




RESEARCH ARTICLE

The second imprisonment of Paul: Fiction or reality?

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Abstract

This article examines the commonly held conception that Paul was released after his first Roman imprisonment, went to Spain and was eventually reimprisoned and executed in Rome. After examining the available evidence it is concluded that the theory of a release of a release and second imprisonment of Paul is ill founded.

Keywords: Acts; Paul; prison epistles; Roman imprisonment; Spain

The tradition of a Roman imprisonment of Paul is strong, although we have no authentic testimony of it from Paul himself.¹ The common conceptions of Paul's life are shaped by the account in Acts, but also include the assumption that Paul was released after this imprisonment only to be arrested and martyred some years later. This assumption can be derived from Eusebius (*Historia ecclesiastica*, 2.22.6–8) and suggests that there was a second imprisonment of Paul in Rome. Between Paul's two Roman imprisonments, it is commonly assumed that Paul undertook a mission trip to Spain (cf. Rom 15:22–9). However, as I will attempt to show in this article, evidence for a second imprisonment of Paul in Rome is lacking, and the evidence available rather indicates that there was only one Pauline imprisonment.² This does not necessarily mean that Paul never went to Spain. The primary outcome of this article is that the narrative of Acts should not be made normative for historical-critical inquiry into the life of Paul,³ but also that filling gaps of knowledge with unreliable traditions is unsatisfactory from a scholarly point of view.

Although most scholars would argue that both the prison epistles and pastoral epistles are pseudonymous,⁴ they reflect conceptions of Paul's life including his impris-

¹See John Macpherson, 'Was there a Second Imprisonment of Paul in Rome', *American Journal of Theology* 4 (1900), pp. 23–40.

²See also the classic treatment of the issue by P. N. Harrison, *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles* (Oxford: OUP, 1921), pp. 102–15.

³On this issue, see the classic treatment of John Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (London: SCM, 1989).

⁴Among the prison epistles, this is especially true for Ephesians and Colossians, whereas Philippians and Philemon are generally regarded authentic (although partition hypotheses are commonly applied to Philippians).

onment. Toward this background, it is interesting that Luke is mentioned as one who is with Paul in Colossians, Philemon and 2 Timothy. It is possible that Acts ends as it does because this is the last known evidence that the author found concerning Luke, his pseudonym. This, combined with Luke's objective of presenting the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, is of substantial importance for the study of the ending of Acts.

The ending of Acts

Let us first address the issue of whether Acts anticipates that Paul would be released. A number of formulations in Acts are often taken to imply that Paul would eventually be released. The leading Jews in Rome state that they have gained no information concerning Paul from Jerusalem (Acts 28:21), which is taken as an indication that the charges had been dropped.⁵ Also the description of Paul as under house arrest rather than in prison is often taken as an indication that Paul was not considered a risk for public order and would therefore be released.⁶ Whereas these features certainly serve Luke's purposes of portraying Paul as innocent and with a good relationship to the Roman authorities, it says nothing of whether Paul was ever released.⁷ We must keep in mind that Luke also makes clear that Pilate found Jesus innocent, but still had him crucified (Luke 23:13–24). It has also been suggested that the information that he was imprisoned for two years (Acts 28:30) implies that he was released.⁸ At times, this is combined with the data in 2 Timothy that not only speaks of a Roman imprisonment (2 Tim 1:15–18), but also that everyone deserted Paul at his first defence (2 Tim 4:16).⁹ However, although the traditional way of interpreting the data *can* indeed be reconciled with the theory of a second imprisonment if one wishes to do so, it must also be admitted that, if one approaches the text without these presuppositions, this course of events cannot be extracted from the texts themselves. Furthermore, Acts 20:28–9 could indicate that Paul would die in Rome. The fact is that the New Testament nowhere indicates what happened to Paul after his Roman imprisonment. Furthermore, no undisputed Pauline material is preserved that speaks of the imprisonment and what possibly happened after Paul's hypothetical release. We are entirely dependent on legends passed on through later adherents of Paul for information. The unanimity of the traditions of a Pauline imprisonment in Rome make it plausible that this part of Paul's legacy has a historical foundation, but discussions concerning Paul's release, further imprisonment and reimprisonment are pure speculation.

