

Paul's Mission Strategy in the Urban Landscape of the First-Century Roman Empire

VOLKER RABENS

No other figure of the Bible visited more cities than the Apostle Paul. In most of the cities Paul remained for a lengthy stay—weeks, months, and sometimes years. Although his concern was not primarily the study of geography like Strabo's *Geography* or Pausanias's *Description of Greece*, there was a significant overlap between investigations like these and Paul's work: both were interested in people. With regard to Paul, we read in his letters (and in the Acts of the Apostles) that he wanted to pass on to other people what had been a life-transforming event for him—his encounter with the Messiah Jesus. A major concern of Paul's travels was to invite others to join this new relationship and participate in the love and life of God. He wanted to communicate the gospel of Jesus the Messiah, and for him this meant more than a perfunctory evangelistic sermon. Paul did preach, but his preaching was embedded in a more comprehensive service through which he shared his life with others:

You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. (1 Thess 2:9–12 NRSV; cf. 1:5–6)

Paul entered into an intensive relationship with those whom he wanted to reach with the gospel—he even identifies himself as their servant (δοῦλος;

2 Cor 4:5; cf. 12:14–15; Col 1:25). “Mission” is therefore understood in this chapter as the multidimensional engagement of an individual or a faith community, with the goal of attracting others to the message of faith and to the lifestyle related to it. In Paul’s case, “multidimensional” meant that his engagement was not limited to verbal proclamation but typically expressed itself in an integrated and reciprocal participation in the lives of others. This participation included working and eating together, theological reflection and discussion, ethical instruction, and the experience of spiritual gifts and miracles (cf. part 1 below).¹

This chapter investigates Paul’s missionary practice among and in the cities of the Roman Empire. My inquiry has two aspects: 1) How did Paul choose the cities that he visited on his missionary journeys? Did he have particular criteria for why he visited Corinth, Ephesus, etc.? 2) What did Paul do once he arrived in a particular city? How did he intend to reach people with the gospel in the context of the social realities of urban life in the Roman Empire?

These two sets of inquiries, which make up the two parts of the present chapter, raise the underlying question whether Paul had a *strategy* in the context of his mission to the cities of the first-century Roman Empire at all. Is there a (conscious?) pattern to his travels and practices among and in the cities? Rodney Stark’s *Cities of God* seems to provide an initial positive answer, mainly based on statistics. He formulates three hypotheses regarding Paul’s mission:

- 1) Paul concentrated on the more Hellenized cities.

Paul visited only 8 of the 31 cities, but of these none was among the less Hellenized group. . . . That is, only Hellenic cities were missionized by

1. In recent studies on mission in Paul, a number of scholars have aimed at putting forward a comprehensive and integrated concept of “mission,” e.g., John P. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities: The Shape, Extent and Background of Early Christian Mission*, WUNT/2 159 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 10; Michael Barram, *Mission and Moral Reflection in Paul*, SBL 75 (New York: Lang, 2006), 175. However, their definitions still tend to focus on describing unilateral missionary activities and overlook the bilateral dynamic of shared lives as we find it in the accounts of Paul’s collaborations in the context of founding apostolic communities, e.g., with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth (Acts 18:2–3). My own approach in this chapter builds on and expands my earlier work, “‘Von Jerusalem aus und rings umher . . .’ (Röm. 15,19): Die paulinische Missionsstrategie im Dickicht der Städte,” in *Das frühe Christentum und die Stadt*, ed. Reinhard von Bendemann and Markus Tiwald, BWANT 198 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2012), 219–37. I would like to thank Prof. Scott Caulley for providing me with an initial translation of my 2012 article as a starting point for the present chapter.

Paul (Hellenism thereby being a necessary factor), even though many Hellenic cities were not missionized by Paul (Hellenism thereby not being a sufficient factor to have drawn Paul).²

2) Paul tended to missionize port cities. Stark admits that this is somewhat obvious because much of Paul's travel was by boat, which was a usual practice in the case of longer-distance travel. Nearly half of the port cities were missionized by Paul, but he visited only 12 percent of the inland cities.³

3) Paul tended to missionize cities with substantial Jewish diaspora communities. Stark calculates that two-thirds of the cities with a significant diaspora Jewish community were missionized by Paul, while he visited only two of the cities lacking a diaspora community.⁴

Stark supplies a comprehensive compendium of statistical charts in the appendix of his book in support of his hypotheses, and although his work has been rightly criticized for overdependence on some of these,⁵ we can generally agree that Paul followed popular trade routes and tended to visit the larger cities.⁶ However, there were also exceptions to these general rules. Stark's statistics agree with that. Therefore, while Stark's statistics-based hypotheses are helpful for tracing Paul's broader movements, we will need to attend to Paul's letters (and, secondarily, to Acts) to fill in more details as we try to find out whether Paul had a cleverly devised strategy to help him a) visit the cities that were significant for his mission, and b) communicate the message of God's reconciliation through Jesus in the most effective way to the people in those cities.

Jörg Frey provides a potential answer to our inquiry: "Paul is the only early Christian missionary for whom we can detect a planned strategic mission, and whose mission is stamped theologically with the marks of his pre-

2. Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 132.

3. Stark, *Cities*, 132.

4. Stark, *Cities*, 132.

5. See, e.g., Jan N. Bremmer, *The Rise of Christianity through the Eyes of Gibbon, Harnack, and Rodney Stark*, 2nd ed. (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2010), 64.

6. Thus also another of Stark's hypotheses: "Larger cities had Christian congregations sooner than smaller cities" (Stark, *Cities*, 81). Thomas A. Robinson, *Who Were the First Christians? Dismantling the Urban Thesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 91–99, rightly insists that Paul may see the countryside included in the orbit of the *polis*, since *polis* and countryside together were a fundamental unit of the economic and political structure of Greco-Roman society. Moreover, as we will see below, when Paul speaks of his mission, he speaks of both regions or provinces as well as individual cities.

Christian upbringing and education, his Scriptural erudition, and his life and occupational experience.”⁷ Whether one sides with Frey’s answer and a series of other authors,⁸ or rather agrees with Roland Allen’s classic 1912 study that *denied* that Paul had a planned-out mission strategy,⁹ depends in large degree upon what one understands by “strategy.” One thing should be clear: if by “mission strategy” we mean a consciously worked out program in which strategic points are selected and fit into a timeline, there are hardly any grounds to support this view from Paul’s letters and from Acts.

Acts describes Paul’s travels from city to city largely in neutral terms (e.g., Acts 17:1; 18:1, 18–19). These reports do not supply any explicit agenda or a formulated mission program that Paul would have followed. Mission is presented as coming from God and is directed by the Spirit (e.g., Acts 16:6–10; 21:4). Paul usually moved on if his hearers rejected the gospel or when conflict arose with opponents (e.g., Acts 14:19–20; 16:39–40; 20:1–3). Paul’s letters, however, which have priority for reconstructing a Pauline mission theology, suggest that Paul planned ahead for his travels to various cities (e.g., 1 Thess 2:18; 1 Cor 4:19; 11:34; 16:5–6).¹⁰ The letters also indicate that Paul was frequently forced to change plans because numerous hindrances made particular visits impossible (1 Thess 2:18; 2 Cor 12–13; Rom 1:9–13; 15:22–23), such as antagonisms or conflicts arising from previous visits (e.g., 2 Cor 1:15–24; 12:20–21).

