

Article

‘Greet My Jewish Friends Among You’: The Recipients in Romans Beyond Encoded Reader (Rom. 16:3–16)

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Abstract

In recent years, a growing number of interpreters propose that the audience in Romans is purely gentile. Problematic for this position is that Jewish persons are greeted by Paul towards the end of the letter in Romans 16:3–16. Respondents appeal to an ancient epistolary convention suggesting that second-person greetings to a third party identify those who are not among the letter’s recipients. Also, the encoded reader is said to be a gentile. This study, however, presents from ancient epistolary conventions most relevant to Rom. 16 that second-person plural greetings assume the third parties are among the same community as the letter recipients. Internal evidence from Rom. 16:6 and 16:16 also confirms this viewpoint. As well, beyond the encoded reader, a reading that affirms the historical recipients of the letter suggests that these recipients include the persons who are named in Rom. 16.

Keywords: letter greetings; ancient letter closings; audience in Romans; encoded reader; implied reader; recipients of Romans; Jew and gentile relationships; Paul’s letter to the Romans; Pauline studies; Christian origins; Romans 16:3–16

1. Introduction

A growing number of studies on Romans propose that the recipients or addressees of this letter are gentiles alone rather than some sort of mix of Jews and non-Jews (Campbell 2023, pp. 17–22; Rodriguez and Thiessen, 2016; Wolter 2014, pp. 40, 44–45; Nanos 1999, 2011, p. 253; Das 2007; Reichert 2001, p. 145; Stowers 1994). Among the strengths of this position is that Paul, an apostle to the nations, seems to address his recipients as gentiles in the letter-frame (Rom. 1:13–14).¹ Likewise, in the letter’s body he explicitly mentions his audience as gentiles in Rom. 11:13. Although the thesis of the letter’s body centers on the gospel of God’s righteousness for both “Jew and Greek” (1:16–17), Paul focuses on issues such as Mosaic law (3:19–20, 27–28, 31; 7:1–25), circumcision (2:25–29; 3:27–28; 4:9–12), Abraham and his posterity (4:1–25), and Israel’s current standing (Rom. 9–11). None of these topics necessitates that Jews must be present to hear the letter. Such topics may be of interest to gentiles who revere Jewish ways and might be familiar with teachings from the synagogue.

Even when Paul directly addresses the one called a Jew in Rom. 2:17, some argue that this is a gentile proselyte claiming to be a Jew (e.g., Thorsteinsson 2003; Rodriguez 2014), though the view has been met with formidable challenges (Oropeza 2021b; Sloan 2023).² The “Jew” in this verse, in any case, is not someone Paul points out from among his Roman auditors but a fictive interlocutor invented to enhance his arguments (Stowers 1994, pp. 150–53). The same may be said for Rom. 4:1, where Abraham is considered “our father



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according to the flesh.” Paul may be addressing this same Jewish interlocutor, or perhaps the interlocutor is posing the question to Paul. Either way, the first-person plural includes a fictive Jew in diatribe discourse, not necessarily Jewish auditors.³ As well, nothing prevents the “strong” and “weak” members in 14:1–15:7 from both being non-Jewish groups that happen to disagree over dietary regulations related to Torah. To be sure, the interpretations of these texts are far from settled,⁴ but these responses do show a conceivable way of reading Romans consistently with gentiles alone as the addressees.