⁵Harry W. Tjara, *The Martyrdom of St. Paul: Historical and Judicial Context, Traditions, and Legends* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1994), p. 73.

⁶So Michael Labahn, 'Paulus—ein *homo honestus et iustus*: Das lukanische Paulusportrait von Act 27–28 im Lichte ausgewählter antiker Parallelen', in F. W. Horn (ed.), *Das Ende des Paulus: Historische, theologische und literaturgeschichtliche Aspekte* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), p. 100.

⁷Friedrich Pfister, 'Die zweimalige römische Gefangenschaft und die spanische Reise des Apostels Paulus und der Schluß der Apostelgeschichte', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 14 (1913), pp. 216–21, suggests that canonical Acts and the *Acts of Paul* were circulated in parallel, and that the idea of a second imprisonment was invented in order to explain the different traditions of the works. Canonical Acts would then treat Paul until the first imprisonment and the *Acts of Paul* from his release to his second imprisonment and subsequent martyrdom. Needless to say, this is pure speculation.

⁸Jens Herzer, 'Verurteilung oder Freilassung und erneute Mission', in F. W. Horn (ed.), *Paulus Handbuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), pp. 124–8.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 125.

The Spanish mission

Our conception of Paul's journey to a Roman imprisonment is based on the narrative in Acts. As for the genuine Pauline epistles, Paul does express a wish to visit Rome on his way to his final destination Spain (Rom 15:22–9).¹⁰ This is different from the account in Acts, where Paul wishes to reach Rome rather than Spain (19:21).¹¹ This wish has given rise to traditions of Paul conducting a Spanish mission between his two imagined imprisonments.¹² The *Acts of Peter* claim that Paul went to Spain following his visit to Rome, but mentions nothing of him being imprisoned and is thus probably dependent on the tradition of Romans rather than accurate knowledge. Since this text is likely from the fourth century, its historicity is rather dubious in any case.¹³ Likewise, the Muratorian fragment mentions Paul's trip to Spain following the end of Acts, but the dating of this document is also rather uncertain.¹⁴ It is more likely that the mention of a mission to Spain is based on Romans.¹⁵

Before embarking on a more detailed discussion of the traditions concerning Paul's mission to Spain, we must admit that Paul's idea that he should travel to Spain is rather odd. Ferdinand Christian Baur could not conceal that he found Paul's idea to be more or less stupid.¹⁶ Still, he saw a logic in that Paul wished to spread the gospel where it had not yet been heard and should therefore not linger in Rome (cf. 2 Cor 10:15–16).¹⁷ More recent scholarship has suggested that Paul's wish to go to Spain was based on his reading of Isaiah 52:7–12,¹⁸ as connected to Paul's

¹⁰For a history of research on Paul's trip to Spain, see Bernd Wander, 'Warum wollte Paulus nach Spanien? Ein forschungs- und motivgeschichtlicher Überblick', in *Das Ende des Paulus*, pp. 175–95.

¹¹Ernst Barnikol, *Römer 15—Letzte Reiseziele des Paulus, Jerusalem, Rom und Antiochien: Eine Voruntersuchung zur Entstehung des sogenannten Römerbriefes* (Kiel: Mühlaus, 1931), argues that the references to Spain are interpolations, and suggests that the reference in Rom 15:24 should be replaced with Jerusalem and in Rom 15:28 with Italy.

¹²Some significant early traditions concerning the Spanish mission are discussed in Friedrich Pfister, *Der Reliquienkult im Altertum*, 2 vols (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1909–12), vol. 1, pp. 266–78. However, I do not share his optimistic view of the sources.

¹³See Matthew C. Baldwin, *Whose Acts of Peter?* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

¹⁴A. C. Sundberg, 'Towards a Revised History of the New Testament Canon', in F. L. Cross (ed.), *Studia Evangelica 4* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1968), vol. 1, pp. 152–61; Sundberg, 'Canon Muratori: A Fourth-Century List', *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (1973), pp. 1–41; Geoffrey M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); Clare K. Rothschild, 'The Muratorian Fragment as Roman Fake', *Novum Testamentum* 60 (2018), pp. 55–82 date the fragment to the fourth century. For a critique of the fourth-century dating and affirmation of the traditional view, see Joseph Verheyden, 'The Canon Muratori: A Matter of Dispute', in J.-M. Auwers and H. J. de Jonge (eds), *The Biblical Canons* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), pp. 487–556. Another approach is taken by Jonathan J. Armstrong, 'Victorinus of Pettau as the Author of the Canon Muratori', *Vigiliae Christianae* 62 (2008), pp. 1–34, who places it in the third century.