There is at least one passage in the epistles where Paul explicitly reflects on the geographic aspect of his mission endeavor. When he looks back on his former mission travels, Paul says in Romans 15:19–20: “From Jerusalem and

7. Jörg Frey, “Die Ausbreitung des frühen Christentums: Perspektiven für die gegenwärtige Praxis der Kirche,” in *Kirche zwischen postmoderner Kultur und Evangelium*, ed. Martin Reppenhausen (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2010), 86–112, here 100; cf. 103.

8. Inter alia, Rainer Riesner, *Die Frühzeit des Apostels Paulus: Studien zur Chronologie, Missionstrategie und Theologie*, WUNT 71 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 204–34; Dickson, *Mission-Commitment*, 9–10; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul, the Missionary: Realities, Strategies, and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic / Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 22–32; James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, Christianity in the Making 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 555.

9. Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?*, 6th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 10: “It is quite impossible to maintain that St. Paul deliberately planned his journeys beforehand, selected certain strategic points at which to establish his churches, and then actually carried out his designs.” Cf. Robinson, *Christians*, 96–99.

10. On Paul’s missionary journeys and their presentation in the Pauline corpus and Acts, see the overview in Eva Ebel, “Paul’s Missionary Activity,” in *Paul: Life, Setting, Work, Letters*, ed. Oda Wischmeyer (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 111–20, here 112–16.

as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ. Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation."¹¹ This text will be the basis of my discussion of Paul's geographical movement in the first part of this chapter. Apart from providing information on Paul's travels in the urban landscape of the Roman Empire, this passage also points toward an answer to our more general question regarding Paul's mission strategy. Namely, Paul here reveals a fundamental principle of his mission, which is to preach where the gospel had not yet been heard.

Accordingly, if one wishes to speak of Paul's "mission strategy," it seems that this is best understood in terms of *the connection between basic missiological principles and their pragmatic application*. This model of flexible implementation of fundamental tenets also comes to the fore once we turn to Paul's concrete behavior when he arrives in a specific city (part 2). For example, when Paul "entered" a city—he speaks about his "entrance" (εἰσοδος [1 Thess 1:9, 2:1])—he usually did not come just by himself. Rather, his work was embedded in a wide-ranging cooperation with various coworkers (e.g., 1 Cor 3:6; 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25; Rom 16:3, 9, 21). This praxis appears to be based on Paul's theological maxim that the "body of Christ" is made up of many individual members who complement each another. Before we look at this and further cooperations in more detail, we now turn to Paul's reflections on the geography of his missionary journeys.

1. Paul's Travel Procedures among the Cities

Paul was inspired by the universal relevance of the gospel. In 2 Cor 5:19–20 he proclaims that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself. . . and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." Paul is convinced that the whole world should experience and accept that God has reconciled the world (κόσμος) to himself.¹² God's saving intervention began with Israel, to which God first

11. All biblical quotations in this chapter are from the NRSV.

12. Cf. the investigation of inclusion and exclusion in the context of Paul's mission in Volker Rabens, "Inclusion of and Demarcation from 'Outsiders': Mission and Ethics in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians," in *Sensitivity towards Outsiders: Exploring the Dynamic Relationship between Mission and Ethics in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, ed. Jacobus Kok et al., WUNT/2 364 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 290–323, here 290–94, 317–19.

devoted himself and made them his people. Therefore the gospel is to the Jews first. However, according to Paul's understanding of the covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:3; 18:18), from the beginning this promise was conceived as a blessing for all people (Gal 3:8).¹³ The gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16).

Paul understood himself as an apostle called to the gentiles (Gal 2:7–8; Rom 1:5; 11:13; 15:16; etc.). This does not mean that he had given up on Israel. Rather, Paul operates from the premise that through the mission among the gentiles, Israel will also finally be saved (Rom 11:13–14, 25–32). Paul regards his call as a charge that grew out of the call of Israel.¹⁴ He hence bases his fundamental missiological tenets explicitly on the pronouncement found in Isaiah 52:15: "Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, 'Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand'" (Rom 15:20–21).

Accordingly, Paul set forth to be a pioneer at the frontier of the expanding Christian movement. He committed himself to making known the gospel where no one had yet heard it.¹⁵ The logical consequence for Paul's missionary praxis resulting from this principle was geographical movement in the service of the gospel. Paul himself worked out these practical consequences in the key passage already mentioned above: "Christ has [worked] through me to win obedience from the gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, *so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ*" (Rom 15:18b–19, emphasis added).

The first part of the passage provides one aspect of the answer to our

13. On the implications of the "New Perspective on Paul" for understanding the foundation of Paul's mission, see W. Paul Bowers, "Mission," in *Dictionary of Paul and the Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 608–19, here 613, 618; Dunn, *Beginning*, 533–36.

14. Compare Gal 1:15–16 with Isa 49:1–6 ("I will give you as a light to the nations [εἰς φῶς ἔθνῶν], that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" [Isa 49:6]) and Jer 1:5 ("a prophet to the nations," προφήτης εἰς ἔθνη). Cf. J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 156–57; Roy E. Ciampa, "Paul's Theology of the Gospel," in *Paul as Missionary: Identity, Activity, Theology, and Practice*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and Brian S. Rosner, LNTS 420 (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 180–91, here 183–84.

15. Rome constitutes an exception, as Paul himself makes clear in Rom 15:22–24.

second question regarding Paul's concrete missionary procedure in a given city. Paul describes his entire service as comprised of "word and work" (λόγος καὶ ἔργον). As in other passages, Paul here reports that his missionary service took place "in the power of signs and wonders" (cf. 1 Thess 1:5; 1 Cor 2:4; 2 Cor 12:12). "Work" (ἔργον) in verse 18 should not be limited to this miraculous aspect of Paul's ministry—after all, it was Paul's entire life that gave testimony to the gospel (1 Thess 1:5–6; 2:9–12; 1 Cor 2:16; 3:9–11; etc.).¹⁶ However, the significance of this "charismatic" dimension of Paul's ministry for the reception of the gospel should also not be underestimated (cf. Gal 3:2–5).¹⁷ In the context of Romans 15:14–29, however, the reference to signs and wonders appears primarily to have a different function. Here Paul places himself again in the line of Israelite prophets. Their work too was authenticated through signs and wonders (e.g., Exod 7:3; Deut 7:19; 29:3; 34:11; Ps 135:9). We have already established that Paul understood his missionary enterprise in our passage explicitly against the background of the call of Isaiah (Isa 52:15 is cited in Rom 15:20–21). We find yet another allusion to this tradition in Romans 15:16. There Paul completes his self-portrait as a missionary in the line of Israelite prophets by referencing Isaiah 66:20 as he describes the aim of his "priestly service of the gospel of God" to be "that the offering of the gentiles may be acceptable."¹⁸

How is the geographic spread of the gospel as it is described in Romans 15:19 to be understood in the context of the urban landscape of the first-century Roman Empire? On the one hand, the reference to Jerusalem as the starting point of the missionary movement can imply the global expansion of salvation ("to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" [Rom 1:16]; cf. Acts 1:8).¹⁹ On the other hand, it could also allude to Paul's own mission

16. Cf. Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 45.

17. Cf. Wolfgang Reinbold, *Propaganda und Mission im ältesten Christentum: Eine Untersuchung zu den Modalitäten der Ausbreitung der frühen Kirche*, FRLANT 188 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 202–204; Volker Rabens, "Power from In Between: The Relational Experience of the Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts in Paul's Churches," in *The Spirit and Christ in the New Testament and Christian Theology: Essays in Honor of Max Turner*, ed. I. Howard Marshall, Volker Rabens, and Cornelis Bennema (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 138–55, here 141–43.

