

PAUL'S HELPERS IN PRISON: DISCIPLES HELPING DISCIPLES

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Abstract — Roman imprisonment was a very treacherous place to be in antiquity. Prisoners had to rely on external support in order to cope and survive. The Apostle Paul experienced a long duration of imprisonment in his life, but he did not make it through on his own. Luke records many instances where Paul received help in physical, mental, and spiritual categories that enabled Paul to endure the hardships associated with being in Roman custody. Comparing the biblical accounts of Paul's imprisonment in the book of Acts with imprisonment accounts in other ancient sources yields a greater understanding and appreciation for the effort of those who helped Paul while he was in prison, and a more accurate picture of the impact of such help on Paul's ministry.

General Research Topic(s) — The Acts of the Apostles, Roman Imprisonment, The Apostle Paul, Missionary Journeys, Historiography, New Testament Studies.

I. INTRODUCTION

A major part of the book of Acts consists of Paul being imprisoned by Roman authorities. The longest period is recorded in Acts 21-28 which encompasses an extent of well over four years of the apostle's life. During this time he appeared before several government officials to defend himself as well as be transported to Rome to appear before Caesar. It can be gathered from other writings of the New Testament (NT) that during his time in prison Paul wrote several of his letters to churches he had founded while on previous missionary journeys.

Also during his time in prison, Paul was actively involved in spreading the gospel to those he came into contact with. Several instances are recorded of him giving testimony before authorities (23:6-10; 24:10-21; 26:2-23), and at the end of his long journey to Rome, it can be noted that only three days after arriving he had the leaders of the Jews assembled and he preached the gospel to them (28:17-22). But, how was Paul able to assemble the Jews at Rome so quickly? Did he have communication with the Christian church there or other local believers? And how was he able to effectively operate his ministry while in prison? Perhaps more importantly, how did Paul cope under such circumstances and for so long in prison to be able to speak the gospel?

In seeking to discover the answer to these questions, one might posit that it was Paul's indomitable spirit that gave him such strength to keep on going and endure such hardships or that he became accustomed to being in prison and so he was able to tolerate the experience. Or possibly, it was that his circumstances in prison were not as austere as one might imagine and were more favorable. In the face of these pressing questions concerning how did Paul personally manage during his time in prison, the record in Acts and elsewhere in the NT yield a surprisingly simple answer: *Paul received help from others.*

While Luke (the author of the book of Acts) does not disclose an abundance of details concerning those who assisted Paul, explicit mention is made of specific individuals on several occasions throughout his writing. Others are mentioned in the letters Paul wrote himself. In conjunction with background information on Roman imprisonment and various accounts of those who helped prisoners in the Greco-Roman world, the brief mention of people who helped Paul in prison can illuminate some insightful details and depth of understanding on how the Apostle likely coped with the harsh environment, the loneliness and mental fatigue, and how he was afforded resources to continue his ministry while incarcerated.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the accounts of those who are mentioned helping Paul in the book of Acts and elsewhere in the New Testament and compare the aid they rendered against other known contemporary examples from antiquity to build a picture of how meaningful such help was for prisoners in the Greco-Roman world.

II. ROMAN IMPRISONMENT

Being arrested and imprisoned in the Greco-Roman world was a much crueler and harsher experience than what is probably recognized by most readers of the New Testament today. Mal-treatment, severe physical hardships, and even torture were normal conditions a person would likely endure in Roman prisons. In addition, when a person was arrested they were immediately apprehended without any warning or chance to notify anyone, bound in chains, and hauled off to the nearest prison where questions would be asked later (if they were ever asked at all).¹ No ethical code of conduct existed for the humane treatment of prisoners in the Roman Empire, and depending on the temperament and disposition of the guards, a prisoner might find

¹ Robert T. Boyd, *Paul the Apostle* (United States: World Press, 1995), 360.

themselves severely burdened under the hand of a cold and merciless fiend.

Emperor Justinian (c. 482 – 565 C.E.) wrote a *Digest* that has provided much insight into the legal code for Roman imprisonment. However, it is a later source and can be viewed as potentially anachronistic if too rigidly applied to the culture of the first-century A.D. In his *Digest*, Justinian conveys how imprisonment in the Roman Empire was typically utilized as a temporary holding measure until a hearing could be realized and punishment rendered.² Furthermore, “Governors are in the habit of condemning men to be kept in prison or in chains, but they ought not to do this; for punishments of this type are forbidden.”³ Long-term imprisonment as punishment was frowned upon but such a paradigm was not always followed. Cicero (106 – 43 B.C.E.) describes how a century earlier life imprisonment was actually viewed as an approved punishment by many in the Roman Empire.⁴ Seneca (c. 4 B.C – 65 A.D.) also reports the need for imprisonment as a ‘harsher remedy’ for wickedness that has become deep-rooted in a person.⁵

Moreover, several ancient writers testify to the cruelty and callousness of Roman guards and the imprisonment system of the empire. The Christian martyr Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35 or 50 – 98 to 117 C.E.) recounts the battles he had with the “beasts,” as he called them, referring to the brutal band of guards that were supervising his transport to Rome.⁶ Also in

² “Prison indeed ought to be employed for confining men, not for punishing them.” Justinian, *Dig.* 48.18.9.

³ *Ibid.*, 48.19.9.

⁴ “Caesar, however, feels that death has been ordained by the immortal gods not as a means of punishment but as a necessity of nature or a relief from all our toil and woe. That is why philosophers have never been reluctant to face it and brave men have often faced it even gladly. Confinement, however, and for life at that, is an exemplary punishment indeed for a heinous crime.” Cicero, *Cat.* 4.7.

⁵ Seneca, *De Ira* 1.16.2-3.

⁶ “On land and by sea, by night and by day, I am in chains with ten leopards around me—or at least with a band

response to how brutal Roman prison guards were known to be, Josephus records (37 C.E.) how Antonia Minor⁷ intervened on behalf of the Jewish Prince Herod Agrippa I (11 B.C.E. – 44 C.E.) in order that Agrippa's guards be "of humane character" as well as the centurion responsible for him and to whom he would be handcuffed.⁸ Lucian (c. 125 – c. 180 C.E.) records how the Egyptian keeper of Antiphilus⁹ exercised his authority over Antiphilus "with a heavy hand"¹⁰, implying Antiphilus was treated with unnecessary and probably injurious force. Cicero (106 – 43 B.C.E.) also describes the nature of how "condemned men were thrust into prison" in a very aggressive and barbaric way without regard for whether they were harmed in the process.¹¹ Moreover, physical harm and brutal treatment was also commonly joined with stringent food rations and intentional mal-nourishment. Dio Cassius (c. 155 – 235 C.E.) records how the food that Asinius Gallus¹² was given to eat "was of such quality and amount as neither to afford him any satisfaction or strength nor yet

to allow him to die."¹³ Roman imprisonment afforded no luxuries and was a most undesirable place to find oneself. Prisoners would constantly be physically debilitated due to the unfit living conditions and minimal dietary provisions as well as the constant inhumane treatment by the guards.

Pertaining to the organization and structure of Roman imprisonment, three primary forms of imprisonment can be categorized from ancient literature: *custodia publica*, *custodia militaris*, and *custodia libera*.¹⁴ The first type *custodia publica* was the main public jail or prison and was by far the worst form of Roman custody. The jail was usually divided into three distinct parts: 1) the *communiora*, which was managed with the least amount of security and the prisoners had free access to sunlight and fresh air, 2) the *intiora*, where prisoners were locked in by iron gates and strong bars, and 3) the *tullianum*, which was also known as the dungeon or innermost part of the prison.¹⁵ The conditions in the *custodia publica* were known to be of a very poor quality, especially in the cells residing in the *tullianum* portion. In describing the inner most part (i.e., the *tullianum*) of the *custodia publica*, it would be "cold, damp, filthy, smelly, and dimly lit [if at all]. Excrement piled up and the odor was stifling."¹⁶ Often, the *tullianum* consisted of a pit with a single entry way in which prisoners were lowered into by ropes and therefore with literally no possible chance of escape. Furthermore, throughout the *custodia publica* prisoners

of guards who grow more brutal the better they are treated." Cited from "Ignatius: To the Romans, 5.1, in *The Fathers of the Church* (trans. Gerald G. Walsh; New York: Christian Heritage, 1947), 110.

⁷ Antonia Minor (36 B.C.E. – 37 C.E.) was the youngest daughter of Roman politician Mark Antony and Octavia Minor. She was the sister-in-law of Emperor Tiberius, who had Herod Agrippa I imprisoned, and she is esteemed to be one of the most prominent Roman women in the first-century C.E. As a close friend of Herod Agrippa's mother, Berenice, she was very formative and influential in the life of Herod Agrippa I.

⁸ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.203 (Feldman, LCL).

⁹ Antiphilus was a Greek painter in Egypt during the time of Alexander the Great (4th cent. B.C.E.). Prior to that he was in the service of Phillip II of Macedon and Ptolemy I of Egypt.

¹⁰ Lucian, *Tox.* 29 (Harmon, LCL).

¹¹ Cicero, *Verr.* 2.5.118 (Greenwood, LCL).

¹² Asinius Gallus (fully Gaius Asinius Gallus Saloninus, (c. 40 B.C.E. – 33 C.E.) was a Roman Senator and friend of Caesar Augustus. He was consul of Asia in 8 B.C.E. and proconsul in 6/5 B.C.E. He was imprisoned in 30 C.E. and died three years later in prison from starvation.

¹³ Cassius, *Rom. Hist.* 58.3.6 (Cary, LCL).

