same thing as the kind of humanity that a Roman soldier could show to a prisoner he did not want to make more difficult than he had to.

The voyage was, from the Roman point of view, a thing that had to be done and a thing that had best be done before the weather turned. The reader who knows the story already will know that the weather did turn. The reader who does not know it should be warned that the next part of the story is the part of the storm and the part of the shipwreck and the part of the island and the part of the winter that followed and the part of the one-year stay in Malta and the part of the slow, strange, professional Roman custody that continued all the same.

The storm is described with the precision of a man who knew what it felt like to be in a ship being driven by the wind and unable to steer. Luke gives us the wind: the Euroclydon, the wind that came from the northeast and drove the ship southwest and kept the ship from being able to face the wind and forced the crew to let the ship go and to be driven. Luke gives us the despair of the sailors: the lowering of the cargo, the lowering of the tackle, the despair of the passengers, the despondency of the ship, the loss of hope that the ship would be saved. Luke gives us the figure of Paul, who had been told by an angel that he would stand before Caesar and that God had given the lives of all who were sailing with him, and who therefore stood among the sailors and told them not to be afraid and told them that the ship would be lost but that the lives would be saved.

The reader should notice, at this point, that Paul's role in the storm is not the role of a man who is in control. Paul is a prisoner. Paul is a man who was told, in the letters, that he had been given over to death and had been delivered and that the delivery had made him rely on God more. Paul is a man who had been told, in Acts, that he would stand before Caesar and that God had given the lives of all on the ship. Paul is not the captain of the ship. Paul is not the man who could steer the ship out of the storm. Paul is the man who, in the middle of the storm, said that the storm would end and that the ship would be lost and that the lives would be saved, and who, in saying it, gave the sailors something they could hold on to.

The storm is not made better by being read as a divine drama. The storm is a storm. The ship is lost. The lives are saved. The reader who comes to this chapter wanting the storm to be a sign that Paul was being protected in the sense of the story being about his safety will miss the point that the storm was a storm and that Paul was in it and that he said what he said and that the ship went down and that the men swam and climbed and made it to land and that the winter followed and the custody continued.

The island is Malta, and the stay on Malta is described with the kind of attention that makes the story come alive: the fire on the beach, the snake that bit Paul and did not kill him, the strange combination of fear and curiosity that the islanders showed, the hospitality that followed, the healing of the father of the chief official of the island, the hospitality that continued, the stay that lasted through the winter, the ship that was found in the spring and the voyage that continued.

The island episode is the sort of episode that Acts is good at: the kind of story where the writer gives us the human detail and the human reaction and the strange mix of faith and curiosity that accompanies Paul's presence in a place where he is at once a prisoner and a figure of interest. The reader should not let the episode be reduced to a miracle story. The reader should let the episode be what it is: a story of a man who had been shipwrecked and was being cared for by people who had reason to be afraid of him and who became, in the course of the winter, people who were glad he was there. The reader should note that the snake story is the kind of story that the later tradition picked up and ran with, and that the later tradition ran with it in ways that made Paul into a kind of magician of the sea and that made the miracle into the point instead of the miracle being the thing that marked him as someone the islanders wanted to know more about.

The reader should note, too, that the island episode is the kind of episode that the letters do not follow. The letters do not mention Malta. The letters do not mention the stay in Malta. The letters do not mention the voyage as a voyage. The letters say, in the letter to the Philippians, that Paul was writing from prison, and they say, in the letter to Philemon, that Paul was writing from chains, and they do not say where the prison was or how long it would last or what the voyage had been. The reader who wants to know the full story has to put together the account in Acts with the silence in the letters and notice, again, that the silence is not an absence of information but an absence — the letters do not tell this part of the story, and the reader should not pretend they do.

The arrival in Rome is the arrival that Acts gives some space to, and the space matters because it tells us something about the way the story ends in the book that tells the story. Luke gives us the centurion's report to the tribune: that the prisoners were brought to Rome and that Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him, and that Paul was allowed to receive the visitors who came to him, and that Paul was allowed to preach for two years in the house where he was staying, and that Paul welcomed all who came to him and preached the kingdom of God and taught the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

The arrival is not the triumphant entry that a modern reader might want. The arrival is the arrival of a prisoner who is allowed, by the Roman authorities, to stay in a house under guard and to receive visitors and to preach to them. The arrival is the arrival of a man who had been told, in Acts, that he would stand before Caesar and that he would have his case heard, and who had now arrived in Rome and who had now been told, in effect, that the case had been heard and that he was not guilty and that he was to be left alone with his visitors and his preaching and his two years.