18. On this issue, see further Stefan Schreiber, *Paulus als Wundertäter: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Apostelgeschichte und den authentischen Paulusbriefen*, BZNW 79 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996), 202; L. J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *Paul the Missionary*, CBET 34 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 246–48.

19. Thus various interpreters, as e.g., C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical*

activity that, as we have seen above, fits into the idea of global salvation beginning with Israel (thus the flow of Rom 15:18–29; cf. Acts 9:26–29; but see Gal 1:17–18; 2:1–10).²⁰ This second option, i.e., that Paul is talking here about his own geographical missionary movement, may find support in the wording of the phrase that is central for our question, namely Romans 15:19c: “from Jerusalem *and in an arc/semicircle up to Illyricum*” (ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ κύκλῳ μέχρι τοῦ Ἰλλυρικῶ).²¹ This thesis has been developed in detail by Rainer Riesner. Building on Paul’s self-portrait as a missionary in the line of Israelite prophets as outlined above, Riesner argues that Paul here presents his mission activity as a fulfillment of the proclamation of salvation in “Tarshish, Put, and Lud . . . to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away,” announced in Isaiah 66:19. These places could have been interpreted by Paul as 1. Tarsus, 2. Cilicia, 3. Lydia, 4. Mysia, 5. Bithynia, 6. Macedonia and 7. the far west. Riesner does not maintain that Paul’s mission plans were oriented to Isaiah 66:19 from the beginning, or that this prophecy was the only or the most important among the different reasons for choosing the route Paul traveled. However, the movement from Jerusalem in a northwestern arc to the extreme west described in Isaiah 66:19 corresponds to the idea behind Romans 15:19, and it may be

Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 2:760–61.

20. Thus, inter alia, Dieter Zeller, *Juden und Heiden in der Mission des Paulus: Studien zum Römerbrief* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1973), 227. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, WBC 38B (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 863–64, holds both options to be convincing. For a nuanced discussion of the locations mentioned in this passage, see further Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1983), 40.

21. Emphasis added. The translation of κύκλῳ μέχρι as “in a semicircle to” is preferable to the translation “around about,” even though the parallel in Ezek 5:5 (“This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her [τὰς κύκλῳ αὐτῆς χώρας]”; cf. James M. Scott, *Paul and the Nations: The Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul’s Mission to the Nations with Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians*, WUNT 84 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995], 67) seems to speak against this. The fact that κύκλῳ can be used to express a circular movement is shown by Philo’s use of the expression. In *Leg.* 1.66 Philo describes how the river Pheison (Φεισίων) “encompasses the entire land of Evilat” (οὗτος ὁ κυκλῶν πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν Εὐιλάτ): “it encircles in its roundel the land of Evilat” (χορεύει δὲ καὶ κύκλῳ περίεισι τὴν γῆν Εὐιλάτ [Colson, LCL]). The line from Jerusalem to Illyricum runs in a semicircle, as a glimpse at the map quickly makes clear (although Paul did of course not have the maps that we do today). For discussion, see Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 863–64; Riesner, *Frühzeit*, 214–16; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2006), 910–11.

a key reason why Paul planned to take his mission to Spain, rather than to Gaul or elsewhere.²²

Along the same lines, James Scott reasons that the apostles had divided the world along the “borders” of the regions inhabited by Noah’s offspring as named in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10, such that the region of “Japheth” has fallen to Paul (“from Jerusalem to Illyricum” and Spain).²³ Riesner’s and Scott’s line of argument has recently been taken up positively by James Dunn. In his monumental trilogy on the expansion of Christianity—and here in the second volume with the fitting title “Beginning from Jerusalem”—Dunn concludes regarding the exposition of Romans 15:19:

Without subscribing to all details of the theses of Riesner and Scott—given the data, firm conclusions are hardly possible—it is nevertheless likely that Isa. 66.19 provides a shaft of light which illuminates both the rationale of Paul’s mission and the compulsion he experienced to reach Spain. If Spain did indeed complete the (half-) circle from Jerusalem, as indicating the limits of Japheth’s territory, Paul’s compulsion to reach Spain meshes with his hope of winning “the full number of the Gentiles” to faith (Rom. 11.25) and thus of triggering the climax of God’s purpose in history and the resurrection of the dead (11.13–15).²⁴

However, the suggestions by Riesner and Scott have not always been met with applause.²⁵ Wright has recently disagreed with Scott in his *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (he seems to be unaware of Riesner’s *Die Frühzeit des Apostels Paulus*, translated into English as *Paul’s Early Period*). As a full correspondence between the cities and regions mentioned in Isaiah and those of Paul’s missionary journeys cannot be established, Wright concludes “Isaiah 66 . . . hardly matches what we know either of Paul’s actual journeys or his future plans.”²⁶ Nevertheless, his own alternative for understanding the reasoning behind Paul’s travel procedures among the cities seems even more difficult to prove. According to Wright, Paul’s movement was driven

22. Riesner, *Frühzeit*, 216–25; cf. Rainer Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 241–53.

23. Scott, *Nations*, 135–80; cf. n. 96 in Riesner, *Frühzeit*, 224–25.

24. Dunn, *Beginning*, 544.

25. See inter alia the critical evaluations in Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Urchristliche Mission* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2002), 1239; Lietaert Peerbolte, *Paul*, 249–251.