¹⁵See Leonhard Goppelt, *Die apostolische und nachapostolische Zeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), p. 72; Robert Jewett, *Dating Paul's Life* (London: SCM, 1979), p. 45.

¹⁶Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi. Sein Leben und Wirken, seine Briefe und seine Lehre. Zu einer kritischen Geschichte des Urchristentums*, 2 vols, 2nd edn, (Leipzig: Fues, 1866–1867), vol. 1, p. 401.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 402. See also discussion in Anders Nygren, *Romarbrevet* (Stockholm: Verbum, 1943), pp. 452–4.

¹⁸Roger D. Aus, 'Paul's Travel Plans to Spain and the Full Number of the Gentiles of Rom XI 25', *Novum Testamentum* 21 (1979), pp. 232–62; Friedrich Wilhelm Horn, 'Das apostolische Selbstverständnis des Paulus nach Römer 15', in U. Schnelle (ed.), *The Letter to the Romans* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), pp. 235–6. See also Florian Wilk, *Die Bedeutung des Jesajabuches für Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck

eschatological expectations,¹⁹ in order to underline that he did not seek to make the world capital his own domain,²⁰ or simply in order to create a physical distance from James and Judaizing Christianity.²¹ Although a consensus is lacking on the reasons for Paul's desire to go to Spain, most scholars believe that it is the result of his theological convictions. Jacob Jervell even claims that the purpose of Romans is to gather support for a Spanish mission.²² This being said, the apparent fact that Paul wished to visit Spain does not necessarily mean that he actually did so.²³ Although *1 Clement* 5:5–7 claims that Paul went to the furthest limits of the West (i.e. Spain), it is uncertain whether this statement is based on historical data or inferred from Romans.²⁴ No Spanish sources from late antiquity state that he visited Spain.²⁵ Furthermore, Paul's wish to go to Spain is not present in the reception of Paul found in the prison epistles. In Philemon 22, written from Rome, Paul wishes to visit Philemon in Colossae, which would be in the opposite direction.

Also, the earliest extant explicit account of Paul's martyrdom, the *Acts of Paul* from the late second century, says nothing of a Spanish mission or even a second imprisonment. When Paul arrives in Rome, Luke awaits him there, and the story of a man falling out of a window and being resurrected by prayer (cf. Acts 20:7–12) is recounted in a somewhat different version (*Acts of Paul* 14:1). In this account, the dead man is the cup-bearer of the emperor. When he returns to the emperor, he tells that he has been resurrected by the king of kings and declares himself a soldier of king Jesus (14:2).²⁶ This infuriates Nero, who imprisons the Christians, including Paul (14:3). Most Christians are burned, but Paul is beheaded due to his Roman citizenship.²⁷ In the *Acts of Paul*, Paul is not sent to Rome as a prisoner, but goes there by own will.²⁸ Yet, his

& Ruprecht, 1998), pp. 233–5; J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul 'in Concert' in the Letter to the Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 329–40. For an assessment and critique of this perspective, see A. Andrew Das, 'Paul of Tarsus: Isaiah 66.19 and the Spanish Mission of Romans 15.24, 28', *New Testament Studies* 54 (2008), pp. 60–73; Wayne A. Meeks, 'From Jerusalem to Illyricum, Rome to Spain: The World of Paul's Missionary Imagination', in C. K. Rothschild and J. Schröter (eds), *The Rise and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries of the Common Era* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), pp. 167–81.

¹⁹E. Earle Ellis, 'The End of the Earth (Acts 1:8)', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1 (1991), pp. 123–32; Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), p. 924.

²⁰Ernst Käsemann, *An die Römer* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1973), pp. 379–80.

²¹Udo Schnelle, 'Der Römerbrief und die Aporien des paulinischen Denkens', in *The Letter to the Romans*, pp. 3–24.

²²Jacob Jervell, 'Der Brief nach Jerusalem: Über Veranlassung und Adresse des Römerbriefes', *Studia Theologica* 25 (1971), pp. 61–73.