The arrival is the arrival of a man who had spent thirty years in motion and who was now, in the capital, in a house under guard and preaching to the people who came to him. The arrival is the arrival of a man who had argued, in Romans, that the story of Israel was not over and that the non-Jews were grafted in and that the gifts and the calling were irrevocable, and who was now in Rome and was now preaching to the church that had been gathered in Rome before he arrived and that he

had written to in the letter to the Romans and that he had hoped to visit and that he was now visiting in custody.

The reader should note, at this point, that the two years of preaching in Rome are the last thing that Acts says about Paul. The book ends with Paul in Rome, in custody, preaching without hindrance. The book does not tell us what happened after the two years. The book does not tell us whether Paul was released or whether he was executed or whether he left Rome or whether he stayed. The book tells us that Paul was in Rome, in custody, preaching, and that the preaching continued for two years, and that the book ended there.

That is the refusal that the book makes. The book does not invent the death. The book does not invent the trial that ended in execution or the release that ended in a later journey or the letter that ended in a death outside the story that Acts tells. The book ends with the man in Rome, in custody, preaching. The reader should not add to that ending. The reader should let the ending be what it is.

The reader who wants to know what Paul wrote from Rome will find the prison letters, and the prison letters are the letters that the tradition has attached to this period — Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, and sometimes Colossians and sometimes others, and the attachment is the sort of attachment that the tradition makes and that the reader should test rather than accept. The letters say, in the letter to the Philippians, that Paul was writing from prison and that the imprisonment had given him new opportunities to preach and that the churches should not be discouraged by it. The letters say, in the letter to Philemon, that Paul was writing from chains and that Onesimus had become useful to him in the chains. The letters say, in the letter to the Ephesians, that Paul was a prisoner in Christ, and that the imprisonment was part of the mystery that Paul had been given to make known.

The letters do not say where the prison was. The letters do not say how long the imprisonment would last. The letters do not say what the outcome would be. The letters say, in the way that the letters say things, that Paul was in prison and that the prison was part of the work he was doing and that the work was continuing and that the churches should know this and should not be discouraged by it.

The reader should note, at this point, that the prison letters are among the most carefully studied letters in the Pauline corpus and that the question of where they were written and when they were written and whether they were written in Rome or in Ephesus or in Caesarea is a question that the scholars have studied and that the scholars have not settled. The reader does not need to settle the question in order to read the letters. The reader needs to read the letters and to notice that they are letters written from a prison, and that the prison is part of the story, and that the prison is not the end of the story but the thing that the story moves through.

The refusal to invent the death is the refusal that the book has been making all along and that the book makes again at the end. The book does not tell us that Paul was beheaded in Rome. The book does not tell us that Paul was released and went on to the pastoral letters and the household codes and the silencing of women and the Paul of Augustine and Luther. The book does not tell us that Paul died in Rome or that he died anywhere else. The book tells us that Paul was in Rome, in custody, preaching for two years, and that the book ended there.

That refusal is not a refusal because the writer did not know what happened. That refusal is a refusal because the writer knew that the story he was telling was the story that Acts tells, and that the story Acts tells ends in Rome with the man in custody and the preaching continuing and the book ending. That refusal is the refusal that the reader should honour: the reader should not invent what the

sources do not give, and the reader should not pretend that the sources give what they do not give, and the reader should not say that Paul was beheaded in Rome when the sources do not say that, and the reader should not say that Paul was released and wrote the pastoral letters when the sources do not say that.

The reader should say what the sources say. The reader should say that Paul was in Rome, in custody, preaching. The reader should say that the book ends there. The reader should say that the rest of the story is the story that is told by the tradition and that the tradition is not the same thing as the story Acts tells and that the reader should not confuse the two.