26. N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols., COQG 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 2:1501.

by the agenda to establish messianic communities in those places where Caesar's power was strongest.²⁷ However, the fact that Paul worked in places that were not Roman provinces (Arabia/Nabatea, cf. Gal 1:17; 2 Cor 11:32) as well as in small towns such as Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Beroea, which were not renowned for a particularly strong zeal for the emperor cult, speaks against this thesis. Moreover, while Paul worked in many of the cities for which the imperial cult has been documented, there were many more in which Paul evidently did not preach the gospel.²⁸ We can hence conclude with Schnabel that Wright's suggestion gives Caesar too much credit for Paul's movements. Paul was less concerned about the emperor than about "all people" and "all gentiles" (1 Cor 9:22; Rom 1:5; 15:11) who needed to hear the gospel, turn away from whatever Greek, Roman, Egyptian, or local deity they worshipped and believe in Jesus and serve the true and living God (cf. 1 Thess 1:1–10).²⁹

So, what are we to make of Riesner's proposal? Riesner's approach has received detailed treatment in Ksenija Magda's recent monograph *Paul's Territoriality and Mission Strategy*. Magda criticizes Riesner's model, arguing that Paul's strategy in the context of the cities cannot be connected to a single verse, not least because Paul nowhere explicitly cites this passage (in contrast to other sections of Isaiah).³⁰ Instead, she is convinced that Paul was influenced and motivated by a Roman geography. Paul repeatedly mentions Roman provinces in his letters. For example, the Thessalonians became an example for all believers in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess 1:7–8), and they became imitators of the believers in Judea (2:14). The province of Asia is mentioned several times (1 Cor 16:19; 2 Cor 1:8; Rom 16:5). Furthermore, in Romans 15:19 Paul mentions Illyricum, a province founded in the year 9 BCE. For Magda, the fact that Paul knows Illyricum and refers to it speaks further to the idea that Paul had a Roman understanding of place names and in his missionary travels was exclusively shaped by that understanding.³¹

27. Wright, *Paul*, 2:1502.

28. See the details provided in Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Evangelism and the Mission of the Church," in *God and the Faithfulness of Paul: A Critical Examination of the Pauline Theology of N. T. Wright*, ed. Michael F. Bird, Christoph Heilig, and Jay Thomas Hewitt, WUNT/2 413 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 688–89.

29. Schnabel, "Evangelism."

30. Ksenija Magda, *Paul's Territoriality and Mission Strategy: Searching for the Geographical Awareness Paradigm behind Romans*, WUNT/2 266 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 93.

31. Magda, *Territoriality*, 6–7, 90.

According to Magda, Paul's familiarity with Roman place names is of great significance for our question about his travel customs among the cities, because it is part of the broader concept of *territoriality*. Magda takes over the concept of territoriality from the geographer Robert Sack.³² A central aspect of territoriality is the interplay of the three components, *nature* (the physical world), *meaning*, and *social relations*. Since these three areas influence each other, we should not underestimate the impact of a specific geographical understanding (which belongs to the area of *nature*) upon the other areas of territoriality, and therefore upon the (missionary) self-understanding of a person. With respect to Paul's territoriality Magda concludes:

Within his Roman territoriality paradigm, Paul's call by Christ could bring about that serious change in theological understanding which was so difficult for Jerusalem-based apostles. Paul was a Roman citizen with a cosmopolitan feeling for all the nations, far more so than the other disciples of Jesus. In comparison with the territoriality of the other apostles, Paul's is broad enough to include other nations. Indeed, his place is broad enough to give him the freedom to claim that he can be all things to all people (1 Cor 9:22)!³³

Magda thus sees in Paul's Roman "territoriality paradigm" an impetus for his mission to the gentiles. Shaped by this territoriality, it is obvious for Paul that he should view the Roman Empire as made up of targets for the gospel, and he travels through it province by province.

Magda's approach provides a valuable perspective for our discussion. She is correct in her assertion that in his conversion and commissioning experience Paul could hardly have had the geographical information of Isaiah 66:19 in his mind's eye. Rather, he would have been much more likely to interpret his call first against the background of his existing territoriality.³⁴ We can agree that Paul's missionary journeys were guided by, though

32. On the definition of territoriality, see further Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History*, Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5, 19; Robert David Sack, *Homo Geographicus: A Framework for Action, Awareness, and Moral Concern* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 1–26. A good illustration of the interplay of the three components is found in Magda, *Territoriality*, 45.

33. Magda, *Territoriality*, 183.

34. When in Gal 1:15–16 Paul describes his mission to the gentiles as a consequence (cf. ἵνα) of his revelatory experience of the risen Christ, the question remains open whether his call as apostle to the gentiles was already a part of that conversion experience (cf. Franz

not totally determined or even limited by, his Roman territoriality. As we have seen above, Paul also worked in places that were not Roman provinces. Moreover, it is worth noting that Riesner does not claim that Paul's mission plans were from the beginning oriented by Isaiah 66:19, or that this prophecy provides the only—or even the most important—reason for the travel routes Paul followed.³⁵ However, it is clear that in Romans 15:14–24 and in other passages (e.g., Rom 10:14–21; Gal 1:15–16), Paul does interpret his missionary identity against the background of prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible, especially Isaiah.³⁶ In this regard, it is striking that Romans 15:16 contains a clear allusion to Isaiah 66:20—i.e., to the verse following directly after 66:19. Even if the concrete geographical information claimed by Riesner only came to the fore in Isaiah 66:19, his interpretation is not just supported by a single verse but by the intertextual echoes of the entire passage of Isaiah 66:18–21 as found in Romans 15:14–24.³⁷

It hence suggests itself that—in the context of the announcement in Romans 15:23–24 of his mission to Spain and his visit to Rome—Paul interprets his previous advances in the provinces and cities retrospectively against the background of the prophecies in Isaiah 66:18–21, especially 66:19. Nonetheless, it has to remain open whether this aspect of his territoriality had already guided the *planning phase* of his mission, and to what extent he had integrated this perspective with his Roman understanding of place names. Apart from that, there are other factors shaping Paul's mission activity that integrated well with and were an integral part of Paul's Roman territoriality, namely, the *practical conditions of the Roman Empire*. We will briefly turn to some of these conditions as we conclude the present section.

When one looks at the spectrum of the cities in which Paul worked, one can observe that Paul's mission mainly had to do with large cities.³⁸

Mußner, *Der Galaterbrief*, 2nd ed., HTKNT 9 [Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2002], 87–88; Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 71–72). On the interpretation of (spiritual) experiences, cf. the analysis in Rabens, "Power," 138–45.

35. See Riesner, *Frühzeit*, 224–25.

36. On this point, see further William J. Webb, *Returning Home: New Covenant and Second Exodus as the Context for 2 Corinthians 6.14–7.1*, JSNTSup 85 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993); Florian Wilk, *Die Bedeutung des Jesajabuches für Paulus*, FRLANT 179 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998); Otfried Hofius, "Paulus—Missionar und Theologe," in *Paulusstudien II*, by Otfried Hofius, WUNT 143 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 13–16; Dickson, *Mission-Commitment*, 153–77.

37. Cf. Riesner, *Frühzeit*, 218–19.

38. Steven J. Friesen, "Prospects for a Demography of the Pauline Mission: Corinth

For example, Paul remained both in Corinth and Ephesus for a prolonged period during which it was also possible to engage the larger region through coworkers. To expand on Harnack's well-known metaphor,³⁹ Paul ignited the torch of the gospel in the larger cities along the arc from Jerusalem to Illyricum, so that the light shone into the hinterland. After having made sure that the flame was burning steadily in one place, he moved on to light a new torch—where no flame had yet burned. In the process of spreading the gospel, Paul chose to a great extent centers of concentrated population. Because of the economic dominance, these large cities attracted traders and business people. Because of their advanced infrastructure, such cities offered good conditions for communication and possibilities of contact with other people.⁴⁰ Therefore, based on Paul's travel movements among the cities, it is possible to speak of Paul's mission to *urban centers* in their provincial settings.⁴¹

The external conditions in the Roman Empire during the time of the

among the Churches," in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen, HTS 53 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 354, provides a detailed list of the cities where a) Paul founded a church, b) Paul established contact with congregations which he himself had not started, and c) Paul traveled through without founding a church.