¹⁴ Boyd, *Paul the Apostle*, 286. Richard Cassidy cites the Roman jurist Ulpian (213 – 223 C.E.) in *The Digest* 48.3.1 who made such distinctions between the categories of Roman prisons. Richard J. Cassidy, *Paul in Chains: Roman Imprisonment and the Letters of St. Paul* (New York: Crossroads, 2001), 243 n. 2. Cp. Brian Rapske, "The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody," in *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting* (ed. Bruce W. Winter; vol. 3; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 20.

¹⁵ Boyd, *Paul the Apostle*, 360.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 361.

were constantly secured with chains and typically bound in discomforting positions or even positions of torture.¹⁷

Upon aggravating Emperor Domitian (81 – 96 C.E.) in a private meeting before his formal hearing, Apollonius¹⁸ was ordered to be bound in chains and to be confined among “the vilest of felons,” likely referring to the *tullianum* in the prison.¹⁹ In addition, Lucian records how Antiphilus was also likely kept in the *tullianum* since he was “regarded as the most villainous of all the malefactors that there were in the prison.”²⁰ The conditions of the prison were horrendous and nearly unlivable for he had to sleep on the stone floor and could not even stretch out his legs during the night. It is no surprise why illness and disease were so easy to contract while in prison and Antiphilus’ health began to wane quickly upon being detained. During the day, his collar was fastened with manacles upon one hand, but at night he had to be “full secured by his bonds.” “Moreover, the stench of the room and its stifling air (since many were confined in the same place, cramped for room, and scarcely able to draw breath), the clash of iron, the scanty sleep—all these conditions were difficult and intolerable for such a man.”²¹

The second category *custodia militaris* was a lighter form of custody than *custodia publica*, but the prisoner was still bound with a chain but was fastened to a guard instead of being placed in a holding cell or pit. This appears to be the predominant form of custody that Herod Agrippa I was kept in. As Josephus records, an unnamed foreign prisoner, who took interest in Prince Agrippa while standing before the royal palace, “asked the soldier to whom he was handcuffed” to allow him to go and speak to Agrippa, who was also standing in

chains.²² This custom was known to be enforced by Tiberius where the prisoner and soldier, who guarded the prisoner, were linked together by the same chain.²³ When Agrippa learned of Tiberius’ death through his freedman Marsyas, the centurion who commanded Agrippa’s guards treated Agrippa to dinner and removed his chains but then when word came that Tiberius might not be dead after all, the centurion was enraged and ordered Agrippa be bound in chains again and be placed under the supervision of a stricter guard than before.²⁴

The third form of custody *custodia libera* provided the prisoner with the greatest amount of freedom and the best living conditions. Many aspects of custody overlap between *custodia militaris* and *custodia libera*, but a predominant distinction is in the personnel who supervised the prisoner (i.e., non-militant personnel) and the location of confinement.²⁵ Unlike *custodia militaris* where chains were typically employed to secure prisoners to the soldier guarding them and they were kept in military or specially designated facilities, in *custodia libera* prisoners were not chained but were simply supervised under “house arrest” by the authority of their custodian and the place of custody was often in public/private housing in civilian sectors.

Philostratus (c. 170/172 – 247/250 C.E.) describes how when Apollonius was first committed into the prison he was kept “where the captives are not bound,” but then was ordered to be bound in fetters for a time, but then subsequently was permitted again to take up his quarters “in the prison where criminals are not bound.”²⁶ Sometimes prisoners would be placed under the supervision of the city magistrate in the magistrate’s own home. This was the case with Junius Gallio (32 C.E.) when he was called back to the capital from his

¹⁷ Ibid., 286.

¹⁸ Apollonius was a Greek philosopher who was persecuted under the reign of Nero (54-68 C.E.) and then was imprisoned during the reign of Domitian (81-96 C.E.).

¹⁹ Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 7.34 (Conybeare, LCL).

²⁰ Lucian, *Tox.* 29.

²¹ Ibid., 29.

²² Josephus, *Ant.* 18.195-196.

²³ Seneca, *Ep.* 5 (Gummere, LCL).

²⁴ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.228-233.

²⁵ Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 42.

²⁶ Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 7.22, 34, & 40.

exile on the island of Lesbos and was placed under the care of various magistrates.²⁷

In *custodia libera* detainees might even be placed under detention in the house of a relative. For example, the former Roman praetor Publius Vitellius (35 C.E.) was ordered to be kept in confinement under the custody of his very own brother.²⁸ Thus, Roman prison types in the ancient world ranged from severe and barbaric treatment where it was a struggle to just survive each day under such atrocious conditions to almost normal living conditions in houses with a merely a degree of restricted personal freedom.

III. DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT OF PRISONERS

The experience of imprisonment was dependent upon not only the type of prison in which one found themselves, but just as determinate was often the status of the imprisoned individual. Ancient judicial and punitive philosophies were drastically different from the modern concept of everyone being 'equal before the law.' In antiquity, the tendency was that the higher the social rank and status, the lesser punishment was likely to be administered. High ranking officials were sometimes exempt from prison for criminal activity and were simply reprimanded, fined, or possibly exiled.²⁹ But there are also cases described where status was irrelevant to the treatment of the prisoner. However, status was not the only advantage that could be leveraged for the incarcerated individual. Bribery was also often an effective means by which one could influence how a prisoner would be treated. One's ability to bribe judges, guards, jailers and others was a common

²⁷ Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.3.

²⁸ Suetonius, *Vit.* 7.2.

²⁹ Imprisonment was viewed as a belittling and shameful experience and the upper class in Roman society often found it offensive when a member of their own class would be subjected to the ridicule and poverty of Roman prisons.

mode of shaping the resulting experience of a prisoner and enabling them to.³⁰

IV. TYPES OF PRISON HELPERS AND FORMS OF ASSISTANCE

In the ancient world, being in confinement was a severely unfavorable circumstance to be in. Depending on the type of imprisonment, one could find themselves suffering extreme hardship and death-foreboding conditions as commonly found in the *custodia publica* or be quite at ease and unrestrained in *custodia libera* or possibly experiencing a wide variety of conditions in between the two extremes. Nonetheless, during their time in Roman custody, prisoners usually had to rely heavily on outsiders to support them since there was no means of support from within the prison system. This is due to the fact that ancient prison systems like the Romans were notorious for neglecting the basic needs of prisoners, especially in the category of diet and hygiene.³¹

Roman imprisonment was designed merely to detain persons for trial, punishment, or other purposes and had minimal (if any) official procedures implemented for sustaining them. To this end, Roman prisoners would often receive care and assistance from outsiders for a variety of support to help them survive and carry on living. Some would bring food and clothing, others would provide companionship, others would function as messengers, and still others would serve in whatever capacity they could offer the prisoner. Whatever aspect of life prison helpers fulfilled, they often were the prisoner's family members, friends, disciples, or slaves. But, the disgrace and humiliation of being in prison in antiquity was able to quickly transfer to those associated with the prisoner. Therefore, friends, family, and

³⁰ Craig S. Wansink, *Chained In Christ: The Experience and Rhetoric of Paul's Imprisonments* (JSNTSup 130; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 41-43.

³¹ Rapske, "Paul in Roman Custody," 209.

disciples of prisoners would likely be subjected to embarrassment and shame on account of their connection with the prisoner, especially in their act of submitting to and caring for a known “law-breaker.” The high social pressure caused by a prisoner losing their former dignity would be felt by those closest to them and would likely be a life-long shame for all parties involved and associated with them.³²

In mentioning family members who desired to help their loved ones in prison, Cicero reports how bereaved family members were “forbidden access to their sons, forbidden to bring their own children food and clothing. The fathers—you see them here in court—lay crouched in the doorway; the unhappy mothers past the Knights prison entrance, cut off from the last sight of their children, begging for nothing but permission to receive with their lips their sons’ parting breath.”³³ It was not uncommon for family members to tend to the needs of other family members or simply to just stand and beg at the prison gate to be able to see their loved ones who had been taken away and thrown in prison. But even if family members were willing to come to the aid of the afflicted prisoner, there was no guarantee they would even be permitted to provide any food or clothing or have any contact with them at all.

Friends were also good candidates to offer assistance to prisoners consigned to Roman custody. An important note to make here is how “just as Roman imprisonment and Roman chains were a test for the prisoner, so too did they constitute a test for the prisoner’s friends.”³⁴ But, this goes not only for friends, but also for family members, acquaintances, and anyone else who would be associated with the prisoner. Specifically about friends of prisoners, though, Seneca writes regarding what he calls “fair-weather friends,” who are unreliable friends who would desert their

friends “at the first rattle of the chain.”³⁵ What is implied by Seneca’s description is that it took a lot of courage and boldness and sacrifice to even be willing to be associated with a criminal in antiquity. The social stigma and dishonor was exceedingly great and Seneca remarks that some friends were only friends when life was good, but when put to the test, they would flee for the sake of saving their own neck or simply their reputation.