The main problem for the strictly gentiles view is that Paul requests greetings be relayed to a number of persons in Rom. 16:3–16, some of whom appear to be Jewish believers in Jesus. Supporters of the gentiles-only position often respond to this problem by pointing out that Paul’s greetings in this text are in the second-person imperative. He requests recipients of this letter to greet a third party, the person he names. If those addressed are to greet other persons on behalf of the letter sender, then the ones to be greeted are not among those addressed. As such, those who are Jews in this text are not part of the letter’s addressees (Campbell 2023, pp. 414–15; Thorsteinsson et al. 2016, pp. 15–17; Thiessen 2016, p. 46; Rodriguez 2014, p. 293; Thorsteinsson 2003, pp. 63–65, 98–99). Also, a distinction can be made between encoded and empirical readers; the latter is said to be a speculative way of reading Romans since it includes historical inquiries, whereas the former centers on internal observations from the letter itself, the result of which demonstrates that gentiles are exclusively that reader (Stowers 1994, pp. 22–36; Thorsteinsson 2003, pp. 99–100; Hodge 2007, pp. 9–11; Thiessen 2016, p. 11; Thorsteinsson et al. 2016, pp. 15–17; Fredriksen 2017, pp. 156–57).

These responses, however, fall short of being convincing. This study will support the view that the recipients of Paul’s letter to the Romans include Jewish Jesus believers. When Rom. 16:3–16 is compared with other second-person plural greetings, the ones greeted are assumed to be among the letter’s recipients rather than from a different community, and in Romans, there are Jews among those greeted. Likewise, indications from the content of Rom. 16:3–16, such as Mary’s location and the community’s holy kiss, are best explained in terms of the greeted people being among the letter’s recipients. Finally, it will be shown that the letter’s purposes fit well with the assumption that Jews are among the recipients, and thus among the addressees.⁵

2. Jews Among Those Who Are Greeted in Romans 16:3–16

In Rom. 16:3–16 a total of 28 persons are identified (26 with names and two without names), and at least several of these individuals appear to be Jewish including Aquila, Andronicus, Junia, Herodion, likely Prisca (16:3–4, 7, 11), probably Mary (16:6), and possibly Rufus and his mother (16:13).

Scholars generally accept that Aquila was a Jew whom Paul met in Corinth based on Acts 18:1–3 (Gaventa 2024, p. 432; Longenecker 2016, p. 1067; Jewett and Kotansky 2007, p. 955; Cranfield 1979, p. 2:783). Although his wife Prisca is not explicitly called a Jew in this text or elsewhere, it makes sense to assume she is Jewish because the couple is said to have been banished from Rome along with other Jews due to a decree from Emperor Claudius (see Section 5 below). There remains a chance, however, that she is a gentile who happens to be married to a Jew (so Lampe 2003, pp. 85, 158). In Romans, the couple has now apparently returned to Rome.

Paul identifies as συγγενής Andronicus, Junia, and Herodion (16:7, 11). The term may be understood as a blood relative, such as “cousin.” If so, this would mean that not only are these three persons related to Paul but also three of his co-workers—Lucian, Jason, and Sosipater—since he identifies these, too, as συγγενής (16:21). To assume that all six in this letter happen to be relatives of Paul seems to be quite a stretch. More likely, as a

number of interpreters affirm, συγγενής here refers to fellow Jews, which is the way Paul uses the term in Rom. 9:3 (e.g., [Gaventa 2024](#), p. 435; [Moo 2018](#), p. 937; [Dunn 1988](#), p. 2:894). Differently, Andrew Das argues this term is used in the sense of metaphorical family members similar to the way “brothers and sisters” identify believers ([Das 2007](#), pp. 91–97). Paul, however, does not use συγγενής this way in 9:3, and he never uses the term elsewhere except in Rom. 16. The similar non-compound cognate γένος means “kind,” “people” and “nation,” and Paul uses this related term in reference to Jews (Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:5; 2 Cor. 11:26).⁶ It would also seem to have sufficed for him to call these individuals metaphorical “brothers” and “sisters” as he does with Phoebe and Quartus in relation to this list, rather than a more remote term like “cousins.”