39. Adolf von Harnack, *Die Mission in Wort und Tat*, vol. 1 of *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 4th ed. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1924), 80. Cf. Allen, *Methods*, 12; Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 869; Lietaert Peerbolte, *Paul*, 250; Schnabel, *Paul*, 285–86; Jewett, *Romans*, 914. Reinbold, *Propaganda*, 224–25, however, excludes missions in the surrounding region through coworkers.

40. On the catalytic function of trade in the expansion of religious movements, see more generally Peter Wick and Volker Rabens, eds., *Religions and Trade: Religious Formation, Transformation and Cross-Cultural Exchange between East and West*, Dynamics in the History of Religions 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

41. So, inter alia, Allen, *Methods*, 13–17; Wolf-Henning Ollrog, *Paulus und seine Mitarbeiter: Untersuchungen zu Theorie und Praxis der paulinischen Mission*, WMANT 50 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979), 125–26; Reinbold, *Propaganda*, 212; Lietaert Peerbolte, *Paul*, 236, 255. However, Schnabel considers this inference as jumping to conclusions because: 1) We know too little about the first almost fifteen years of Paul's activities in Arabia, Syria, and Cilicia to speak about a *Zentrumsmission* in the time between 32/33 and 45; 2) In his missionary activities during the years 45–57 it appears that Paul did not visit Ankara, the capital of the province of Galatia. Likewise, he probably did not work in other important cities (Side, Termessos, Sagalassos, and Kybistra); 3) According to Acts 13:49, Paul did not limit his missionary activity to cities, but also reached out to those living in the territories around the cities (χώρα), i.e., he also worked among village dwellers (Schnabel, *Mission*, 1242). Cf. Robinson, *Christians*, 65–130, who stresses the dynamic interaction between the cities and the surrounding countryside.

Pauline mission were widely beneficial to the apostle's travels. The rule of Augustus had inaugurated a time of peace and resulted in the flowering of economic and cultural enterprises. Trade could develop, the infrastructure was improved. Methods of travel were relatively safe so that traffic on the Mediterranean Sea and on the main trade roads increased. Travel like Paul's profited from these conditions, a kind of travel that in part might better be referred to as "removal" or "moving household" (cf. Priscilla and Aquila, whom we find first in Rome, then in Corinth, and finally in Ephesus). It hence seems natural to assume that many of Paul's travel procedures were pragmatic decisions based on the concrete shape and practical conditions of the urban landscape of the first-century Roman Empire.

By way of answer to our first question of this chapter, we can conclude that Paul's Roman territoriality and the conditions of the urban landscape of the Roman Empire provided a framework for Paul's travel procedures among the cities. In retrospect, he interpreted his overarching travel directions in the light of the prophecies in Isaiah 66. He wanted to reach the unreached, and it is this focus on people that drove him. He did not just want to win people for the gospel, but he wanted them to "become the gospel," to use the title of Michael Gorman's recent book on Paul, participation, and mission. In order to accomplish this holistic mission, he shared his life with the city dwellers, and a number of times had to return to the cities and regions that he had visited before, so that he could help his assemblies to flourish. In the second part of the chapter we will now look at some of the details of how Paul tried to accomplish this goal once he had arrived in a particular city.

2. Paul's Missionary Procedures upon His Arrival in a City

In the previous section we saw that in his letters Paul does not communicate a detailed mission strategy that would explain the travel plans and program of his ministry in the spreading of the gospel. Paul rather conveys basic principles from which stem practical consequences for his work. These tenets include the precept that Paul wished to work where the gospel was not yet known. Paul's travel routine is based on this foundational truth. Larger cities were particularly well-suited for communicating the gospel. They were pulsing with life and in possession of good infrastructure and access to the surrounding region for which they served as administrative centers.

What awaited Paul in the cities? On the most elementary level, Paul shared the same language (Koine Greek) with the residents of the cities.

Building on this, Paul as a “city dweller” employed rhetoric and verbal images and metaphors from the urban context. In comparison with the Jesus of the gospels, who taught with parables using the rural landscape (seeds, weeds, tenant farmers, etc.), Paul’s eloquent Greek more clearly evoked the *gymnasium* and private homes (although he could also use imagery from the world of agriculture, e.g., in 1 Cor 3:6). Apart from that, Paul was also at home in the city because of the practicalities of the urban working environment. In the context of his avocation as a missionary, the cities offered Paul great job opportunities, so that he could support himself and meet other people in a natural way.⁴² A further characteristic of the larger cities was that Paul could here find established Jewish communities as well as a great spectrum of non-Jewish inhabitants, including “settlers” (μέτοικοι), who helped open channels of communication with other parts of the non-Jewish world. At the same time, a large city offered a certain amount of anonymity, so that a small, developing group of Christians need not draw unnecessary attention to itself when there were conflicts with people of other faiths.⁴³

In the cities Paul met people from a variety of social statuses. Social status is made up of various facets of social identity, such as ethnic origin, nationality, personal freedom, wealth, employment relationships, patron/client relationships, age, gender, marital status, family heritage, public offices, and honors.⁴⁴ It is difficult to fathom the precise statistical details of the make-up of the Pauline congregations. Malherbe, Meeks and others are of the opinion that the Pauline assemblies broadly represented an even share of the various statuses which shaped the urban society.⁴⁵ Meggitt, Friesen,

42. Cf. Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 9. On the physical and social structure of the cities, see esp. Peter Oakes, “Contours of the Urban Environment,” in *After the First Urban Christians: The Social-Scientific Study of Pauline Christianity Twenty-Five Years Later*, ed. Todd D. Still and David G. Horrell (London: Continuum, 2009), 21–35; Reinhard von Bendemann and Markus Tiwald, “Das frühe Christentum und die Stadt—Einleitung und Grundlegung,” in *Das frühe Christentum und die Stadt*, ed. Reinhard von Bendemann and Markus Tiwald, BWANT 198 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2012), 9–42; Martin Ebner, *Die Stadt als Lebensraum der ersten Christen*, vol. 1 of *Das Urchristentum in seiner Umwelt*, GNT 1/1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012). Detailed geographical and archeological maps on Paul’s mission in the context of the cities can also be found in Schnabel, *Mission*, 1529–66.