Several records in ancient texts exist that describe trustworthy and true friends who came to the aid of their friends who were taken captive into Roman custody. Josephus conveys how the Jewish Prince Agrippa I received assistance from his friend Silas as well as Marsyas and Stoecheus, two of his freedmen, to ease his circumstances in prison. They brought him food and garments and did whatever service they could in order to give him greater comfort.³⁶ Lucian recounts that when Deinias was captured and imprisoned for murder (c. 163 C.E.), Agathocles, “alone of all his friends,” stayed by his side, went to his trial, and shared in the penalty of his exile to live in Gyaros. Agathocles even joined up with local fishermen to make enough earnings to support himself and Deinias, and when Deinias fell ill, Agathocles tended to him “for a very long time,” even until his death.³⁷ Lucian also recounts another story of how Demetrius cared so much for Antiphilus after Antiphilus was wrongfully arrested for the crime of his slave. In order to care for Antiphilus, Demetrius worked all morning as a porter on the ships in the harbor just to earn money and then would go and attend to Antiphilus in prison, dividing his earnings between bribing the prison keeper to keep Antiphilus “tractable and peaceful” and seeing to “the maintenance” of providing supplies for Antiphilus.³⁸ But demonstrating even greater devotion and care for his friend, when Demetrius

³² Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 283.

³³ Cicero, *Verr.* 2.5.118.

³⁴ Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 48.

³⁵ Seneca, *Ep.* 9.9.

³⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.204.

³⁷ Lucian, *Tox.* 18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

became prohibited from entering the prison, he incriminated himself along with Antiphilus and entreated the warden with the utmost persistence that he “be confined near Antiphilus and in the same set of irons.”³⁹ Even when Demetrius fell ill in prison, he still thought nothing of his own suffering and well-being but was wholly attendant to his friend to try and secure the greatest comfort and rest possible for him to lighten the burden of their misery together. Another noteworthy example is that of Origen (c. 204 C.E.), who was recognized for extending constant consideration and friendship to Christians in prison and was known for “the kindly help and goodwill that he displayed toward all the holy martyrs.”⁴⁰

However, friends, family, associates, and slaves were not merely concerned with bringing prisoners sustenance like food, water, and other provisions for nourishment but were also interested in the overall health and welfare of the prisoner during their time in custody. Even in the Praetorian camp in Rome (37 C.E.), Herod Agrippa’s friend Silas and freedmen Marsyas and Stoecheus made a bed for Agrippa to sleep on so he would not have to lie on the cold hard floor of the prison, where he might risk catching cold and losing health.⁴¹

Emotion support was just as vital a concern for friends of prisoners as was their physical health. Suetonius (c. 69 – after 122 C.E.) describes the account of how Publius Vitellius (35 C.E.) received encouragement and strength from the “treaties of his friends” to keep living after he attempted suicide while in prison. On account of his friends’ efforts, he allowed himself to be bandaged and restored to health and subsequently lived out the remainder of his days in prison.⁴² Also, such was the case when Demetrius came

to the aid of Antiphilus. Antiphilus had despaired of life itself and had resolved to die than to go on living in prison. But the companionship of Demetrius brought new life to Antiphilus and sustained him until they both were acquitted of all charges and released from prison.

When Proteus was captured and thrown in prison, Lucian (c. 125 – c. 180 C.E.) recounts how fellow Christian believers responded by coming to his aid in prison and making his confinement quite amenable.

“Well, when he [Proteus] had been imprisoned, the Christians, regarding the incident as a calamity, left nothing undone in the effort to rescue him. Then, as this was impossible, every other form of attention was shown him, not in any casual way but with assiduity; and from the very break of day aged widows and orphan children could be seen waiting near the prison, while their officials even slept inside with him after bribing the guards. Then elaborate meals were brought in, and sacred books of theirs were read aloud...Indeed, people came even from the cities in Asia, sent by the Christians at their common expense, to succor and defend and encourage the hero.”⁴³

On the other hand, some prisoners were never able to receive such support from family or friends. They were forced to suffer the excruciating agony of Roman prison alone. Dio Cassius recounts the circumstances surrounding the solitary imprisonment of Asinius Gallus and how “he had no companion or servant with him, spoke to no one, and saw no one, except when he was compelled to take food.”⁴⁴ Gallus barely received any food and had contact with no one for 3 years before dying in prison.

³⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁰ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.3.3 (Oulton, LCL).

⁴¹ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.204.

⁴² Suetonius, *Vit.* 7.2.3 (Rolfe, LCL).

⁴³ Lucian, *Peregr.* 12-13.

⁴⁴ Cassius, *Rom. Hist.* 58.3.6 (Cary, LCL).

V. RISKS INVOLVED IN HELPING PRISONERS

For those who came to the aid of prisoners, there certainly was the inherent risk of automatically incurring and experiencing humiliation and shame imposed by Roman society toward prisoners regardless of whether the prisoners were innocent or guilty. But, there was also “the additional danger of simply being too intimately associated with or sympathetic toward the prisoner or his views.”⁴⁵ This sort of connection could possibly pose hazardous to the prisoner’s helpers depending upon the nature of the prisoner’s accused crime, political affiliation, or reputation. Several noteworthy examples can be found regarding the potential dangers lurking for those who assisted prisoners in antiquity.

Philostratus records the occasion when the philosopher Apollonius was travelling to Rome with his disciples (c. 54-56 C.E.) and how a report of Emperor Nero’s persecution of philosophers in Rome caused many of his followers to be dissuaded from accompanying him upon fear of imprisonment and even death.⁴⁶ Origen (c. 204 C.E.) writes about when visiting prisoners, he used “great boldness” by coming into “close quarters with danger” and greeting the martyrs with a kiss. He further remarks that his actions drew the fury of the heathen multitude around him to the point that they were about to stone him.⁴⁷ Eusebius records the fateful outcome of two Christians, Agapius and Dionysius (309 – 310 C.E.), who frequently attended to

the needs of six Christians in prison who were to be martyred. Unfortunately, they drew the attention of the government officials to themselves and were consequently thrown in prison and beheaded along with the other six Christian prisoners.⁴⁸

Even speaking to prisoners could be dangerous as prison guards and keepers of the prison were always watching for suspicious behavior with a constant ear toward the prisoners’ conversations. Some wrong words or expressions could pose deadly to both the prisoner and their visitor. Philostratus records when Apollonius visited Musonius in prison in the dungeons of Nero (54 – 68 C.E.). He says that they did not say one word to each other (“did not openly converse”) during the whole time Musonius was imprisoned “in order that both their lives might not be endangered.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, on two separate accounts Philostratus records Domitian (81-96 C.E.) sending in spies (one privately and one openly) into the prison when Apollonius was held captive in an attempt to catch Apollonius misspeak on some matter.⁵⁰ The spies were interested to see if Apollonius would “reproach his sovereign on account of his sufferings.”⁵¹ But, “Apollonius understood that the Syracusan [spy] was trying to drive him into some such admission as the Emperor had tried to get out of him, and that he imagined that out of sheer weariness of his imprisonment he would tell some falsehood to the detriment of his friends.”⁵² Also, when Agrippa’s freedman, Marsyas, came to alert Agrippa that Emperor Tiberius had died, he spoke to Agrippa in Hebrew and alluded to the event metaphorically by saying, “the lion is dead”⁵³, so as to not be caught bringing the news of

⁴⁵ Brian M. Rapske, “The Importance of Helpers to the Imprisoned Paul in the Book of Acts,” *TynBul* 42 (1991): 3-30.

⁴⁶ “And in fact the knocked-kneed among them were detected in no time, for under the influence of what Philolaus said, some of them declared that they were ill, others that they had no provisions for the journey, others that they were homesick, others that they had been deterred by dreams; and in the result the thirty-four companions of Apollonius who were willing to accompany him to Rome were reduced from thirty-four to eight.” Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 4.37.

⁴⁷ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.3.3.

⁴⁸ H. J. Lawlor and J. E. L. Oulton, eds., *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine* (New York: McMillan, 1927), 340-43.

⁴⁹ Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 4.46.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.27 & 36.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7.36.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.229.

the Emperor's demise. Simply the joyful response of Agrippa drew the suspicion of the centurion on guard and the centurion came and inquired from Agrippa what was just said between he and Marsyas.

An alternative form of communication for those in prison to stay in touch with the outside world was letter writing. However, this privilege was likely only available to those with literary training and with access to writing materials or who could afford an amanuensis (secretary) to come and compose a letter on their behalf. One such example of this alternative method is how Apollonius carried on written correspondence with Musonius while Musonius was imprisoned under Emperor Nero (54 – 68 C.E.). They refrained from communicating verbally by passing letters through Apollonius' servants Menippus and Damis, who went back and forth from the prison frequently. However, in these letters, Apollonius and Musonius only conveyed simple matters and sentiments and did not handle any "lofty subjects" that could implicate them saying something offensive or incriminating if the letters were unexpectedly intercepted and turned over to Roman authorities.⁵⁴

VI. OVERVIEW OF PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT

In the events recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, Luke describes how the Apostle Paul experienced imprisonment at the hand of the Romans on more than one occasion and for an extended period of his life in one instance. Specifically, the book of Acts records two instances of imprisonment for Paul during his ministry, one of which lasted for at least a period of more than 4 years.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Even samples of their letters with the more "lofty topics," as Philostratus describes, are filled with unimportant matters that bear no real legal or political consequence. Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 4.46.

⁵⁵ In the Second Letter to the Corinthians, Paul asserts that he experienced far more imprisonments than any other

Paul's first recorded encounter in prison was during his visit to Philippi on his second missionary journey through the region of Macedonia (c. 51 – 54 C.E.). Upon arriving in Philippi, Paul and Silas learned of a place of prayer by the river where they met a woman named Lydia, who was the first person to convert and believe the gospel in the city (16:11-15). But one day after an encounter with a woman possessed with a spirit of divination, Paul and Silas were dragged before the authorities (city magistrates) and accused of teaching foreign customs that were unlawful for Roman citizens to adopt and follow. In consequence, Paul and Silas were thrown into the "innermost cell" of the prison in Philippi and their feet were shackled with chains (16:16-24). The "innermost cell" (ἐσωτέραν φυλακὴν) is likely a reference to the *tullianum*, which was the worst degree of public confinement. Conditions would likely have been dirty, cold, and damp, and downright uncomfortable being bound in shackles with limited mobility. However, the Lord miraculously freed Paul and Silas and on top of that the jailer's entire house believed the gospel. Paul and Silas then baptized and ministered to the jailer's family and household (16:25-34).