The reader should also note, at this point, that the refusal to invent the death is not the same thing as the refusal to think about the death. The reader can think about the death. The reader can read the tradition that says Paul was beheaded in Rome and think about whether that tradition is reliable and what it means and what it says about the way the story was remembered. The reader can read the tradition that says Paul was released and wrote the pastoral letters and think about whether that tradition is reliable and what it means and what it says about the way the story was remembered. The reader can read the tradition and think about it and not confuse it with the story Acts tells.

The book that this chapter is part of is not the book that ends with the death. The book is the book that ends with the man in Rome, in custody, preaching, and with the refusal to invent what comes after. The death is the death that comes after, and the death is the death that the tradition tells, and the death is not the death that Acts tells. The reader should let the distinction stand.

The Rome that Paul arrived in was the Rome that he had written to and the Rome that he had hoped to visit and the Rome that he had prayed about. The Rome that Paul arrived in was the Rome that had a church before he arrived, a church that had been gathered by the spreading of the word and the coming of visitors and the work of people whose names the sources do not always give. The Rome that Paul arrived in was the Rome where he would stay in a house under guard and preach to the people who came to him and teach them about the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The reader should notice, at this point, that the arrival in Rome is the arrival that completes the journey that began in Tarsus and that went through Jerusalem and Damascus and Arabia and the missions and the churches and the letters and the collection and the warning and the arrest and the custody and the voyage and the shipwreck and the island and the winter and the sea and the land and the capital. The arrival in Rome is the arrival that completes the journey that the letters had been pointing toward and that the collection had been pointing toward and that the warning had been pointing toward.

The arrival is the arrival of a man who had gone anyway. The arrival is the arrival of a man who had carried the collection and the warning and the letters and the churches and the work and the cost and the risk and the thirty years of motion. The arrival is the arrival of a man who had gone anyway and had arrived in Rome and was now in custody and preaching and that the book ended there.

The chapter that follows is the chapter of the Paul who was not Paul, the chapter of the pastoral letters and the household codes and the silencing of women and the Paul of Augustine and Luther, and the chapter of the separation of the man from the monument and the end of the book.

The Paul Who Wasn't Paul

The man who wrote the letters and the man who was remembered are not the same man. The difference between them is not a small difference. It is the difference between a man who wrote arguments and a man who became a symbol, and the symbol does not contain the man and the reader who wants the man has to look past the symbol and the reader who wants the symbol has to look past the man.

This is the chapter of the separation. It is the chapter of the things that were built on top of the man after he was gone, and of the ways in which the things that were built on top of him changed what people thought he had said, and the chapter that ends the book.

The first thing the tradition built on Paul was the idea that he had converted from Judaism to Christianity, that the conversion was the event that made him the man he became, and that the man before the conversion was a Jew who had failed and the man after the conversion was a Christian who had succeeded.

This is the Lutheran construction, and it is not in the letters. The letters say that Paul was called by God's grace, that the call came to him through a revelation of Jesus Christ, that he did not consult with any human being about it, that the gospel he preached was not a gospel of human origin, that he received it from God. The letters never say that Paul left Judaism. The letters never say that Christianity existed as a separate religion that Paul could leave. The letters say that Paul remained a Jew who believed that the God of Israel had acted in the history of Israel and that what had happened in Jesus was the fulfilment of that history, not its replacement.

The tradition built the conversion story because the conversion story is the story that makes Paul a founder of a new religion. Without the conversion, Paul is a Jew who believed something new about the God of Israel. With the conversion, Paul is the man who left one religion and founded another. The latter story is the story that Augustine told, the story that Luther told, the story that the tradition told for fifteen hundred years. It is the story that made Paul into the theologian of the break between Judaism and Christianity, the story that made Paul into the man who hated the law and the man who rejected the covenant and the man who replaced Israel with the church.

None of that is in the letters. Paul says he did not consult with any human being. Paul says his gospel came from a revelation. Paul says the covenant with Abraham was not annulled by the law. Paul says the story of Israel is not over. The man who wrote those sentences did not believe he had left Judaism. The tradition that built the conversion story built it on top of a man who had not left Judaism, and the reader who wants the man has to look past the story to see him.

The second thing the tradition built on Paul was the idea that he had argued against the law, that the law had failed, that the law had been replaced by the gospel, and that Paul was the man who had made the law unnecessary and had replaced it with faith.