43. Cf. Dunn, *Beginning*, 555–56.

44. Cf. Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 53–55; Friesen, “Demography,” 361–62.

45. Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, Rockwell Lectures, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 31, speaks of a developing consensus; Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 72–73, agrees. Cf. Gerd Theißen, *Studien zur Soziologie des Urchristentums*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 272–89.

and others, however, have strongly emphasized that, just as the majority of the general population was made up of the poorest level of people, so also the majority of church members stemmed from that group.⁴⁶ Bruce Longenecker takes a mediating position. He ascribes some significance to the middle class both in society and in the apostolic communities, even if it was minor.⁴⁷ No matter which of these analyses one supports, it is clear that a large part of the people in the cities and in the congregations were poor.

The assemblies Paul founded in the cities had something to offer the poorest level of the urban population, including an alternative community with a value system different from the hierarchy of status, honor, and shame. Regarding poverty, Longenecker writes:

If Paul's communities took initiatives to care for the poor, and if they gathered to share food and drink in corporate dinners and other occasions, it is relatively easy to see what economic attraction such communities would have held for people . . . who fell beyond the structures of a household. Moreover, this dimension might have distinguished groups of Jesus followers from other urban associations, since Greco-Roman associations did not accumulate their membership from among [these] levels.⁴⁸

The apostles were united in giving priority to the care of the poor, and Paul stresses that that “was actually what I was eager to do” (Gal 2:10). This was not just a tactical consideration for “reaching people with the good news,” but a theological and ethical reflection that integrated well with Paul’s overall mission. The social status and honor of the lower stratum people in the city got enhanced. Equality before God was the new ethos (1 Cor 12:12–26; 2 Cor 8:13–15; Gal 3:28; Rom 10:11–12, etc.).⁴⁹ The status change from “slaves” to

46. Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, SNTW (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); Friesen, “Demography,” 351–70; cf. Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *Urchristliche Sozialgeschichte: Die Anfänge im Judentum und die Christusgemeinden in der mediterranen Welt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1997), 249–71.

47. Bruce W. Longenecker, “Socio-Economic Profiling of the First Urban Christians,” in *After the First Urban Christians: The Social-Scientific Study of Pauline Christianity Twenty-Five Years Later*, ed. Todd D. Still and David G. Horrell (London: Continuum, 2009), 36–59. Cf. Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

48. Longenecker, “Socio-Economic Profiling,” 52.

49. On this point see details in Michael Wolter, *Paulus: Ein Grundriss seiner Theologie* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 2011), 323–327. In addition, Ebel argues that the great intensity of their life together and the renunciation of formal membership requirements

“adopted children of God” (with the attending family imagery of “brothers and sisters”) and the experience of the unconditional love of God as “Father” through the Spirit of the Son (Jesus the Messiah) were dimensions of community that had the potential to satisfy the “never-ending hunt for ‘honor capture’ that marked out Greco-Roman urbanism”⁵⁰ (see Rom 5:5, 8; 8:15–17; Gal 4:1–7; etc.).⁵¹

The factors mentioned above shaped Paul’s mission as his gospel and its ethical corollaries engaged the realities of life in the city in the Roman Empire. Next to these formative factors there were some concrete practices and structures of Paul’s mission that we will now examine in the remainder of this chapter.

A fundamental characteristic of Paul’s missionary work in the urban context was that Paul *traveled with coworkers*. For Paul, mission was a community task for which he could count on an extended network of Jews and non-Jews, women and men, slaves, ex-slaves, and free. In his letters Paul names approximately nineteen “colleagues” (“partners” [κοινωνοί], “fellow slaves” [σύνδουλοι], “fellow prisoners” [συναιχμάλωτοι], and “fellow soldiers” [συστρατιῶται]) who traveled with him. These colleagues worked with him, provided companionship for him, and acted as his representatives (e.g., Timothy in 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10–11; Titus in 2 Cor 2:13; 7:6–15; 8:6, 16–17), or functioned as his host or patron (e.g., Aquila and Prisca in 1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:3–5).⁵² This multifaceted and interactive teamwork in the context of urban mission work touches on the Pauline principle of the church as the body of Christ, in which there are different gifts and tasks (1 Cor 12; Rom 12:4–8; Eph 4:16). Correspondingly, for his missionary work Paul used the fitting picture of building a house, in which he, the wise master builder, has laid the foundation upon which others may build (1 Cor 3:10).

made the Christian congregations attractive in the competition with pagan associations in their milieu (Eva Ebel, *Die Attraktivität früher christlicher Gemeinden: Die Gemeinde von Korinth im Spiegel griechisch-römischer Vereine*, WUNT/2 178 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], 218; cf. Frey, “Ausbreitung,” 104–6).

50. Longenecker, “Socio-Economic Profiling,” 53.

51. Cf. Jewett, *Romans*, 500; Volker Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul: Transformation and Empowering for Religious-Ethical Life*, WUNT/2 283, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 215–41. However, the converse was also true: “The more subversive the early Christian movement appeared, the less attraction it would have held for those enthralled by honor and advancement within Roman urbanism” (Longenecker, “Socio-Economic Profiling,” 55).

52. Cf. Ollrog, *Paulus, passim*; Reinbold, *Propaganda*, 213–24. On the meaning of relationships for the life and theology of Paul, see Rabens, *Spirit*, 133–44.

When Paul settled in a city, as a rule *he sought a workplace* (1 Thess 2:9; 1 Cor 4:12; 2 Cor 11:27; 12:14; Acts 20:34). Paul made a living with his hands (according to Acts 18:3 he was a leatherworker or tentmaker). According to Paul's own reports, he spent a great amount of his time in urban business. For example, the apostle reminds the Thessalonians that he and his coworkers labored day and night, taking pains not to become a burden to them (1 Thess 2:9). This practice had at least two consequences for the apostle's life and work. First, it meant that Paul spent the better part of his days in the workshop, probably bent over a workbench next to slaves.⁵³ In that way Paul's reputation and honor may have suffered—through this practice he was himself probably associated with the status of a slave (cf. Cicero, *Off.* 1.42).⁵⁴ On the other side, the apostle's "grounded" existence allowed him to spend a lot of time in daily contact with other people, living and working together. This, in turn, would have produced abundant opportunities for communicating the gospel.⁵⁵ Paul thus shared his life with the people of the city—in a thoroughly practical manner.

Also this aspect of Paul's missionary procedure has underlying reasons. The most central motive for earning his own living is stated in 1 Corinthians 9:12–19: the gospel itself is "free of charge" and for that reason he desires to pass it on at no cost.⁵⁶ A further cause for Paul financing himself is closely bound up with the first reason: Paul distances himself from wandering preachers who evangelize for the purpose of earning money (1 Cor 9:12; 2 Cor 2:17; 1 Thess 2:3–6). He did not "twist" the gospel (*δολοῦν*, 2 Cor 4:2) in order to be able to preach more popularly about the crucified Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1:22–23). Furthermore, Dunn suspects that Paul did not want to give up his independence lest he be caught up in new loyalty struggles or power structures, and lest he become a burden to others (1 Thess 2:7, 9; cf. 2 Thess 3:8–9).⁵⁷ Even so, Paul could accept

53. On the working conditions for leather handwork, see Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 67–68, and the critical discussion in Meggitt, *Poverty*, 65, 76–77.