Whether Rufus and his mother are Jews (Rom. 16:13) will to some extent depend on whether one accepts that this is the same person named as the son of Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus’s cross (Mark 15:21). The name is common enough in the first-century Roman world to seriously question this connection,⁷ though Paul’s unique description of him as “the chosen one in the Lord” (τὸν ἐκλεκτὸν ἐν κυρίῳ) may suggest a special role for this Rufus among early Jesus believers, comparable with why Mark (traditionally writing to Romans) mentions the Rufus that he knows. Even if [Hvalvik \(2007, p. 167\)](#) is right that the Latin name was used of Diaspora Jews, this still does not raise the odds of Rufus as Jewish beyond a possibility.

Whether Mary (Μαρία/Μαριαμ) is a Jew (Rom. 16:6) may depend in part on whether her name originates from the Hebrew *Miriam* (Μαριαμ: P^{46} א D F G מ, Vulgate, John of Damascus, Theodoret, etc.) rather than from the Latin feminine form of *Marius* (Μαρία[v]: $\text{P}^{118\text{vid}}$ A B C P Coptic, Armenian, etc.). Both Jewish and Roman women were commonly named Mary in the first century (cp. [Ilan 2002](#), pp. 242–48; [Lampe 1992, 2003](#), pp. 175–76). The name accounts for about 23.5% (58 out of 247 total) of ancient Palestinian women (330 BCE–200 CE), according to a study of relevant inscriptions, papyri, and literature ([Ilan 1989](#)). In the Latin inscriptions, “Maria” appears 108 times in *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* VI (Rome), and 19 times for the Semitic name representing Jewish women ([Lampe 1992](#), p. 4:582; [2003](#), p. 176). Richard Longenecker raises that P^{46} is the oldest witness of Rom. 16, and there the name Μαριαμ appears, which is Semitic (cf. מרים, Exod 15:20–21) and thus the harder reading. It could have been changed to Μαρίαν more easily than vice/versa ([Longenecker 2016](#), p. 1059). If so, then she is probably Jewish.

Although Rufus, his mother, and arguably Mary cannot be demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt as Jews, it will not suffice to preclude them as Jews on account of Paul failing to identify them as συγγενής; Aquila is not identified as συγγενής even though he is Jewish. It seems that Paul was not concerned about greeting every Jew on this list as συγγενής, any more than he would be concerned about identifying everyone as “beloved” (16:5, 8, 9, 12). More on this list, for all we know, might be Jews who have adopted Greek or Latin names, as did Paul. Perhaps Paul met the people on this list when they were expelled from Rome, similar to Prisca and Aquila.⁸ It seems more reasonable to suggest, however, that he met them under various circumstances, whether as fellow missionaries, while on their way to the feasts in Jerusalem, while in exile, and so on.

If the majority of those who are Jews on this list happen to be missionaries and understand Paul’s mission to the gentiles ([Campbell 2023](#), p. 415), that only serves to strengthen the notion that Paul would be attempting to rally their support for his mission to Spain (Rom. 15:24–29). Hence, this increases the likelihood that he wanted them to hear this letter, which he anticipated would help confirm their support of him and perhaps prompt them to encourage others in Rome to lend their support. It does not follow, in any case, that a missionary in Rome cannot also belong to a congregation in Rome as one of its members. Given the five who are most likely Jewish among the 26 names on this greetings

list (Aquila, Prisca, Andronicus, Junia, Herodion), a couple of scholars estimate that “If these numbers are representative for all Jesus believers in Rome, at least 19% were Jewish believers; probably the number was closer to 30%” (Stenschke 2018, p. 22; Hvalvik 2007, pp. 171–72, quote from the latter). Based on these figures, if we then assume conservatively that there were 250 total believing members among the various houses, tenements, and other places of gatherings in Rome, this would mean that at least 48 were Jewish.⁹

Two extremes, then, should probably be avoided regarding the greetings list in Rom. 16: (1) that all these people were Jewish; and (2) that none of them were Jewish. It will suffice to suggest that at least a significant minority were Jews, and the rest were non-Jews.