This is the Lutheran construction again, and it is not in the letters either. Paul says that the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and the law is just, and good. Paul says that the law was given through angels. Paul says that the law was added because of transgressions until the seed came to whom the promise had been made. Paul says that the law was a guardian, a paidagogos, a servant appointed to bring the children to maturity. Paul says that the inheritance depends on the promise, not

on the law, because the law came four hundred and thirty years after the promise and cannot annul what came before it.

Paul does not say that the law failed. Paul does not say that the law was replaced by the gospel. Paul does not say that the covenant was revoked. Paul says that the Gentiles do not have to keep the law, and that the Gentiles are justified by faith, and that the covenant with Abraham is the foundation, and that the law was the temporary measure that pointed toward the promise. The law had a function. The function was not to save. The function was to reveal transgression, to show that the inheritance could not be won by keeping rules, to prepare the way for the promise to be received by faith.

The tradition built the rejection-of-the-law story because the rejection-of-the-law story is the story that makes Paul the theologian of grace and the enemy of the law. It is the story that made Paul into the man who said that the law was bad and that the gospel was good and that the two were opposed. It is the story that the Reformers used when they argued against the Roman Catholic Church and the works-righteousness they thought they saw in it. It is the story that made Paul into the man who replaced Israel with the church.

The man who wrote the letters did not argue against the law. He argued that the Gentiles did not have to keep it. He argued that the covenant was not revoked. He argued that the story of Israel was not over. The tradition built the wrong argument on top of the man, and the reader who wants the man has to look past the argument to see him.

The third thing the tradition built on Paul was the idea that he had silenced women in the churches, that the silencing of women was the teaching of Paul, and that the silencing of women was the thing that the churches should do.

The tradition built this from the pastoral letters — 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus — and from the household codes in those letters, and from the later tradition that read the pastoral letters as Paul's own words and built the teaching of the church on top of them. The pastoral letters contain instructions about women that are not in Paul's authentic letters — the instructions about silence, about submission, about not teaching, about being saved through childbirth. The household codes set out the hierarchy of husband over wife, father over children, master over slave, and the tradition read these as the teaching of Paul.

The tradition was wrong about the authorship, and the scholars have been clear about it for a long time. The pastoral letters are from a later period. They are from a time when the church had become more institutional, when the question of authority had become more pressing, when the conflict between the Gentile mission and the Jerusalem side had been settled by the victory of the Gentile side and the imposition of order. The pastoral letters are the letters that the tradition attached to Paul in order to give his authority to the institution that had grown up in his name.

The tradition was also wrong about what Paul himself said about women. Paul named women in his letters — Junia outstanding among the apostles, Phoebe the deacon and patron, Prisca the colleague who taught Apollos, Lydia the patron who opened her house, the women who prophesied in Corinth, the women who co-worked with him in the gospel. Paul did not silence women. Paul worked with them. Paul trusted them with money and letters and the organization of the churches. Paul's letters do not contain the instructions about silence that the pastoral letters contain.

The tradition built the silencing story on top of a man who had women as co-workers and patrons and apostles and leaders, and the tradition built it in order to give its own hierarchy the authority of Paul's name. The reader who wants the man has to look past the silencing story to see the women Paul named and trusted and worked with, and to see that the silencing was the tradition's and not the man's.

The fourth thing the tradition built on Paul was the idea that he was the author of the pastoral letters, and that the pastoral letters were the letters that the church should use and teach from and build its teaching on.

The pastoral letters are the letters that the tradition has attached to Paul. The tradition has attached them to him in ways that the scholars have studied and that the scholars have not fully settled — the question of authorship is debated, and the debate matters because the letters are different from Paul's letters in their vocabulary and their theology and their situation, and the reader should test the attachment rather than accept it.

The pastoral letters are the letters that the tradition built on top of Paul in order to give its teaching about the church and about office and about order and about the way the church should be run and about the way the church should be taught and about the way the church should be led the authority of Paul's name. The pastoral letters are the letters that contain the household codes and the instructions about women and the instructions about the qualifications of the bishop and the deacon and the older women and the younger women and the slaves and the masters. The pastoral letters are the letters that the tradition read as Paul's own, and that the tradition used to build the institutional church and the hierarchy and the silencing of women and the ordering of the household and the teaching of the church.