²³As pointed out by Otto Pfeleiderer, *Das Urchristentum: Seine Schriften und Lehren in geschichtlichem Zusammenhang* (Berlin: Reimer, 1887), p. 145.

²⁴Andreas Lindemann, *Die Clemensbriefe* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), p. 38, suggests that the failure to mention Spain makes it improbable that this is the destination aimed at. Hermut Löhr, 'Zur Paulus-Notiz in 1 Clem 5,5–7', in *Das Ende des Paulus*, p. 208, regards this as a rather weak argument. However, I agree with Lindemann that the reference to missions in 'East and West' more naturally conveys the meaning of worldwide missions than a specific tradition of a mission to Spain.

²⁵David L. Eastman, *Paul the Martyr: The Cult of the Apostle in the Latin West* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2011), p. 148.

²⁶This resembles the accusations in Acts 17:7.

²⁷Those who behead Paul come to faith and are sealed by Luke and Titus (*Acts of Paul* 14:7). Thus, Luke here, just as in Acts, is together with Paul yet escapes his hardships. The notion of Paul's Roman citizenship is probably derived from canonical Acts.

²⁸Acts 26:32 also suggests that the trip to Rome is due to the will of Paul.

imprisonment is closely linked to his death. The *Acts of Paul* does not seek to underline the good relationship between early Christianity and Roman society, as Luke-Acts does, but has Nero behead Paul following his imprisonment. We find no traces of a long period of relative freedom in prison followed by a release and eventual mission to Spain. The Pauline imprisonment in Rome is a vital part of his martyrdom account. Yet the *Acts of Paul* also reports the apostle preaches and brings people to faith in prison. The storyline of the *Acts of Paul* is interesting since a number of scholars view the work as a connected in some way to canonical Acts.²⁹ It is without question that the *Acts of Paul* uses canonical Acts, and the parallel accounts in *Acts of Paul* and canonical Acts suggest that the *Acts of Paul* does not aim at recounting for Paul's activity between his two hypothetical imprisonments. As such, the *Acts of Paul* is substantial evidence that the imprisonment in canonical Acts was thought of as ending with Paul's martyrdom by at least some second-century Christians.

What if the author of Acts knew the prison epistles?

The main reason that it is believed that Paul was released and imprisoned a second time is the existence of the so-called prison epistles that are often connected to this purported second imprisonment. However, I regard it as rather plausible that these writings were in fact known to the author of Acts. Let us now discuss the traces of the prison epistles in Acts and how the relationship between these texts can be understood.

With respect to Colossians and Philemon, we must admit that Colossae is not mentioned in Acts, nor are the names Philemon and Onesimus. However, this does not necessarily mean that Luke did not know these texts and traditions. The traditions that are connected to Colossae would have been of lesser relevance in a time when this city had lost its significance.³⁰ Onesimus and Philemon are peripheral figures who would not add value to Acts in any self-evident way. On the other hand, as we shall see below, Ephesus plays a significant role in Acts, and it is theoretically possible that Ephesians had superseded Colossians. At the same time, Colossians and Philemon both mention Luke (Col 4:14; Philem 24). Although Luke-Acts is anonymous, it is not plausible that it originally circulated under another name.³¹ Furthermore, the work was connected to the Pauline associate Luke by the second half of the second century.³² Since Paul has not yet visited Colossae in Colossians/Philemon, but is imprisoned and together with Luke, it is likely that the author of Acts would place an eventual visit to Colossae subsequent to Paul's imprisonment in Rome that finishes Acts.

²⁹Richard Bauckham, 'The *Acts of Paul* as a Sequel to Acts', in B. W. Winter and A. D. Clarke (eds), *The Book of Acts in its Ancient Literary Setting* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 105–52; Bauckham, 'The Acts of Paul: Replacement of Acts or Sequel to Acts', *Semeia* 80 (1997), pp. 159–68; Peter W. Dunn, 'The Acts of Paul and the Pauline Legacy in the Second Century' (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge, 1996); Julian V. Hills, 'The Acts of Paul and the Legacy of the Lukan Acts', *Semeia* 80 (1997), pp. 145–58.