3. Second-Person Greetings of a Third Party in Ancient Letters

The greetings in Rom. 16:3–16 include the second-person plural imperative ἀσπᾶσασθε, which is mentioned sixteen times. The auditors are addressed in the plural “you,” and they are to greet a third party, the persons and groups whom Paul names. Does it follow that those who are greeted are not among the addressees of this letter? At stake is whether the Jewish persons mentioned in these greetings are among those whom Paul addresses as the recipients in Romans. Runar Thorsteinsson appeals to a work by Terence Mullins, who affirmed through his study on ancient letter papyri that second-person greetings are indirect; the addressee becomes the agent who establishes communication with a third party that is “not intended” to be among the letter’s immediate readership (Mullins 1968, p. 420; Thorsteinsson 2003, pp. 63, 98). The most relevant examples Mullins provides from ancient letters among the Papyri Oxyrhynchus collection and other sources are mostly private letters related to greetings in the second-person singular relayed to family members, for example, such as a request to greet the addressee’s mother, brother, or father (e.g., P.Oxy. 295; 1676; P.Tebt. [2.]412; Mullins 1968, pp. 418, 421). Through this study, Thorsteinsson maintains that the third parties to whom Paul requests greetings in Rom. 16 are not part of the letter’s audience (Thorsteinsson 2015, pp. 63–65, 98–99).

In a rare instance, Mullins mentions a letter from the late second or early third century CE with a second-person plural greeting (ἀσπᾶσασθε) to a third party (P.Oxy. 533), though Mullins does not comment on this aspect (Mullins 1968, p. 423). Peter Head provides a good sampling of 74 ancient greetings from Greek letters. He concludes that the named people to greet, if further identified, very often have close family ties with the reader (Head 2019, pp. 272–75, 284–90). A number of these greetings use the second-person singular—the aorist form ἀσπᾶσαι is used 30 times in these letters, while the present form ἀσπᾶζου 19 times (without any apparent distinction: P.Oxy. 530 uses both). Only one of these letters uses the second-person plural, P.Oxy. 533, which happens to be the same letter mentioned by Mullins (Head 2019, pp. 272 cf. 289). Prior to Head’s study, Jewett and Kotansky likewise found only this same example of an ancient second-person plural greeting (Jewett and Kotansky 2007, p. 950 n. 4). This letter has a father, Apion, who is writing to his son, Apion, and another person identified as “dearest Horion” (hence, the need for a plural second-person greetings). The letter pertains to various business matters, and towards the end of it, the father wants them to greet other family members: “Greet [ἀσπᾶσασθε] Statia my daughter and Heraklides and Apion my sons. Greet [ἀσπᾶσασθε] little Serenos and Koprea and all those of us [i.e., our household] by name” (Oxyrhynchus Letter 533, lines 26–28, translation mine based on the text in Grenfell and Hunt 1903, p. 272). The letter turns out to be a private, familial business letter.

Several problems arise when we compare Mullins’s study of ancient letters with Paul’s own letters. First, the apostle’s relevant third-party greetings are not requested with second-person singulars but plurals. Second, Paul’s letters are typically not private but

intended to be read publicly before assemblies in Christ. Third, Mullins suggested the second-person greetings imply that the letter's writer has a closer relationship with the addressee than with the one greeted, and this type of greeting often assumes the addressee has a closer relationship with the one greeted than the writer (Mullins 1968, p. 420). Romans 16 is different, however. Paul, the letter writer, has never visited the Roman Jesus-believing community, and it is clear that he has a closer relationship with the third persons he wants the second persons to greet than he does with the second persons. This is perhaps to be expected, for as Harry Gamble affirms, Paul aims to stress the relationship between the greeted and the apostle himself, and "it can be seen that Paul's commendatory greetings to specific individuals serve to place those individuals in a position of respect vis-a-vis the community, but also, by linking the Apostle so closely to them, place Paul in the same position. At the same time, those singled out for greeting are claimed by Paul as his advocates within the community" (Gamble 1979, p. 92).