Paul's second and longest recorded imprisonment began in Jerusalem in Judea at the end of his third missionary journey (c. 58 C.E.) and lasted all the way until he was brought to Rome and remained there two years (c. 63 C.E.). Upon his return to Jerusalem at the end of his third journey in order to meet with James and deliver the contribution from the missional churches to the Jerusalem church, Paul was arrested in the Temple area by Tribune Claudius Lysias (cf. 23:26) for causing an uproar and being accused of a capital crime by the

servant of Christ (2 Cor 11:23). According *1 Clement*, Paul is described as being imprisoned as many as seven different times (*1 Clem.* 5.6). Whether the testimonies of *1 Clement* and Acts are in exact agreement as to the full extent of Paul prison experiences, they both relate how Paul spent considerable time in prison and on multiple occasions.

Jews (21:22-36).⁵⁶ The following day Paul was released from prison by Claudius and brought before the chief priests and Sanhedrin (council) in order to uncover what the commotion was about in the Temple the previous day (22:30). But, when no consensus could be obtained regarding the charges against Paul, forty Jews conspired among themselves how to assassinate Paul. However, when their plan reached the ears of Paul's nephew, his nephew brought the news to Paul and subsequently to the Tribune (commander) at the barracks, and Paul was relocated to the city of Caesarea and detained there (23:1-35).

At Caesarea, Paul stands trial before Governor Felix (24:1-27) but remains in prison in Caesarea for two more years. Then, when Festus succeeded Felix as governor, Paul was brought before Festus to testify and plead his case again (25:1-12). However, during the hearing Paul abruptly appeals to stand trial before Caesar rather than allowing Festus to pass judgment and therefore it was arranged to send him to Rome to let the Emperor decide the outcome of his case (25:11-26:32). Paul is then placed aboard a ship and shipped off to Rome (27:1).

However, the ship encountered a disastrous storm at sea and was overtaken by the sea. Paul and the ship's crew washed up on the island of Malta (or Melita) and remained there for over three months (27:13-28:10). Then, upon boarding another ship at Malta, Paul was transported finally to Rome (28:11-15). At Rome, Paul is commissioned to live by himself under house arrest for at least two years following his arrival and is granted permission to preach and receive all visitors that would come to see him (28:16-31).

⁵⁶ During the first-century, it was a national policy that Roman citizenship would exempt a person from undergoing torture and capital punishment even by those outside the jurisdiction of Rome. James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 199 & 207.

VII. PAUL'S PRISON HELPERS

One fact that can be adamantly stated is that Paul did not endure the hardship of prison life for so many years all alone. At various points during his imprisonment, Paul received help from others who supplied many forms of assistance. Some acts of help were more significant than others, but Paul did not bear the life of Roman imprisonment all by himself. While Luke does not provide detailed accounts of all the helpers or every specific occasion upon which a person rendered some sort of service to the Apostle, from the background of ancient extra-biblical sources discussed above, a sense of the magnitude and impact of those who aided Paul while in Roman custody can be deduced, more fully comprehended, and provide more culturally sensitive insight into the life and work of the great Apostle during these trying times.

The objective of the next section is to investigate more closely the biblical accounts related specifically to Paul's experiences in Roman custody (Acts 21-28) and then to relate his experiences and the assistance he received during his time in prison with the background about Roman imprisonment and prison helpers previously discussed. The historical picture of Roman imprisonment will allow us to better grasp how inspiring and courageous the Apostle Paul was as well as those who took the risk of coming to his side to enable the continued the work of his ministry.

A. *Divine Help*

During his first visit to the city of Philippi, Paul (along with Silas) found himself in prison after exorcising a demon from a slave girl, causing her masters to be infuriated with them since she earned them a lot of money on account of her fortune-telling (Acts 16:16-18). Paul and Silas were dragged into the marketplace and accused before the magistrates of the city for causing confusion and advocating unlawful

customs.⁵⁷ After their garments were torn off and they were beaten with rods, Paul and Silas were thrust into prison and their feet bound with chains (16:19-24).⁵⁸

Luke records specifically that they were put in the “inner prison” (v. 24; ἔσωτέραν φυλακὴν), which is likely a reference to the *intiora* with iron bars and reinforced doors, but it is more likely referring to the *tullianum*, which is the innermost part of the prison with little or no light.⁵⁹ The *tullianum* would explain why the jailer had to call for light when Paul called out to him (16:29).

That night, Luke records that “about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened.” (16:25-26 NRSV). Paul and Silas were singing songs to God with everyone listening to them when a sudden earthquake violently shook the prison and the doors

opened and the chains fell off of everyone (16:25-26).⁶⁰ In place of sending an angel like he did with the apostles (5:19) or Peter (12:7), the Lord uses natural means to free Paul and his companion. Such assistance from the Lord was miraculous as Luke notes that the doors opened and the prisoner’s stock broke free but they were not injured. The Lord used a natural calamity for supernatural purposes. Symbolizing the power and presence of God, the earthquake accomplished the liberation of God’s servants in a miraculous way.⁶¹

After delivering an oppressed slave girl from an evil spirit and then getting thrown in prison, Paul and Silas probably were not sure where this was all heading. But, their spirits were not defeated as they were singing songs in the middle of the night when the Lord came to their rescue. What is interesting about this incident is that Paul and Silas go from ministering to the slave girl, to being beaten and aggressively thrown into prison, to being freed from prison, to then ministering to the jailer’s family (16:16-34). God not only intervened into the lives of Paul and Silas to set them free from their bondage, but he also orchestrated a plot that would help them further their mission to spread the gospel in Philippi and reach hearts that longed for salvation. The miracle of Paul’s freedom was a catalyst for the conversion of the jailer and his family.⁶²

The next mention of someone who came to Paul’s aid was after his arrest and detainment in the Fortress Antonia in Jerusalem when he traveled there against the advice of his fellow believers (21:10-14). Again, it was the Lord who spoke to Paul and encouraged him after his hearing before the Jewish council the second night of

⁵⁷ According to Roman law, Judaism was a legal religion and thus Christianity was because the empire had not distinguished Christianity from Judaism at this time. Christianity was seen as just a smaller sect of Judaism by the Romans. However, Rome had prohibited the Jews from making converts of Roman citizens (Cicero, *De legibus* 2.8.19). Apparently, Paul’s evangelistic efforts in Philippi had gained some degree of public recognition and the gospel was likely being spoken about in the streets. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (NTC; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 595.

⁵⁸ Public beating was used to humiliate and defame those being accused of crime, whether they were guilty of it or not, especially if they were foreigners. Peter Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 268. This harsh and brutal treatment was likely meant to pose as a warning to discourage followers or deter people from looking favorably upon them in the future. Craig S. Keener, *Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 396.

⁵⁹ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 497.

⁶⁰ Perhaps Paul and the others were reminded of Psalm 42:8 (NRSV) “By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.”

⁶¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 588.

⁶² Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts* (ACNT; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 312.

his imprisonment.⁶³ Acts 23:11 reads, “That night the Lord stood near him [Paul] and said, ‘Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome’” (NRSV).⁶⁴ Paul’s countenance was likely downcast and his spirit trodden upon by the recent turn of events since his arrival at Jerusalem. Paul’s missionary trip and purpose to see the church leaders in Jerusalem had backfired and failed miserably.⁶⁵ Probably in a state of feeling “dejected and despondent”⁶⁶ over the “obdurate hatred of his fellow-countrymen, his pain of heart at the hardness of God’s chosen people, and the questionings of his own conscience,”⁶⁷

Paul was most certainly battling some of his fiercest internal enemies at this point. All the warnings Paul was given by the believers speaking by the Spirit of God certainly would have come flooding back into his mind after these events transpired just as they were predicted.⁶⁸ His failure to heed the admonitions of the

⁶³ Eusebius records how Origen received divine help to escape the anger of the heathen multitudes, which were intent on stoning him on numerous occasions. He writes, “this same divine and heavenly grace on other occasions again and again –it is impossible to say how often–preserved him safely” (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.6.5).

⁶⁴ Peterson finds the command of the Lord (imperative mood – “Keep up your courage” – Acts 23:11) reminiscent of the charge the Lord gave him to continue in his ministry at Corinth (“Do not be afraid” – 1 Cor 18:9). David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 618.

⁶⁵ While Paul did get the opportunity to convey his conversion experience to the Jewish crowd at the Temple, the crowd did not afford him the place to preach the gospel concerning Jesus, the Messiah (Acts 22:6-21).

⁶⁶ F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 455.

⁶⁷ Richard B. Rackham, *Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition* (London: Methuen & Co, 1947), 435.

⁶⁸ Exhorted by the Spirit of God, the believers at Tyre admonished Paul not to go down to Jerusalem (21:4), and also at Caesarea, Agabus gave a prophecy of the misfortune awaiting Paul at Jerusalem (21:11). The other believers who were with Paul in Caesarea also tried to dissuade him for going to Jerusalem.