54. See Steve Walton, "Paul, Patronage and Pay: What Do We Know about the Apostle's Financial Support?," in *Paul as Missionary: Identity, Activity, Theology, and Practice*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and Brian S. Rosner, LNTS 420 (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 220–33, here 222–23.

55. See Hock, *Social Context*, 33, 39–40, 56–57 (mentioning philosophical tutorials in ancient workshops); Dunn, *Beginning*, 565–66.

56. Cf. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 421: "In offering the 'free' gospel 'free of charge' his own ministry becomes a living paradigm of the gospel itself."

57. Dunn, *Beginning*, 56; cf. Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven/London:

financial gifts in certain circumstances, when these were given not by patrons, but by “partners in the gospel,” of their own free will (Phil 1:5). Such gifts did not cover Paul’s regular living expenses (Phil 4:10–19; cf. 2 Cor 11:7–8).⁵⁸

Aside from (and presumably during) his daily work, Paul devoted himself to the spreading of the gospel in the city. *Paul preached and discussed in synagogues and houses, and founded apostolic communities.* Acts stereotypically locates the beginning of Paul’s preaching activity in the synagogues (e.g., Acts 17:1–2, 10). As we find in Paul no statements of his missionary tactics upon his arrival in a city, and as he says several times that he is an apostle for the gentiles, Wolfgang Reinbold has posed the question whether in this point Acts is historically reliable. In relation to possible preaching activities in the synagogue, Reinbold comes to a negative conclusion. Nonetheless, he grants that Paul may have attended the meetings on the Sabbath and made occasional contacts on this basis.⁵⁹ However, while Reinbold is justified in treating Acts’ more schematic presentation of Paul’s entry into cities with caution, there are good reasons to believe that Paul established significant relationships in the context of his interaction with the synagogues (which may have included teaching). In the synagogues, Paul would have been accepted as a fellow Jewish believer and would find not only a Jewish infrastructure, but also other Jews and Godfearers who were conversant with the essentials of Jewish thinking and in that sense were prepared for the apostle’s concerns. Paul thus did not really contradict his principle of gentile mission: in the synagogue both groups would hear the gospel, “the Jew first, and also the Greek” (Rom 1:16). In such a context Paul could also live out one of his related missiological principles:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law) so that I might win those outside the law. (1 Cor 9:20–21)

As we have already seen, the salvation of Israel is of great interest for Paul. Since in this passage Paul says that he has directed one part of his missio-

Yale University Press, 1995), 79–86; Walton, “Patronage,” 232. Walton lists further possible grounds for Paul’s practice of financing himself (“Patronage,” 224–25).

58. On the potential contradiction, see the detailed discussion in Walton, “Patronage.”

59. Reinbold, *Propaganda*, 185–87, 207–10.

logical practice toward “winning Jews,” it is only logical that he would seek contact with the synagogue.⁶⁰ Judging from his letters, it seems that Paul had a certain amount of success with his mission to his fellow Jews, for he freely presupposes that the members of his assemblies, or at least the teachers, knew the Septuagint as Holy Scripture, acknowledged its authority, and were familiar with Jewish ethics.⁶¹

To be sure, Paul’s interaction with the Jews in the context of his mission did not always meet with success. In his catalog of hardships in 2 Corinthians 11:23–26, Paul writes that he had to suffer five times the punishment of forty lashes minus one.⁶² It is most likely that the historical setting of this punishment was his confrontations with the synagogues. Once Paul had to leave a synagogue in a given city, did he then turn to the public squares to preach in the marketplace? This popular image of Paul is based above all on the story of the Areopagus episode in Acts 17 and on the parallels that recount the preaching activity of the Cynic and Sophistic philosophers. However, Stanley Stowers questions these parallels, and argues that the diatribes of the Hellenistic philosophers that have come down to us do not have their *Sitz im Leben* in the marketplace, but in schools.⁶³ Since Paul’s letters provide no

60. Against this background Sandnes proposes the hermeneutical principle that the book of Acts deserves attention where it does not contradict Paul’s letters. “The dictum of 1 Cor. 9.19–23 becomes almost without reference if Acts is not taken into account” (Karl Olav Sandnes, “A Missionary Strategy in 1 Corinthians 9.19–23?,” in *Paul as Missionary: Identity, Activity, Theology, and Practice*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and Brian S. Rosner, LNTS 420 [London: T&T Clark, 2011], 128–41, here 135). Cf. Lietaert Peerbolte, *Paul*, 241; James C. Miller, “The Jewish Context of Paul’s Gentile Mission,” *TynBul* 58 (2007): 101–15; Reidar Hvalvik, “Paul as a Jewish Believer—According to the Book of Acts,” in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 121–53. However, one should not go as far as Marius Reiser, “Hat Paulus Heiden bekehrt?,” *BZ* 39 (1995): 76–91, who clearly overshoots the target when he denies to Paul any mission outside of the synagogue.

61. Cf. Schnabel, *Mission*, 1242–43; Dunn, *Beginning*, 560.

62. So, among others, Stanley K. Stowers, “Social Status, Public Speaking and Private Teaching: The Circumstances of Paul’s Preaching Activity,” *NovT* 26 (1984): 59–82, here 64; Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 2:723–58 (with a detailed argument against the thesis that Paul employs the hardship catalog as a parody). Reinbold thinks that the punishment was not carried out because of Paul’s preaching, but because of his “un-Jewish” lifestyle (Reinbold, *Propaganda*, 207–210).

63. Stowers, “Status,” 59–82, followed by Reinbold, *Propaganda*, 200–202. See the critique in Thomas Schmeller, *Paulus und die ‘Diatriben’: Eine vergleichende Stilinterpretation*, NTA 19 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1987), 46–52. Stowers sees clear parallels in structure and

information suggesting an extended public preaching ministry in the marketplace, and as Acts gives only a little more (cf. Acts 14:8–18; 20:20; etc.), we can assume with Stowers that preaching in synagogues, schools (cf. Acts 19:9), and private houses was characteristic of Paul. Nevertheless, this certainly does not exclude the possibility that Paul sometimes led philosophical and theological discussions in the public square.⁶⁴