A fourth problem is raised by Peter Oakes against Mullins's lexical approach. Oakes points out that in the same context of Rom. 16 Paul not only requests to greet other people but also, using the same second-person imperative, to "greet one another" (Rom. 16:16). For Oakes, this means "to greet other people who are among the recipients of the letter" (Oakes 2009, p. 77 n. 25). A fifth problem is that the non-Pauline letter greetings typically have people named as other family members of the reader specifically addressed. Head, in another study, concludes that this aspect tends to support one's "thinking of greeted family members as within the extended readership of the letter (and not excluded)" (Head 2024, p. 278).¹⁰

These difficulties prompt us to conduct a more concentrated review of Paul's second-person greetings, whether among themselves or to a third party. Rather than interpret Rom. 16:3–16 centered on second-person singular greetings from private letters of antiquity, it makes far better sense to compare our text with other second-person *plural* greetings of antiquity that are *not* private letters but are addressed to ancient congregations in Christ, similar to what we find in Romans. It so happens that certain greetings in both undisputed and disputed letters of Paul, along with other ancient Christ-community letters, meet these criteria and shed light on our understanding of Romans 16.

4. Second-Person Plural Greetings Addressed to Christ Communities

Among the undisputed letters of Paul, the second-person plural command at the letter close to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (ἀσπάσασθε ἀλλήλους ἐν φιλήματι ἁγίῳ) in Rom. 16:16 is likewise found in 1 Cor. 16:20 and 2 Cor. 13:12 (though with switched places for ἁγίῳ and φιλήματι in 2 Cor.). In 1 Cor., the letter recipients are to greet other congregation members among themselves with this kiss. There may be an assumption here that the members in Corinth could all meet together in one facility (1 Cor. 11:18, 34; 14:26). Perhaps Gaius's home, if a villa, would be large enough to accommodate such a gathering (cf. Rom. 16:23). Somewhat different is 2 Cor.—the letter's opening is addressed not only to the ἐκκλησία in Corinth but to all the saints throughout the region of Achaia (2 Cor. 1:1). Complicating the identity of addressees, various opinions are that this letter may comprise anywhere from two to five original letters, and 2 Cor. 10–13 stands out most prominently as one of them. This makes it difficult to determine whether the greeting at the end of 2 Cor. 10–13 assumes the same audience as in 2 Cor. 1:1. In any case, whether Corinth by itself or Corinth and congregations in neighboring towns are meant (e.g., Cenchrae), the recipients of the letter are to greet other members of their respective gatherings in Christ with this kiss.

Paul's formula is slightly different in 1 Thess. 5:26: "greet all the brothers and sisters (τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς) with a holy kiss." He continues by adjuring his recipients to have the

letter they are currently hearing read to “all the brothers and sisters” (1 Thess. 5:27). The letter, incidentally, is addressed to the Thessalonian ἐκκλησία (1 Thess. 1:1). His assumption seems to be that some of the believers in the city were not present to hear the first reading of the letter. Did the leaders read it first and then read it to the rest of the congregation afterward? This is certainly possible (see [Mustakallio 2008](#), p. 232). Another option is that this letter was first read to one congregation in the city, and Paul now wants it to circulate to other gatherings of believers in the city ([Gehring 2004](#), pp. 178–79). His solemn adjuration in 1 Thess. 5:27, perhaps written by his own hand instead of that of his amanuensis, ensures the widest distribution possible and may betray ethnic or social differences in Thessalonica. The first audience, at least, should include the rebellious idlers in 5:14 in a later reading.¹¹ Practice of the holy kiss would seem to help unify believers in the city.

Apart from Paul’s letters, 1 Peter 5:14 has a similar request in which letter recipients are to greet one another with a “kiss of love.” Unique here is that this letter is addressed to numerous believers living in different regions covering more than 100,000 square miles in distance: Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Pontus, and Bithynia (1 Pet. 1:1). The letter, then, is either an encyclical or one in which many copies were distributed to the various regions. It would be virtually impossible for congregations in one region to greet all the other congregations in other regions with this kiss. The act must then be understood as something that was done within one’s own congregation or network of congregations in a respective city or region.