Lord and the prophetic advice of many fellow-believers surely weighed heavily on his conscience. It was likely painstakingly evident to Paul that he had rebelled against the Lord and had found himself in a most undesirable predicament. But it was in this “darkest hour of Paul’s apparent defeat and discouragement, the Lord stood by him to comfort and sustain.”⁶⁹ In the face of Paul’s intense struggles at Jerusalem, the invigorating words of the Lord (“Keep up your courage!”) must have been like a soothing balm upon his troubled soul. Despite how disheartening the experience, perplexing the situation, or dark and mysterious his future might have seemed to him, it was the Lord who came to Paul before any others and bade “him to be of good cheer” in the face of the forthcoming adversity.⁷⁰

With such defeat of his plans looming over his head, Paul must have felt hemmed in on all sides not knowing what to do or what the future holds. The words from the Lord certainly were a beacon of hope against the rising doubt and worry of his next step (or if there would even be a next step).⁷¹ When Paul received the news that he would bear witness of the Lord in Rome just as he had in Jerusalem, he got a glimpse of the path the Lord was setting him on.⁷² However, unlike his previous attempt to be a witness for the Lord by coming to Jerusalem on his own accord, this time the plan was the Lord’s. Being arrested and put in confinement in the Roman barracks in Jerusalem might have seemed to Paul as though he was at the end of the road in his missionary efforts. But, in the midst of such a dim-looking future, the Lord gave him new direction and purpose and that delivered a

⁶⁹ Charles W. Carter and Ralph Earle, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 346.

⁷⁰ A. C. Gaebelein, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition* (New York: Our Hope, 1912), 384.

⁷¹ Krodel, *Acts*, 429.

⁷² The use of the Greek word δεῖ (“must”) in 23:11 suggests that it was God’s will for Paul to bear witness in Rome for the sake of the gospel just as he had in Jerusalem. Rapske, “Paul in Roman Custody,” 420.

glimmer of light for Paul to hope and trust in.⁷³ What great assurance Paul must have received from these comforting words revealing the will of the Lord to him even in such demoralizing circumstances as he now found himself.⁷⁴

With his heart set more at ease and his sights on Rome, the uncertainty of his mission had been largely eradicated by the guidance and provision of the Lord.⁷⁵ However, the Lord's encouragement was not directed at the idea that Paul would soon be delivered and all would be well again as it was before. As González remarks, "Paul is to take courage, not because his difficulties will end soon, but rather because what has begun in Jerusalem will continue in Rome."⁷⁶ The encouragement for Paul was not that he would be freed from custody but that his imprisonment would serve a purpose for the Lord and that knowing it was the Lord's will would bolster his spirit to endure the coming trials.

It will be his confidence in the words of the Lord over the next several years that would "mark him [Paul] out as a master of events rather than their victim."⁷⁷ This can be seen in Paul's confident assertion when he stands before the Roman Governor Festus, King Herod Agrippa, and other Roman dignitaries in Caesarea and boldly declares that "to this day I [Paul] have had help

from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and great" (26:22 NRSV).⁷⁸

However, the Lord's words of encouragement in the barracks at Jerusalem would not be the only time during his imprisonment that the Lord would pay Paul a special visitation to succor and strengthen him when all else seemed lost. During a violent storm on the Mediterranean Sea in Paul's voyage to Rome, it looked like the ship was not going to be able to make it to land and he and the crew might all die (27:14-20). But in the midst of that dire time, Paul reveals to the sailors a message from the Lord that he received in a vision in the night (through an angel of the Lord). The message was that the Lord promised Paul he would absolutely stand before Caesar and testify to him and that the Lord has granted safety to all those with him (27:21-26).⁷⁹ Interestingly, the Lord's words came in a more specific manner than before. At Jerusalem, the Lord exhorted Paul to be courageous and declared that he would testify in Rome. But in this second message, the Lord encouraged Paul to not be afraid because he would bear witness before the most powerful man in the Roman Empire—Caesar himself. The Lord guaranteed Paul's safety (as well as the crew) so that he could continue his

⁷³ Kistemaker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 817.

⁷⁴ Despite the outcome of events, Paul knew that suffering, imprisonment, and hardships were on the horizon (9:16; 20:23) and he had manifestly declared that he was prepared to be afflicted and even suffer death for the sake of "testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (20:24 NRSV). Rapske, "Paul in Roman Custody," 195. In place of a miraculous release from prison, like he experienced previously, the presence of the Lord was Paul's substitute this time. But it would be a most powerful encouragement that would carry him through many years ahead as he set his vision on Rome. Witherington III, *Acts of the Apostles*, 692.

⁷⁵ Gaebelein, *Acts of the Apostles*, 385.

⁷⁶ Justo L. González, *The Gospel of the Spirit* (New York: Orbis, 2001), 256.

⁷⁷ Bruce, *Acts*, 455.

⁷⁸ It is worth noting that Paul had also received specific encouragement by way of words from the Lord on another occasion between the time he was in jail in Philippi and the time he went to Jerusalem and got arrested. Halfway through his third missionary journey, Paul was being strongly opposed by Jews in Corinth to the point of them being "abusive" toward him (18:6). Acts 18:9 records the message of the Lord to Paul at Corinth: "One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: 'Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city'" (NIV).

⁷⁹ For Paul, the promise of appearing in Rome and the promise from the Lord's angel in the night gave him the conviction that what the Lord says will surely come to pass. "His [Paul's] strength comes from beyond the storm: he 'believes God,' that he can accomplish what he has promised." William J. Larkin Jr., "Acts," in *The IVP New Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 373.

journey to fulfill the Lord's will.⁸⁰ But such a journey would prove nothing less than being the most treacherous and trying experience the Apostle had ever experienced.

Paul finds in the most austere circumstances when everything seems to be going wrong that the Lord has not forgotten him but has a plan and a purpose that can never be thwarted. With comfort, courage, and cheer, the Lord helped Paul see past the circumstances and to embrace the future that the Lord was guiding him toward. One could confidently say that the greatest help Paul received during his time in prison and his journey to Rome was the healing and uplifting words of the Lord that in the end everything was going to be "ok".

B. Family Help

Returning to the account when Paul was taken prisoner in Jerusalem (21:33), it would only be the following day after his hearing before the Jewish council and receiving the gracious words from the Lord that Paul would again receive a form of help from someone else. This time help would come from a member of Paul's own family—his nephew. Briefly, after his hearing before the council, the Jews began to develop a plot to kill Paul and they devised a ploy by which they would be able to have access to Paul in order to slay him (23:12-15). In some undescribed way, Paul's nephew in Jerusalem catches wind of the conspiracy and brings word of it to Paul while he is in custody in the barracks. After conferring with Paul, Paul's nephew gains a private audience with the tribune whereby he reveals the Jew's plot to assassinate Paul. Upon realizing that Paul's life was not safe in Jerusalem, the tribune makes preparations to transport Paul to Caesarea in order for his life to no longer be in danger (23:16-35).

⁸⁰ Witherington III, *Acts of the Apostles*, 769. Kistemaker remarks, "God has not guaranteed an easy voyage, but he has promised a safe harbor." Kistemaker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 817.

It was the voice of Paul's nephew that enabled Paul's life to be spared and for the tribune to decide to send him to safer territory. As the record details, after learning (by some untold means) that the Jews were conspiring to kill his uncle, Paul's nephew comes straightway into the barracks to reveal the insidious plot (23:16). It is interesting to note that Paul's nephew was able to so easily gain access into the fortress to speak to Paul.⁸¹ The reason might have been due to the age of Paul's nephew. Paul's nephew is called a νεανίαν, which means "a young man."⁸² If the term is taken to indicate Paul's nephew was a teenager, the guards likely did not judge him to be a threat to prison security or to Paul himself.⁸³ Also, intriguing in this account is how Paul's nephew "despite his youth, anonymity, and apparent lack of social status, surprisingly enjoys a certain

⁸¹ Luke uses a double participle to describe Paul's nephew "coming near" (παραγενόμενος) and then "going into" (εἰσελθὼν) the prison in verse 16. Lenski sees the first participle referring to the sentries at the "outer gate," who had to be approached first in order to gain entry into the barracks, and the second participle indicating the admission and entrance into the fortress by which Paul's nephew was able to come close enough to him in order to speak to him. R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934), 942.

⁸² W. Bauer et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd ed.; BDAG; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 667.