It is indisputable that private houses played a central role in the Pauline mission in the cities. The ancient οἶκος in the sense of “house as living space” and “family household” became the focal point of the early Christian movement. Here arose not only parallels to the teaching activity of the Hellenistic philosophers,⁶⁵ but also Jewish converts were familiar with assembling in houses.⁶⁶ Furthermore, there is a series of practical reasons that may have led to the significance of houses for the Pauline mission: 1. The houses of new church members were immediately available as meeting places. Remodeling to accommodate the Christian meetings was not necessary. 2. For the central elements of Christian gatherings the private house offered the best conditions: familial community and shared meals at which the Lord's Supper could be celebrated. 3. Private houses made possible relatively in-

contents between Hellenistic philosophies (esp. the Stoics) and Paul's theology (Stanley K. Stowers, “Does Pauline Christianity Resemble a Hellenistic Philosophy?,” in *Paul beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 81–102). However, the parallels to Paul's preaching activity should not only be sought among the Hellenistic philosophers (cf. Vitor Hugo Schell, *Die Areopagrede des Paulus und Reden bei Josephus: Eine vergleichende Studie zu Apg 17 und dem historiographischen Werk des Josephus*, WUNT/2 419 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016]), and not all of the supposed parallels between Paul's theology and Stoic philosophy are conclusive (see the critical analysis in, e.g., Volker Rabens, “Pneuma and the Beholding of God: Reading Paul in the Context of Philonic Mystical Traditions,” in *The Holy Spirit, Inspiration, and the Cultures of Antiquity: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Jörg Frey and John R. Levison, Ekstasis 5 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014], 293–329, here 306–12). In addition, Philo's teaching (which according to Noack was a missionary activity) offers interesting evidence for the possible circumstances of Paul's preaching. Noack highlights five ideal-typical locations: 1. The synagogue, with the reading and exposition of scripture; 2. The private philosophical school, with a private library and discourse (diatribe); 3. The public lecture hall (Gymnasium, Ephebie); 4. A rich citizen's private villa with philosophical lectures; 5. The marketplace (cf. Philo, *Spec.* 1.319–23) (Christian Noack, *Gottesbewußtsein: Exegetische Studien zur Soteriologie und Mystik bei Philo von Alexandria*, WUNT/2 116 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000], 27–29); cf. Schnabel, *Mission*, 1236.

64. Cf. Reinbold, *Propaganda*, 202.

65. Cf. Stowers, “Status,” 81.

66. According to Schnabel, *Mission*, 1244, this applied to Palestine as well as to the diaspora.

conspicuous gatherings—a requirement that became necessary if there were conflicts with non-believers.⁶⁷

In many cities these house communities started to expand in the course of the Pauline mission activity. After the apostle had helped an assembly develop a worship life and had provided guidance for the spiritual and structural growth of the community (cf. 1 Thess 2:10–12, etc.), *Paul moved on*. If, in his estimation, he had “fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ” (πεπληρωκέναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, Rom 15:19), or if he found “no further place” in a city or region (μηκέτι τόπος, 15:23), the apostle would carry on his mission elsewhere—where Christ was not yet known (15:20). Nevertheless, he continued to care for the congregations he founded through visits, letters, and by sending coworkers as emissaries who could build upon the foundation he had laid (1 Cor 3:10).⁶⁸

Did Paul call upon his congregations for their part to be “on-site missionaries” in their city after his departure? In his letters, Paul’s assemblies are infrequently exhorted to share the gospel explicitly (see, e.g., the implicit encouragement in Phil 1:14: “most of the brothers and sisters . . . dare to *speak the word* with greater boldness and without fear;” cf. 1:7, 18).⁶⁹ More frequently, the congregations are presented as “recipients” of the message, who above all are encouraged to live faithfully according to the values of the gospel. However, it is clear that such a lifestyle “tells a story” (e.g., 1 Thess 1:6–9: “the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it”). Paul thus explicitly expects from his assemblies the *promotion* of the gospel, although he does not explicate that this implies (verbal) *proclamation*.⁷⁰ According to Dickson, this promotion of the gospel is achieved through the congregations being “partners in the gospel” (Phil 1:5), which for Paul involved the idea that “all of you share in God’s grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel” (Phil 1:7).⁷¹ Paul considers it a success of such

67. Cf. Schnabel, *Mission*, 1244.

68. On Paul’s highly individual “aftercare” for his assemblies in the different cities, see most recently Matthew Forrest Lowe, “In the Making and the Unmasking: Spiritual Formation as Paul’s Missional ‘Good News,’ Then and Now,” in *Is the Gospel Good News?*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Hughson Ong, McMaster New Testament Studies (Eugene: Pickwick, 2018), forthcoming.

69. On this text, see Gorman, *Gospel*, 110–12. Gorman goes even further by arguing (partly from silence) that “like a dog, a community in Christ cannot help but bark” (45).

70. Cf. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment*, 311.

71. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment*, 131, 311.

participation in the gospel that many “through the testing of this ministry . . . glorify God by . . . obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of . . . sharing with them and with all others” (2 Cor 9:13). The believers’ participation in the gospel is hence adequately coined as their “becoming the gospel.”⁷²

The attraction and radiance of such a life is emphasized by Paul also in other passages. For example, he encouraged the church in Rome to “take thought for what is noble in the sight of all” (Rom 12:17b). The fact that Paul can speak of “what is noble in the sight of all” shows the far-reaching compatibility of Pauline ethics with the basic ethical convictions of the ancient city dwellers (cf. Gal 5:23; 6:9; Phil 4:8; 1 Cor 9:19–22; 10:32–33). “The content of the paraenetic instructions which Paul gave demonstrates a definite inclusive ethical profile, directly in the middle of which stand such norms and values as are acknowledged by all people and enjoy general esteem, including among the non-Christian majority of society.”⁷³ This inclusive ethical profile also implies the openness and comprehensibility of the worship service, so that outsiders may reach the positive conviction, “God is really among you” (1 Cor 14:24–25).

3. Conclusion

Paul’s mission strategy among the cities demonstrates a close interconnection between basic missiological principles and the praxis based upon them. In the planning and execution of his missionary journeys Paul demonstrated flexibility, because conflicts and adversity forced him to take ways other than those he had planned. It is difficult to establish on the basis of his letters (and Acts) how far in advance and in how much detail Paul preplanned his travel routes. However, I have argued that Paul’s Roman territoriality and the conditions of the urban landscape of the Roman Empire provided a framework for Paul’s travel procedures among the cities. In retrospect, he interpreted his overarching geographical movement (shaped in an arc from Jerusalem to Illyricum) in the light of the prophecies in Isaiah 66. For him, the effective

72. Cf. n. 16 above.

73. Wolter, *Paulus*, 316. On the potentially missional function of an attractive ethos, see further Volker Rabens, “Philo’s Attractive Ethics on the ‘Religious Market’ of Ancient Alexandria,” in *Religions and Trade: Religious Formation, Transformation and Cross-Cultural Exchange between East and West*, ed. Peter Wick and Volker Rabens, DHR 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 333–55.

motivation is the universal promise and demand of the gospel, which was to be proclaimed everywhere, especially wherever people had not yet heard, and especially among the gentiles.

Paul selected large cities such as Corinth and Ephesus for his mission. This choice brought with it abundant advantages for his work, ranging from a developed infrastructure to a breadth of job possibilities, to a great diversity of population. The latter point is significant in that it allowed Paul the possibility of attending the synagogue. These advantages served the purpose that people could hear the gospel, and eventually themselves become “partners in the gospel.” This was a relational enterprise. For the apostle “mission” meant a reciprocal process in which he shared his life. This process manifested itself in the joint work with his coworkers with whom Paul traveled to the cities, in the work of urban industry as well as in the synagogues and houses in which Paul engaged with his fellow citizens. With the values that Paul communicated in this lifestyle, his congregations had a solid basis from which to lead a life attractive to further inhabitants of the cities and provinces.