Beyond the New Testament, the kiss seems to have developed into a standardized way of greeting other Christians in one’s own gathering, whether after baptism and prayers (Justin, 1 *Apol.* 61.65) or with men greeting men and women greeting women (*Apost. Const.* 2.57; 8.11). The kiss signaled a way to encourage solidarity and familial-like affection among congregation members in a respective location. Paul doubtless encourages it for the same reasons. His use of the reciprocal “one another” (ἀλλήλους) in relation to the kiss stands out in Rom. 16:16. The auditors already connected ἀλλήλους with mutuality, unity, and love among members in their own congregations (Rom. 12:10, 16; 13:8; 14:13, 19; 15:7, 14). Such observations suggest that in 16:3–15 the greeters and those whom they are to greet both participate in the holy kiss of 16:16 as members of the *same* Jesus-believing community in Rome, though perhaps from different gatherings in this city.

Paul charges his Philippian recipients at the close of the letter to “greet every saint in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:21). Here there is no reference to the holy kiss but a second-person plural greetings for a third party is nonetheless used, which seems to be the same group he addresses as “all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi” (Phil. 1:1). The singular πάντα here may be distributive, emphasizing that each member of the community be greeted ([Fee 1995](#), p. 457). Whether all the Philippian believers could fit into one facility to hear this letter read, or whether this involved leaders reading the letter first and then having it read to their congregations afterward (as [Mustakallio 2008](#), pp. 233–34), or something else, Paul’s expectation seems to be that everyone in the Jesus-believing community in Philippi is the addressee and should hear this letter.

Among disputed Pauline letters, we find the second-person plural ἀσπασασθε at the closing of Colossians. The congregation is to greet the brothers and sisters in Laodicea as well as Nympha and the ἐκκλησία in her home (Col. 4:15). After reading this letter, the Colossians are to bring the letter to the ἐκκλησία in Laodicea so that the members there could read it, too, and the Colossians likewise are to read a letter that was sent to the Laodiceans (4:16).¹² The greetings in this case are to be relayed to believers in another ἐκκλησία in a neighboring city who have not yet read the letter. Nympha’s home is presumably one of the assemblies in Laodicea. The requested greeting may stand in for “greet for me,” though more broadly than this, the Colossians are to express their own affection,

too, for the Laodiceans (Beale 2019, p. 360). Since the Colossians are to swap letters with the Laodiceans, we thus have first and second readers of the same letter, similar to the Thessalonians, but this time it involves neighboring cities.

Elsewhere in the NT, we find a second-person plural greeting to a third party at the close of Hebrews, where the author's command is to "greet all your leaders and all the saints" (Heb. 13:24). The greeting is to be comprehensive for the entire community in Christ (Attridge 1989, p. 409). The assumption appears to be that this community has at least several congregations with leaders in each, and not all of them were present at the first reading.¹³

Letters in the NT that have greetings in the second-person *singular* are different than those in the plural. In 2 Timothy 4:19, Timothy is to greet Prisca and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus, who are all presumably in the same city as Timothy (Ephesus: 1 Tim. 1:1–3). This letter, however, is addressed to Timothy only. In Titus 3:15, Titus is to greet "all those who love us," which would exclude the false teachers that are causing problems in Crete. Greetings appear to be to those in the same Christ-community as Titus, but this letter is addressed to Titus only. In 3 John 15, Gaius is to greet "the friends by name," that is, mutual friends with the author, whether local, itinerant, or both. The letter is addressed to Gaius only. In these three letters, even though others are to be greeted within the same respective community, there is no indication that the ones greeted are to read the letter also. The same conclusion, as we already observed, cannot be drawn for the second-person plural greetings in the NT. As such, inferences drawn from second-person singular greetings should not be imposed onto second-person plural greetings.