⁸³ Some see this term (νεανίαν) as suggesting a young lad between 20 and 40 years old. Larkin Jr., "Acts," 332. Lenski, *Interpretation of Acts*, 941. Robert W. Wall, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (vol. 10; Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 312. However, Kistemaker sees the impression of the text as that the boy must not even be a teenager because a military commander would never take a teenager, much less an adult man, by the hand and lead them aside to speak with them (Kistemaker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 821). Bruce argues along similar lines of reasoning for the youthful age of Paul's nephew with the use of the diminutive form νεανίσκων (23:18, 22) used in conjunction with νεανίαν (23:17) but acknowledges that the term νεανίαν can cover the span of 20 to 40 years of age. F. F. Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 469. However, Bock sees the description of Paul's nephew as allowing his age to legitimately range from mid-teens on into his twenties. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (BECNT 5; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 678.

intimacy and assumes a certain authority with the high-ranking Roman tribune.⁸⁴ Bravely stepping out of what would be appropriate social-norm boundaries and behavior, Paul's nephew even adds an urgent plea before the tribune on behalf of Paul by exhorting "don't give in to them" (23:21 NIV) when he finished conveying the message of the assassination plan in an attempt to persuade the tribune to immediately act in order to avoid Paul's impending doom.⁸⁵

Another point to consider is how Paul was able to receive visitors while being detained. Several other New Testament texts suggest the likelihood that Roman prisoners could receive visitors (cf. Mt 11:2; Phil 2:25; 2 Tim 1:16-17),⁸⁶ but Rapske thinks that it would have been unlikely that the tribune would have allowed Paul to receive any visitors so soon after the commotion had occurred at the Temple.⁸⁷ This observation is quite apt because it was also only on the previous evening at the hearing with the Jewish council and chief priests that the tribune became very concerned for Paul's life when things started to get heated between the Jewish factions (Sadducees and Pharisees). When the council became violent, the tribune had Paul removed and taken back to the barracks. However, others think strongly that Paul's status as an un-condemned prisoner and Roman citizen

would have afforded him the privilege to receive visitors while in custody.⁸⁸

In addition to the direct help Paul received from his nephew to avoid the danger of being killed by the Jews, being in close contact with members of his family, as is implied by the quick concern of his nephew in coming to the barracks in Jerusalem, would likely have enabled Paul to receive financial support as well.⁸⁹ However, the specifics of whether his sister actually lived in Jerusalem, whether she was a Christian, and whether she supported Paul's ministry are not known.⁹⁰ Also, the willingness of Paul's family to associate with him as a Christian "heretic" (in Jewish eyes) and now a Roman prisoner taken in on suspect charges of causing civil unrest reflects very positively upon both Paul's character and that of his family's loyalty and affectionate regard for him. Larkin remarks that "for freedom-loving ancients to identify with someone in prison, deprived of liberty because of alleged or proven wrongdoing, could be a matter of shame."⁹¹ Thus, for Paul's relatives to be voluntarily coming to his aid and

⁸⁴ Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 622.

⁸⁵ The "boyish" instruction from Paul's nephew to the Roman commander is seen as further proof that he is likely either an adolescent or near-teen "young man." Kistemaker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 822.

⁸⁶ Beverly R. Gaventa, *Acts* (ANTC 5; Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 320.

⁸⁷ Rapske cautions that Paul's close encounters with death make it improbable that he was able to see other visitors freely. He places the emphasis on the age of Paul's nephew ("young man" – 23:17) that likely made him appear to be harmless to the soldiers and that "other adult males would have been denied access for security reasons." Rapske, "Paul in Roman Custody," 149. See also Lenski, *Interpretation of Acts*, 942, and Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 622 n. 48.

⁸⁸ Witherington offers a convincing argument in favor of Paul being permitted to receive visitors for four reasons: (1) "Paul had not yet been convicted of any crime. Confinement in this case was not a punishment but a matter of Roman custody until the legal matter could be resolved, and protective custody at that. There was no reason not to admit the young man. (2) Because Paul was a Roman citizen and thus a person of status, it was common Roman practice to allow such persons in custody to be visited by friends and relatives, not least because they were responsible for taking care of the person's physical needs. (3) Examples of these practices can be readily cited... (4) We are talking about a case of military custody in a barracks, not in a prison, and such a confinement was certainly less severe than being in a prison." Witherington III, *Acts of the Apostles*, 695.

⁸⁹ J. W. Packer, *Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 189.

⁹⁰ Krodel, *Acts*, 431.

⁹¹ Larkin Jr., "Acts," 333. Malina and Pilch remark that in the biblical culture, "honor and shame were forms of social evaluation in which both men and women were constantly compelled to assess their own conduct and that of their fellows in relation to each other. Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 369.

potentially subjecting themselves to social ostracism and dishonor speaks loudly on behalf of the character of both them and Paul.

Moreover, perhaps Paul's nephew was functioning as a representative for the church in Jerusalem and as Paul's "caretaker."⁹² This is quite probable as Paul's nephew was able to gain easy access to Paul, openly speak with the centurion on duty, and then be brought before the tribune on account of the conspiracy he had recently discovered. Whatever the circumstance under which Paul's nephew was aiding his uncle, it certainly must have been a relief to the Apostle to know that someone was still looking out for his back while all this was going down and he was helpless to do anything about it.

C. Friends, Fellow-Believers, and Co-Worker Help

Upon coming to Caesarea and being detained in Herod's Praetorium (23:31-35), Paul was permitted to give a preliminary defense before the Roman Procurator Felix (24:10-21). Then, following the hearing, Luke records that Felix "ordered the centurion to keep him in custody, but to let him have some liberty"⁹³ and not to prevent any of his friends from taking care⁹⁴ of his needs" (24:23 NRSV). Thus, "the charge from Felix was for Paul to be: (1) kept in custody (i.e., *custodia militaris*), (2) have liberty (fitting for a Roman citizen who has not been proven guilty), and (3) be permitted to

have free intercourse with his friends or relatives who might wish to visit him and minister to his comfort and needs."⁹⁵ While no explicit mention is made of anyone coming to help Paul while imprisoned in Caesarea, the text suggests that Paul might have had some acquaintances (friends, family, believers, etc.) which likely desired to come and care for him, or at least that he had permission to receive any who would come to tend to his needs. It is quite possible that the τῶν ἰδίων αὐτοῦ ("of his friends" – 24:24) were some of Paul's travelling companions (i.e., fellow-believers in the church in Caesarea), who had journeyed to Jerusalem with him (21:16). Some of them may have returned to Caesarea after hearing about (or witnessing) the turmoil in the Temple area and Paul's abrupt arrest.⁹⁶ Regardless of the unknown specifics surrounding those who came to visit Paul, Paul was permitted to have contact with friends and fellow-believers and to receive support and assistance while in custody in Caesarea. This was likely a great relief and a joy for him after parting from Jerusalem and the animosity he encountered there with the imminent assassination plot on his life.

Next, after spending two years in Herod's Praetorium in Caesarea, Paul is given a hearing before Governor Festus (who succeeded Felix) and Paul appeals to stand before Caesar in Rome and be tried by the Imperial Court (24:27; 25:11). Luke then records that Paul was placed upon a ship from Adramyttium with a cohort of other prisoners and joined by Aristarchus, the Macedonian from Thessalonica (27:2).⁹⁷ Prisoners of higher-status or Roman citizenship

⁹² Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 621.

⁹³ The Greek word translated "liberty" (ἄνεσιν) in 24:23 is the same word Josephus uses to describe the leniency or freedoms granted to Agrippa while he was still kept in custody (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.235). It connotes the idea of loosing or relaxing of strings or cords that have been tightly stretched. In other words, reduced security and increased opportunity.

⁹⁴ The Greek word translated "taking care of his needs" (ὑπηρετεῖν) literally means "to serve as an under-rower on a ship," and it is used metaphorically as "to minister" or "serve." It denotes acting for another or being under the direction of another. Carter and Earle, *Acts of the Apostles*, 363.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 364. See also Witherington III, *Acts of the Apostles*, 714.

⁹⁶ This deduction is mere speculation on the text and is by no means conclusive, but it is equally probable that there were other Christian believers in Caesarea that knew Paul and would want to come to his aid while he was imprisoned there.

⁹⁷ Not much is known about this Aristarchus in Acts. He is assumedly the same Aristarchus mentioned as Paul's

were typically afforded the right to take up to two slave attendants along with them when being transported.⁹⁸ But, there are no indicators that Aristarchus was Paul's slave or that Paul had requested any one to accompany him on the journey to Rome. He was mostly likely a free man who was greatly attached to the Apostle. It is possible that Aristarchus might have incriminated himself in order to journey along with Paul, but it is more likely that Aristarchus just volunteered to accompany Paul aboard the ship as a passenger during Paul's transport to Rome.⁹⁹ The voluntary commitment of Aristarchus to join Paul on this journey demonstrates the high degree of devotion and love that he had for Paul. It seems as though Aristarchus was a man who would do whatever was necessary to care for his beloved friend during this austere voyage.¹⁰⁰

Acts 27 begins what is known as a "first-person narrative section" and resumes Luke's first-person account which he left off in 21:18.¹⁰¹ While some scholars see Luke's first-person narrative of the sea voyage (27:1-28:22) as belonging to a specific sea-voyage genre of ancient literature and therefore functioning as a literary device and not actually suggesting Luke's first-hand testimony of the events,¹⁰² there exists convincing historiographical data that

travelling companion in Acts 19:29 and likely is also the one Paul calls a "fellow prisoner" in Colossians 4:10.

⁹⁸ González, *Gospel of the Spirit*, 269.

⁹⁹ Kistemaker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 916. Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 769.

¹⁰⁰ A similar account of a devoted friend coming to the aid of a prisoner is when Demetrius learned that Antiphilus was "giving up the struggle and refusing even to take food" while he was in prison. Demetrius "set off, just as he was, straight for the prison at a run." Demetrius then devoted himself to sharing "in his [Antiphilus'] life in every way, attending and cherishing him" (Lucian, *Tox.* 31).

¹⁰¹ Harold S. Songer, "Acts 20-28: From Ephesus to Rome," *RevExp* 87 (1990): 451-63.

¹⁰² Vernon K. Robbins, "We-Passages in Acts and Ancient Sea Voyages," *BR* 20 (1975): 5-18. Susan M. Praeder, "Acts 27:1-28:16: Sea Voyages in Ancient Literature and the Theology of Luke-Acts," *CBQ* 46 (1984): 683-706.

supports Luke's personal presence on board the ship, and thus, the validity of his eye-witness accounts of Paul's journey to Rome as he recorded them in the book of Acts.¹⁰³ However, it is important to note that in Luke's first-person narration he never mentions himself in the first person singular and some see this as a lack of Luke's authorial concern for eye-witness support.¹⁰⁴ Even though Luke may not have provided every detail necessary to combat various criticisms, the substantiation from ancient epigraphs and his precision with nautical terminology and geography bears a strong argument in favor of the position that Luke personally travelled with Paul to Rome, likely offering medical care as well as companionship and conversation on the long voyage. Paul would assuredly have been strengthened in his spirit being accompanied by two such caring and compassionate believers as Aristarchus and Luke.