³⁰Cf. Andreas Lindemann, 'Die Gemeinde von "Kolossä": Erwägungen zum "Sitz im Leben" eines pseudopaulinischen Briefes', *Wort und Dienst* 16 (1981), pp. 111–34.

³¹Ernst Haenchen, 'Das "Wir" in der Apostelgeschichte und das Itinerar', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 58 (1961), p. 333. Although we do not know when Luke-Acts was attributed to Luke, the attribution to him in the extant manuscripts is consistent; see Simon J. Gathercole, 'The Titles of the Gospels in the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 104 (2013), pp. 33–76.

³²See Claus-Jürgen Thornton, *Der Zeuge des Zeugen: Lukas als Historiker der Paulusreisen* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991), pp. 7–69.

A visit to Colossae is therefore not to be expected, nor is a mentioning of Onesimus and Philemon, since this correspondence originates from his imprisonment at the ending of Acts. If Luke-Acts was ascribed to Luke already from the beginning,³³ this places the 'we-person' (as we may call the undefined companion of Paul) in Rome together with the imprisoned Paul exactly when it fits the information in Colossians and Philemon. The legacy of Luke as Paul's companion until the end, even in the period preceding his martyrdom, is also indicated in 2 Timothy 4:11. The absence of connections between Paul and Colossae and the people mentioned in his letters there are thus an indication that Luke used the Pauline epistles very consciously rather than that he was ignorant of them, as he models the fictive author of Luke-Acts after the information concerning Luke found in these letters.

In contrast to Colossae, the two other destinations of the prison epistles both play significant parts in the construal of the Pauline mission in Acts. The first to be mentioned is Philippi (16:9–15). Paul and his companions arrive in Philippi directed by the Spirit (16:9), and Luke adds that Philippi was the most significant city in the region (16:12). Paul's mission in Philippi is a significant turning point in the narrative, as it contains the first so-called 'we-passage'.³⁴ In 1 Thessalonians, Paul describes how he was mistreated in Philippi (2:2), and this is echoed in the account in Acts 16:16–40 (which also includes an imprisonment narrative). Yet Acts also describes Philippi as something of a safe haven for Paul, who returns to the city on multiple occasions, as does the we-person (Acts 20:1–6). Despite Paul's great success in Ephesus, he chooses to return to Macedonia (likely Philippi) after this (Acts 20:1).³⁵ As the story is told in Acts 20, Philippi emerges as a Pauline centre similar to the role often ascribed to Antioch.

Philippians does not contain greetings in the style typical for Pauline epistles. Although one could argue that this is due to the conditions of Paul's imprisonment,³⁶ the pattern found in the other prison epistles suggests otherwise. Paul does mention co-workers in Philippi (Euodia, Syntyche, Syzygos and Clement), but they are otherwise unknown. Euodia and Syntyche are not mentioned in Acts, where Lydia instead plays a prominent role.³⁷ Lilian Portefaix argues that Lydia should be considered a fictitious character hiding a germ of historical truth,³⁸ and perhaps Luke was inspired by traditions that the church in Philippi had significant leading women (such as Euodia and Syntyche) and invented one of his own.³⁹ Although Philippi is a significant place in Acts, we find no direct signs that Philippians has been utilised by the author of Acts.

³³This is argued by Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), pp. 48–56.

³⁴The exact scope of the we-passages is debated, but roughly one could say that they comprise Acts 16:10–18; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16.

³⁵The pattern of travelling via Macedonia can be recognised from 1 Cor 16:5.

³⁶See Angela Standhartinger, 'Aus der Welt eines Gefangenen: Die Kommunikationsstruktur des Philippenerbriefes im Spiegel seiner Abfassungssituation', *Novum Testamentum* 55 (2013), pp. 140–67.

³⁷On the rhetorical function of Lydia in Acts, see Alexandra Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia as a Rhetorical Construct in Acts* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2016).

³⁸Lilian Portefaix, *Sisters Rejoice: Paul's Letter to the Philippians and Luke-Acts as Received by First-Century Philippian Women* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988), p. 132, n. 4.

³⁹So Shelly Matthews, *First Converts: Rich Pagan Women and the Rhetoric of Mission in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 93.