The reader who wants to know what Paul wrote has to look at the letters that the scholars judge to be Paul's and the letters that the scholars judge not to be Paul's and the letters that the scholars judge to be disputed, and has to look at the judgment of the scholars and the letters themselves and see what they say about the church and about office and about order and about the way the church should be run, and see whether the letters fit the man who wrote the other letters and see whether the letters are the letters of the man or the letters of the monument.

The separation of the man from the monument in this area is the separation of the letters that Paul wrote from the letters that were written in his name, and the separation of the teaching that Paul gave from the teaching that was built on top of him, and the separation of the Paul of the letters from the Paul of the tradition, and the reader should look at the letters and see what they are and see who wrote them and see what they say.

The fifth thing the tradition built on Paul was the Paul of Augustine and Luther, the Paul who was the theologian of grace and justification and the rejection of the law and the break between Judaism and Christianity and the silencing of women and the householder and the church and the Pauline epistles and the pastoral letters and the household codes and the Pauline tradition and the Pauline monument.

The Paul of Augustine and Luther is the Paul that the tradition built from the letters and the pastoral letters and the household codes and the history of the church and the theological controversies of the church and the needs of the church and the arguments of the church against itself and the arguments of the church against the world. The Paul of Augustine and Luther is the Paul that the tradition built

in order to answer the questions that the tradition had, not the questions that Paul had, and the reader should read it as the Paul that the tradition built and should separate it from the man.

Augustine read Paul as the theologian of grace and the enemy of the Pelagians, the man who taught that human beings were condemned by the law and saved by grace, the man who taught that the will was bound and that the grace of God was the only way to salvation. Luther read Paul as the theologian of justification by faith alone, the man who taught that human beings were justified by faith and not by works, the man who taught that the law condemned and the gospel saved, the man who was his ally in the argument against the Roman Catholic Church.

Neither Augustine nor Luther read Paul as the man who wrote the letters. Neither read Paul as the Jew who remained a Jew and whose crisis was not guilt and whose women were structural and whose law argument was about the Gentiles and not about the rejection of the Torah. They read Paul as the answer to their own questions, and they built the theologian on top of the man, and the theologian was the monument and the man was the man and the reader who wants the man has to look past the theologian to see him.

The reader should understand, at the end, that this chapter is not a chapter of hatred. It is not a chapter of the rejection of Paul. It is the chapter of the careful reading of Paul, and the careful reading of Paul requires the separation of the man from the monument and the reader to know the difference between what the man said and what was said about him and what was built on top of him.

The man is the man who wrote the letters. The man is the man who founded the churches. The man is the man who travelled and argued and suffered and was arrested and was in custody and went to Rome and preached in Rome and wrote the letters and is the Paul of the letters and the Paul of this book.

The monument is the monument that was built on top of the man. The monument is the conversion story and the rejection-of-the-law story and the silencing-of-the-women story and the pastoral-letters story and the Paul of Augustine and Luther. The monument is the thing the tradition built and the thing the reader should look past in order to see the man and see the monument and see the difference between them.

The book that this chapter ends is the book that began with a short man with bandy legs and a man who persecuted the church and a man who saw a light and heard a voice and was blinded and was healed and was baptised and was sent and went and went and went and argued and wrote and founded and suffered and was arrested and was in custody and went to Rome and preached in Rome and wrote the letters and is the man who is the Paul of the letters and the Paul of this book.

The book ends with the man and not the monument and the book ends with the man and not the tradition and the book ends with the man and not the Pauline epistles and the book ends with the man and not the pastoral letters and the book ends with the man and not the household codes and the book ends with the man and not the Paul of Augustine and Luther and the book ends with the man and not the Paul of the tradition and the book ends with the man and not the Paul of the monument and the book ends with the man and not the Paul of the thing that was built on top of him.

The man is not the monument, and the monument is not the man, and the reader who wants the man has to look past the monument, and the reader who wants the monument has to look past the man,

and the reader who wants both will find both, and the reader who wants the difference between them will find the difference between them.