The following day after departing from Caesarea and before the long sea-voyage narrative, the ship that Paul and the others were aboard laid anchor a little farther north along the coast at the port city of Sidon (27:3). At Sidon, Luke writes that Julius, the

¹⁰³ An inscription at Myra attests to the fact that there was an imperial initiative to store grain at the transit ports. Myra was the location where Paul was placed aboard an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy carrying grain (Acts 27:5, 38). Also, an inscription at Crete bears the name-device of "Isopharia" (a name of a protective deity), which is a close parallel to the "Twin Brothers" figurehead on the Alexandrian ship in Acts 28:12. In addition, this inscription was located at the precise location of Phoenix on Crete where the seamen wanted stay for winter (27:12). Furthermore, Luke's geographical placement of the island of Cauda (27:13-16) is remarkably accurate "whereas other literary geographers have erred." "Pliny puts his 'Gaudos' off Hierapytna, some 90 miles too far E; Ptolemy distorts its position to the NW, too near the western end of Crete." Even more conclusively is a well-known inscription that attests to the title of the chief local magistrate of Malta as *πρωτος*, which is the same title Luke ascribes to Publius "the chief official" (NIV) of the island in 28:7. Colin J. Hemer, "First Person Narrative in Acts 27-28," *TynBul* 36 (1985): 94-102.

¹⁰⁴ Susan M. Praeder, "The Problem of First Person Narration in Acts," *NovT* 29 (1987): 196-198.

centurion, “treated Paul kindly, and allowed him to go to his friends to be cared for” (27:3 NRSV). Many Christians were known to live in Sidon and the nearby city of Tyre (cf. 11:9; 15:3; 21:3-6), and even though Paul’s friends are not explicitly identified here by name, it is safely presumed they were believers whom he knew well from his missionary travels or were believers who had heard of Paul and would gladly host him and care for his needs.¹⁰⁵

Julius, the commanding officer in charge of Paul’s transit to Rome, allowed Paul to go to his friends but certainly still under military custody, and therefore, Paul would have been accompanied by and probably chained to a soldier during the time he spent with his friends while on shore in Sidon.¹⁰⁶ The believers at Sidon and any of those who came from Tyre would surely have been devoted to providing spiritual edification and encouragement to Paul as well as social enjoyments and conversation (which he probably was unable to have much of in prison at Caesarea). Paul must have been very relieved and thankful for an opportunity to see familiar faces and to say goodbye his friends as he knew that he would not return to this land for a very long time (if at all). Moreover, Paul’s friends likely also “contributed to his personal comfort in food and clothing for the voyage, which would have been welcomed by Paul after a two-year imprisonment.”¹⁰⁷ The help that Paul received at Sidon (spiritually, physically, and emotionally) would unquestionably have aided him in being prepared and in good spirits to undergo the long journey ahead to Rome.

Upon leaving from Sidon, Paul was accompanied by only Luke and Aristarchus and no mention is made of

¹⁰⁵ Certainly many of the believers were likely those who knew Paul from the time when he stayed in Tyre for seven days before travelling on toward Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey just before he got arrested (21:4).

¹⁰⁶ González, *Gospel of the Spirit*, 270. Carter and Earle, *Acts of the Apostles*, 395.

¹⁰⁷ Carter and Earle, *Acts of the Apostles*, 395.

any other times Paul was able to see other believers until they reached Puteoli in Italy many months later. During the voyage Luke and Aristarchus were probably the only people Paul communed with on the ship. Just as Demetrius remained with Antiphilus each afternoon to keep him “in heart” (in good spirits),¹⁰⁸ Luke and Aristarchus no doubt provided the same aspect of care and friendship for the imprisoned Paul as they slowly sailed toward Rome. Travelling countless miles by sea would have been a very despairing and lonely circumstance in which to find oneself a stranger on a ship full of prisoners. But, Paul was certainly in good company and could take heart from his trusted friends. Probably there was no measure of thankfulness Paul could have ascribed for having such trustworthy allies as Luke and Aristarchus, who would be willing to give up everything in their lives, be closely-associated with a criminal, and accompany Paul on the arduous trip all the way to Rome.

After surviving a couple life threatening incidents on the trip like the storm and shipwreck on Malta (27:44) and the poisonous snake bite (28:3-6), Paul and all the other prisoners were put aboard another Alexandrian ship that had spent the winter at Malta. After stopping at Syracuse in Sicily and Rhegium on the southern tip of Italy, the ship came to Puteoli (28:11-13). At Puteoli, Paul again received exceptional kindness and generosity (benevolence) from Julius the commanding centurion, for Paul was permitted to go ashore and stay with believers at Puteoli for seven days (28:14).

This afforded liberty to stay a week with other Christian believers after such disastrous travel happenings and setbacks was quite unusual treatment for a prisoner in *custodia militaris*, who was already probably quite late in being delivered to the Imperial Court in Rome. It might have been that after travelling with Paul for half a year, Julius had come “to respect

¹⁰⁸ Lucian, *Tox*. 31.

and perhaps in a certain way even love the prisoner who had been entrusted to him.”¹⁰⁹ Julius knew that Paul was a Roman citizen and he surely must have heard the verdict of Paul’s innocence by King Herod Agrippa (as well as with his plea to appeal to Caesar). It could be that this background along with his observed conduct on the ship during the past half-year motivated Julius to be favorably disposed to allow Paul to go to see local believers for such an extended period of time in light of the substantial delays they had incurred thus far during their journey.¹¹⁰ However, it is also possible that Paul and the others on the ship were in a physically weakened condition overall, and therefore, Julius was disposed to letting them leave the ship and be nourished and strengthened in order to prevent illness and disease from setting in and potentially slowing the rate of their travel.¹¹¹ Alternatively, the extended rest at Puteoli might also have been in preparation for the final leg of the journey to Rome on foot,¹¹² or perhaps it was just a natural conclusion and/or custom at the end of a sea voyage.¹¹³

Despite the exact reason behind the permission Paul received to venture off the ship and stay with believers at Puteoli, this opportunity was probably very much needed by Paul (as well as Luke and Aristarchus).¹¹⁴ Paul is treated graciously by the believers at Puteoli even though Paul did not found their community nor

was probably a recognizable face to them. By this sort of unconditional hospitality toward Paul (and his fellow-travelers) from unacquainted believers, “the unity of the church finds visible expression.”¹¹⁵ That is, the loving treatment Paul and his companions received at Puteoli testified that the gospel was living and moving throughout the empire and visibly apparent through the generous hearts of giving in believers like these. On top of that, as he was arriving in this foreign land, Paul was welcomed and cared for as a brother in the faith before going to face the monumental task the Lord had set before him to do. What better means of reviving the Apostle’s spirit and vigor and preparing him to proclaim the gospel than to meet new believers and spend several days fellowshiping and living with them just prior to arriving in Rome.

Furthermore, Paul was not only the recipient of help from fellow-believers, but just as the pagan inhabitants of Malta had shown unusual kindness and hospitality toward Paul and the rest of the members of the wrecked ship by building a fire and welcoming them (28:1), Julius also displayed goodwill and concern for Paul’s well-being by giving him the permission to be looked after by locals.¹¹⁶ Julius was an unbelieving military official who probably made his way through the ranks by being strict and rigorous in his management and policies. Perhaps permitting Paul to be away from the ship for so long was an unconventional move on his part. But regardless of his motivation, or if it actually was a deviation from standard procedure to let Paul go, Julius’ decision helped Paul in ways he probably could never comprehend. Thus, even the most unsuspecting people can be seen to have contributed to Paul’s successful journey to Rome and his preparation to preach the gospel at the capital and before the Emperor.

¹⁰⁹ González, *Gospel of the Spirit*, 278.

¹¹⁰ Kistemaker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 917.

¹¹¹ Gaebelien, *Acts of the Apostles*, 412. But, it can be noted that the ship’s prisoners and crew had stayed on Malta for three months before setting sail again to Syracuse (28:11). During this time, Paul and the others would have been regaining their health and strength after the shipwreck disaster they all had experienced. But nothing is mentioned of their physical condition upon arriving at Rhegium or Puteoli.

¹¹² Witherington III, *Acts of the Apostles*, 786.

¹¹³ Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 787.

¹¹⁴ “Paul’s last known contact with Christians, apart from the members of his party and converts he may have made en route, had been at Sidon some six months earlier.” Carter and Earle, *Acts of the Apostles*, 418.

¹¹⁵ Krodel, *Acts*, 473.

¹¹⁶ Krodel comments on Julius’ willingness to let Paul stay with believers for a week by saying how “God works benefactions through believers and through pagans.” *Ibid.*, 473.

From Puteoli, Paul and the other prisoners travelled by land to Rome, likely on foot.¹¹⁷ Before arriving in the capital, Luke mentions how believers from Rome ventured all the way to the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to greet the Apostle and escort him back to the city (28:15).¹¹⁸ One might wonder how word got sent so quickly to Rome about Paul's arrival in Italy and his travel plans toward the capital, but this is not suspicious seeing as how Puteoli was a city "on one of the great Roman roads, with heavy traffic of all kinds."¹¹⁹ Word could have easily spread quickly along that trade route by Christian merchants or various travelers curious to spread news in Rome about the approach of the "infamous follower" of Jesus of Nazareth. In addition, Paul stayed in Puteoli for seven days, which would have been more than adequate time for the believers to send a messenger to the church in Rome to announce his coming.