Let us now turn to Paul's ministry in Ephesus according to Acts. After a short visit in Ephesus in 18:19–21, Paul finally stays for a longer period in the city (Acts 19). Just as in Philippi, Paul is the founder of Christianity in Ephesus.⁴⁰ Paul's mission in Ephesus is successful, and Luke's account is rather elaborate.⁴¹ The plot of the mission in Philippi is echoed in Ephesus. In Philippi he delivers a slave-girl from a spirit of divination (16:18) and it is implied that Paul performed similar exorcisms (19:12), since some Jewish sorcerers tried to imitate him (19:13–16). Just as in Philippi (16:19), Paul's ministry has a negative economic impact for other religious businesses (19:23–25). However, in contrast to Philippi, Paul is never imprisoned in Ephesus. The idea of an Ephesian imprisonment builds on the presupposition that Romans 16 was originally sent to Ephesus,⁴² which originates with the greeting to Prisca and Aquila (16:3), who live in Ephesus according to 1 Corinthians 16:9, and his reference to Andronicus and Junia(s) as his fellow prisoners (Rom 16:7).⁴³ On the one hand, an Ephesian imprisonment is easily reconcilable with the hardships Paul claims to have endured in Ephesus (1 Cor 4:6–11, 15:30–3; 2 Cor 1:8–11). On the other hand, Acts portrays Prisca and Aquila as quite mobile. Aquila was born in Pontus but lived together with Prisca in Rome until they were expelled and met Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1–3), only to eventually reach Ephesus (Acts 18:18–19). Although it is possible that Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus at some point,⁴⁴ there is no reason to believe that the prison epistles were written during this imprisonment.⁴⁵ Udo Schnelle argues rather convincingly that Romans 16 is directed to Rome,⁴⁶ and it is quite possible that the account in Acts is an attempt to harmonise Romans 16:3 with 1 Corinthians 16:19 and possibly 2 Timothy 4:19.

Paul's ministry in Ephesus is more extensive than in Philippi according to Acts, with Paul teaching in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (19:9). In contrast to Philippi, to which

⁴⁰Mikael Tellbe, *Christ-Believers in Ephesus: A Textual Analysis of Early Christian Identity Formation in a Local Perspective* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), p. 22, notes that most ascribe the founding of the church to Apollos, although some also relate it to Pentecost according to Acts 2. In any case, such judgements are entirely based on the narrative of Acts, and their reliability can therefore be questioned.

⁴¹Stephan Witetschek, *Ephesische Enthüllungen 1: Frühe Christen in einer antiken Großstadt zugleich ein Beitrag zur Frage nach den Kontexten der Johannesapokalypse* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), pp. 259–62, argues that Luke-Acts is written from Ephesus due to the central role of the Ephesian ministry in Acts 19–20.

⁴²Cf. Willi Marxsen, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament: Eine Einführung in ihre Probleme* (Gütersloh: Mohr, 1963), p. 100.

⁴³On the hypothesis that Romans 16 was originally sent to Ephesus, see J. I. H. McDonald, 'Was Romans XVI a Separate Letter?', *New Testament Studies* 16 (1970), pp. 369–72. See also discussion in Helmut Koester, 'Ephesus in Early Christian Literature', in *Ephesus, Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), pp. 119–40.

⁴⁴See discussion in Heike Omerzu, 'Spurensuche: Apostelgeschichte und Paulusbriefe als Zeugnisse einer ephesischer Gefangenschaft des Paulus', in J. Frey, C. K. Rothschild and J. Schröter (eds), *Die Apostelgeschichte im Kontext antiker und frühchristlicher Historiographie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 295–326.

⁴⁵See Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 83–7.

⁴⁶Udo Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), pp. 116–20. See also Harry Gamble, *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans: A Study in Textual and Literary Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1977); Mark A. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 249–54.

Paul returns a number of times in Acts, Paul does not return to Ephesus, although he summons its leaders to Miletus on his way to Jerusalem (20:17–38). At this encounter, he speaks as if he anticipates his own martyrdom, preceded by bonds and sufferings (20:23) and is certain that he will not see them again (20:25, 38). This sets the stage for the letter which he sends in bonds (Eph 3:1, 4:1, 6:20), in which he expresses no intention of personally visiting the Ephesians again (Eph 6:21). There are also some particular parallels to Paul's ministry in Ephesus that are echoed in Acts, such as the receiving of the Spirit (cf. Eph 1:13–14 and Acts 19:2).⁴⁷

Regardless of whether Paul was historically imprisoned in Ephesus, this is not accounted for in Acts. In Acts, the only substantial imprisonment of Paul is connected to his arrest in Jerusalem and eventual trip to and imprisonment in Rome. This is in rather stark contrast to Paul's own words, which include the claim that he was frequently imprisoned (2 Cor 11:23), despite these imprisonments not being accounted for in his letters. It is not impossible that the historical Paul was at some point imprisoned in Ephesus, but this is not sufficient basis to argue that the prison epistles were written (or, on the assumption that they are pseudonymous, allegedly written) from Ephesus. Paul's legacy as a prisoner is primarily connected to his Roman imprisonment, and this is the background against which we must understand the prison epistles. This being said, we must acknowledge that Paul clearly indicates that he endured hardships in Ephesus. In 1 Corinthians, which is written from Ephesus (1 Cor 16:8), he states that he fought the 'wild beasts of Ephesus', which probably refers to controversies with the cult of Artemis.⁴⁸ Yet, this does not mean that Paul refers to the riot reported in Acts 19:21–49, although this reference may serve as background for the Acts narrative.⁴⁹

Paul was not released

If Paul was released from prison and went to Spain, it is remarkable that this period in his life left so miniscule an impact on history. We know of no letters he wrote and no churches that he founded. If the Spanish mission ever took place, it must have been a failure compared to Paul's previous work. We know nothing concerning how and why Paul was imprisoned again and eventually martyred. The only traditions concerning Paul we can infer from the Pauline pseudepigrapha is that he was known to have been imprisoned in Rome. We must therefore conclude that the theories concerning Paul's release, Spanish mission, reimprisonment and martyrdom lack sufficient historical basis. For some reason, Luke's narrative of Paul ends in Rome. Colin Hemer suggests that the ending of Acts implies that the reader would know what happened thereafter, but all that appears to be universally believed is that Paul was eventually martyred. Either Luke presupposes that his readers would understand that Paul's

⁴⁷For a more extensive discussion of parallels in Acts and Ephesians, see Mitton, *Ephesians*, pp. 198–220. See also Barbara Shellard, *New Light on Luke: Its Purpose, Sources, and Literary Context* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 56–8. Ralph P. Martin, 'An Epistle in Search of a Life-Setting', *Expository Times* 79 (1967), pp. 296–302, goes so far as to suggest that Luke is the author of Ephesians.

⁴⁸See Morna D. Hooker, 'Artemis of Ephesus', *Journal of Theological Studies* 64 (2013), pp. 37–46; Daniel Frayer-Griggs, 'The Beasts of Ephesus and the Cult of Artemis', *Harvard Theological Review* 106 (2013), pp. 459–77; J. Andrew Doole, "'I Have Fought with Wild Beasts... But I Will Stay until Pentecost': What (Else) Can 1 Corinthians Teach us about Ephesus', *Novum Testamentum* 60 (2018), p. 151.

⁴⁹See Hooker, 'Artemis of Ephesus'.

imprisonment ended with his death, or he found existing traditions too confusing to harmonise. In any case, as we have mentioned previously, Acts ends at a point where many readers would suspect Luke to have been present.⁵⁰ Luke's construction of Paul's Roman imprisonment is dependent on the assertion that Paul was a Roman citizen, something that is not attested outside Acts. Although the accuracy of this claim is frequently defended,⁵¹ there is reason to believe that it is part of Luke's literary construction.⁵² The author of 2 Timothy does not appear to be aware that Paul is a Roman citizen, as he has him refer to being rescued from the lions.⁵³ Robert Jewett argues that Luke implies that Paul was executed following his imprisonment, and that none of the arguments to the effect that the ending of Acts suggests that Paul was released stand up to closer examination.⁵⁴ The reference to Paul's 'first defence' (πρώτη μου ἀπολογία; 2 Tim 4:16) could possibly indicate an early tradition of a second imprisonment.⁵⁵ Yet in its context, it is evident that Paul is speaking of his dealings with Alexander the Coppersmith (2 Tim 4:14; 1 Tim 1:20), so the passage cannot apply to the Roman imprisonment described in Acts.⁵⁶ Furthermore, 2 Timothy can at least partially be designated as a testament of Paul,⁵⁷ which suggests that the author of 2 Timothy imagined that the imprisonment from which he had Paul write preceded his death.⁵⁸

⁵⁰Although it is possible that the fictional framework of Acts is intended to convey that Acts was written around the time of Paul's Roman imprisonment (as is still held by those who cling to an early dating of Acts), this setting must be understood as purely fictional, since Luke 1:1–4, which was likely written prior to Acts, presupposes previous Gospel accounts, although none of the other canonical Gospels were published by the early 60s.