Whole house congregations or possibly only select representatives of believers from Rome walked toward Paul along the Appian Way and met him on the road to Rome. The text appears to suggest two distinct companies of believers came out to meet Paul at respective locations (i.e., the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns).¹²⁰ The description of these greeting parties seems to suggest that there was an official delegation from the church at Rome to greet and escort Paul, which could have resulted from house churches in

Rome hearing word of Paul's coming at different times.¹²¹

Acts 28:15 only says that "believers from there [Rome], when they heard of us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us" (NRSV). Did all the believers at Rome up and leave to come greet Paul? Or were the "believers from Rome" mentioned in verse 15 delegates who were commissioned to represent the Roman churches and greet and embrace Paul on their behalf? The text gives no further details besides stating they were "believers" (lit. "brethren" - ἀδελφοί), but due to the fact that they journeyed so far away from Rome to rendezvous with Paul provides a strong indication that they were either former acquaintances of Paul, whom he had met on his missionary trips, or believers who had come to have a cursory knowledge about Paul being informed by updates from Christian circles, or official church representatives sent by the churches in Rome to welcome the Apostle to the capital of the Empire.¹²²

If Paul would have had any apprehension about his reception by the believers at Rome under the present circumstances (i.e., his imprisonment), certainly the warm-hearted welcome and excitement for his arrival well outside the city limits must have allayed all those concerns beginning at the Forum of Appius and then being further bolstered by the second group of believers at Three Taverns.¹²³ Paul is described as giving God thanks and taking courage in 28:15 probably "because in

¹¹⁷ The trip from Puteoli to Rome probably lasted between two to five days depending on the rate of travel. Lenski, *Interpretation of Acts*, 1103. Kistemaker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 956. Bock, *Acts*, 746.

¹¹⁸ The Forum of Appius was ~40 mi/65 km from Rome and Three Taverns was ~30 mi/49 km from Rome. Kistemaker comments how "we have no idea how many believers met Paul on the Appian Way, but we imagine that the joyful meeting at both the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns must have made an impression on Julius [and the rest of the soldiers]." Kistemaker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 956.

¹¹⁹ Lenski, *Interpretation of Acts*, 1101.

¹²⁰ Gaebelien, *Acts of the Apostles*, 423.

¹²¹ Carter and Earle, *Acts of the Apostles*, 418.

¹²² This distance the Roman believers traveled to meet Paul suggests that they must have been close acquaintances and maybe even part of his inner circle of co-workers which the word ἀδελφοί can imply. However, there is no conclusive evidence of who the "brethren" were in 28:15, but circumstantial evidence points toward them likely being part of Paul's inner cohort of fellow-workers or leaders within the church, i.e., those actively laboring together for the sake of the gospel. E. Earle Ellis, "Paul and His Co-Workers," *NTS* 17 (1971): 445-49.

¹²³ Carter and Earle, *Acts of the Apostles*, 419.

these delegations from Rome he saw how the Lord was beginning to prepare the way for him, though a prisoner, he might nevertheless do his part in bearing witness in Rome”¹²⁴ just as the Lord had declared to him long ago in Jerusalem (cf. 23:11). It was a great gesture of honor and praise, as well as love, for the believers at Rome to come as far out as they did to meet Paul.¹²⁵ “That Paul was encouraged upon seeing the brethren does not mean that he was distraught before. Rather, the welcome by the Roman Christians, the favorable impression they made on Paul, the realization that they were with him, leading him in a humble and yet triumphant procession to Rome, became a source for renewed courage.”¹²⁶

When he arrived in Rome (28:16), Paul was allowed to stay by himself in his own rented house presumably under the supervision of a soldier who was appointed to watch him but give him extended liberties that were typically afforded those under *custodia libera*. But where did Paul get the money to rent a house while being in custody for at least two years in Rome since there is no mention of him performing any work during his confinement?¹²⁷ Luke records that while under *custodia libera* in Rome Paul was permitted to receive all visitors who came to him (28:30). Thus, it is quite plausible that the church at Rome made sure Paul received financial support during the two years he was imprisoned there in order to cover his living expenses

and other personal needs (e.g., rent, clothing, food, materials, etc.).¹²⁸

In what is probably the greatest testimony regarding those who helped Paul while in prison, only three days after coming to Rome, Luke records Paul calling together all the local leaders of the Jews in Rome (28:17). It is estimated that there were between 40,000 and 60,000 Jews in Rome during this time and at least eleven synagogues are known from ancient inscriptions found in Rome.¹²⁹ How would Paul have been able to send word to all the Jewish leaders in Rome in such short time after arriving? Either Paul was permitted writing supplies immediately and public couriers were provided to him to urgently carry his letters to all the Jewish leaders,¹³⁰ or the Christian believers at Rome relayed the message by word of mouth or written correspondence on Paul’s behalf. Since the Jewish leaders were favorably disposed to listen to Paul (28:17b), it can be assumed that Jewish anti-Christian hostilities had not yet erupted in Rome. Nonetheless, it is apparent that Paul certainly received some form of help in calling together all the Jewish leaders within three days of coming to town and through this help he was able to begin boldly proclaiming the message of the gospel at Rome without any delay (28:23-29).¹³¹

¹²⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 747. Krodel, *Acts*, 483. Kistemaker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 956.

¹²⁹ H. J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1960), 135-66.

¹³⁰ During his time in *custodia militaris* some sixty years after Paul, Ignatius of Antioch records how he was able to write numerous letters to various Christians during his journey in prison from Antioch to Rome before he was martyred. Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 45, cp. 244 n. 18.

¹³¹ Luke’s record in the book of Acts ends with Paul remaining in his rented house for the following two years “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (28:31 NRSV). No mention is made in the New Testament of Paul’s testimony before Caesar. But, from the testimony of the Lord, Paul was assured of the necessity of his future trial before the Emperor (27:24). Also, tradition suggests that Paul was also freed and continued preaching throughout the empire

¹²⁴ Lenski, *Interpretation of Acts*, 1103.

¹²⁵ Josephus recounts how “the entire Jewish community in Rome went out to meet an imposter who claimed to be Alexander, son of Herod the Great”, as a gesture of devotion and honor to him (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.12.1). Kistemaker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 955 n. 21.

¹²⁶ Krodel, *Acts*, 482.

¹²⁷ Paul had been travelling by ship the past many months and was in prison at least the prior two years before that. It is quite certain to say that he did not have any financial means to support himself in this manner upon arriving in Rome.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

According to ancient extra-biblical sources, prisoners in the Roman Empire were often able to receive a variety of help from outsiders or others with them in prison too. In addition, different degrees of assistance could be given depending on the type of confinement. *Custodia publica*, *custodia militaris*, *custodia libera* all carried a certain manner of restriction, but for some confinements like *custodia libera*, a considerable degree of flexibility and freedom as well. Many noted people in ancient writings are recorded as having received help while in each category of confinement and that the help rendered to them brought significant benefit personally during their time in prison.

In the book of Acts, Paul is mentioned as having received help on multiple occasions during times of imprisonment, especially during the extended duration of custody he experienced as recorded in Acts 21-28. Comparing the accounts cited from extra-biblical sources with those in the book of Acts leads us to conclude that the help Paul received while in prison absolutely affected the operation of his ministry and overall well-being in significant ways, and in at least one instance, saved his life. Some benefits are explicitly mentioned in Acts like the time Paul's nephew disclosed the plot of the Jews in Jerusalem to assassinate Paul (23:16), the inhabitants on the island of Malta (28:2),

and the believers providing seven days of food and shelter for Paul and his companions at Puteoli (28:14).

From the small glimpse that Luke affords us about those who helped Paul, it can be understood that Paul did not "tough-it-out" in prison for so many years in solitude. His success in conducting his apostolic ministry was not solely due to an indomitable spirit or his relentless will power. Instead, what we see contributing to his success was the help he received along the way and that help was incontrovertibly more meaningful than can be perceived from the Lukan account alone. It was without doubt the help he received from the Lord, family, friends, fellow-believers, and even strangers during his imprisonment that enabled him to endure the many years in custody and to journey all the way to Rome and arrive with the strength and mental fortitude to meet with the Jewish leaders relatively shortly thereafter and preach Christ and the gospel of the kingdom.

The care and concern of Paul's helpers certainly was a major factor in Paul managing to make it through years in Roman prison, his ministry finally reaching Rome, his preaching of the gospel message to Roman Jews, and his ultimate purpose of bearing testimony before Caesar himself. Paul, who we can call one of the greatest apostles of the church, would never have made it on his own. His life is a testimony to the power of disciples helping disciples.

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until his death. Eusebius recounts the testimony of the early church that Paul "after pleading his cause, he is said to have been sent again upon the ministry of preaching, and after a second visit to the city [Rome], he finished his life with martyrdom" (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.22). Clement of Rome in 96 C.E. testified that Paul had reached the farthest bounds of the West (i.e., Spain) and testified before rulers (, *1 Clem.* 5.7). Other traditions such as one found in the *Acts of Peter* delineate the multitudes of people who gathered by the Ostia harbor near Rome to see the Apostle off on his way (likely to the West toward Spain). Otto F. A. Meinardus, "Paul's Missionary Journey to Spain: Tradition and Folklore," *BA* 41 (1978): 61-63.

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