⁵¹Peter van Minnen, 'Paul the Roman Citizen', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 56 (1994), pp. 43–52; Heike Omerzu, *Der Prozeß des Paulus: Eine exegetische und rechtsgeschichtliche Untersuchung der Apostelgeschichte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), pp. 17–52; Sean A. Adams, 'Paul the Roman Citizen: Roman Citizenship in the Ancient World and its Importance for Understanding Acts 22:22–29', in S. E. Porter (ed.), *Paul: Jew, Greek, and Roman* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 309–26.

⁵²Wolfgang Stegemann, 'War der Apostel Paulus ein römischer Bürger?', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 78 (1987), pp. 200–29; John Clayton Lentz, *Luke's Portrait of Paul* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), pp. 23–61.

⁵³Although Roman citizens were normally not thrown to the beasts, there were exceptions; see Boris A. Paschke, 'The Roman ad bestias Execution as a Possible Historical Background for 1 Peter 5.8', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28 (2006), pp. 489–500, n. 24. Not only citizenship, but also social class was taken into consideration when deciding upon a punishment. See Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 96.

⁵⁴Jewett, *Dating*, pp. 45–4. He suggests that the accusations can be found in Acts 25:8.

⁵⁵Herzer, 'Verurteilung', p. 125, argues that this is a clear indication that Paul was released when read against Acts 28:21.

⁵⁶The reference to being rescued from lions (2 Tim 4:17) is reminiscent of the 'beasts at Ephesus' (1 Cor 15:32) and suggests that it refers to the Ephesus tradition in Acts 18:21–40, in which Paul's antagonist is Demetrius the Silversmith.

⁵⁷Lorenz Oberlinner, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, 3 vols (Freiburg: Herder, 1994–6), vol. 2, pp. 1–5. William A. Richards, *Difference and Distance in Post-Pauline Christianity: An Epistolary Analysis of the Pastorals* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 133–6, disagrees with this genre designation, but, as pointed out in my *Peter's Legacy in Early Christianity: The Use and Appropriation of Peter's Legacy in the First Three Centuries* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), pp. 152–4, genre designations must be thought of in more fluid terms, used for the purposes of the author.

⁵⁸Craig A. Smith, *Timothy's Task, Paul's Prospect: A New Reading of 2 Timothy* (Sheffield: Phoenix, 2006), argues that this passage should not be read as referring to Paul's death, but rather to his ministry. He suggests that the text is more of paraenesis than testament.

Conclusion

In concluding this our discussion on the second imprisonment and Spanish mission, we must admit that there is no reliable evidence that Paul was released from his Roman imprisonment, nor that he conducted a missionary enterprise to Spain.⁵⁹ Although *I Clement* possibly indicates that the Spanish mission was part of Paul's legacy already in the late first century, this is based on Romans and does not suggest Paul's release from Rome. Also, the *Acts of Paul* suggests that Rome was Paul's final destination in more than one regard. The notion of a second imprisonment is by no means necessary for the fictional framework of the prison epistles (including 2 Timothy), which fit nicely with the idea of a single Roman imprisonment. Unless one contends that Paul must by necessity have gone to Spain, and that Paul's martyrdom would by necessity have been recounted in Acts if it followed the imprisonment with which it ends, it is more plausible that Paul's life and mission ended in connection to his one and only Roman imprisonment. We know nothing of the circumstances for this imprisonment, but since we have no authentic Pauline correspondence from the time, we may presume that the Romans were not as gentle to Paul as the author of Acts wishes to portray them.

⁵⁹Richard I. Pervo, *The Making of Paul: Constructions of the Apostle in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), p. 33, n. 72, dismisses the idea of a release and second trial as a 'scholarly construct'.