Among earliest Christ communities, then, in every case of the second-person plural greeting given towards the end of the letter, the otherpersons to be greeted are either expected to be among the recipients of the respective letter that is read (1–2 Cor.; 1 Pet.; probably Phil.), or they are to be among the subsequent recipients and auditors of the letter (1 Thess.; Col.; Heb.). There is not a single case in which the persons greeted were not expected to be among the hearers of the letter. All of Paul's second-person plural greetings—the only type of greeting he *personally* makes at the end of his letters—not only inspire unity and love among congregations and their members, but they also appear to be a way of expressing his own affection, friendliness, and honor of the person or group to be greeted. He, in essence, is saying, "Greet and kiss them for me, too!" This type of greeting, as Jeffrey Weima rightly affirms, functions virtually as a surrogate for the first-person greeting, as though Paul greets the third person himself. "If it is asked, 'Why then did Paul not use the more personal first-person greeting?', the answer seems to be that the involvement of the congregation in passing on his greetings to others expressed a stronger sense of public commendation for those individuals being specifically greeted by the apostle" (Weima 1994, p. 108).¹⁴

Hence, in Rom. 16:3–16, those addressed in second-person plurals, and the third-person parties that are greeted, belong to the same community in Christ. That community appears to be a connection of gatherings in the city of Rome, whether in tenements, houses, shops, or other places, some perhaps more loosely linked together than others.¹⁵ The call for a holy kiss in Rom. 16:16 encourages unity among Paul's auditors in Rome that includes those who were just named in the previous verses. The kiss command is mutual, as explained by Josh Ip: "Paul not only writes to congregation members in Rome to greet those he names, but also writes to those he names to greet congregation members in Rome" (Ip 2022, p. 14).

In these verses several gatherings in Rome appear to be mentioned including Prisca and Aquila's congregation (16:5a), those from Aristobulus (16:10), those from Narcissus (16:11), those who are with the ones just named in 16:14, and the "saints" who are with the

ones named in 16:15. Beyond these groups, one suspects that in a large city like Rome, Paul was unaware of at least several more congregations of Jesus believers that would regularly meet. It is very likely, then, that he did not expect every believer in Rome to be gathered together to hear this letter when it was read for the first time. Rather, he may have expected the letter to make its rounds among the various groups in the city, including those with Jewish members. If so, then the greetings in Rom. 16:3–16 best resemble those that are found in 1 Thess. 5:26–27 and Heb. 13:24.

Our study thus far makes it improbable that the persons who were greeted in Rom. 16:3–16 were not expected to be among the recipients of this letter, let alone that Paul could know in advance *who* would be present among the gatherings in Rome to hear his letter being read.¹⁶ Stephen Westerholm is apropos here: “Can we really imagine that the twenty-five [*sic*] named individuals, all in Rome, *and* the one ‘assembly,’ the two households, and the ‘brothers and sisters’ and ‘saints’ who met in two other groups were all excluded from those for whom Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans—merely because Paul requests that they be greeted?” (Westerholm 2022, p. 72). Even so, it is not just Jews on this greeting list that become problematic for interpreters who want the readers to all be gentiles. There is another problem with *gentiles* being on the same list, as Oakes explains: “One might, at a stretch, argue that a letter addressed to ‘all those in Rome beloved by God, called to be holy ones’ (1:7) is sent only to Christian gentiles, not Christian Jews. However, it seems almost impossible to suppose that the letter is not at least addressed to all the Christian gentiles in Rome, including those named in Romans 16” (Oakes 2009, p. 77 n.25).

5. The Location of Mary and Others on the Greeting List

Another point worth pursuing is to verify whether the persons greeted in Rom. 16:3–16 actually live in Rome (as in Rom. 1:7) or somewhere else. Several decades ago, scholars fiercely debated whether Rom. 16 was once a separate letter addressed to the church in Ephesus that was then attached to the end of Romans (e.g., Manson 1962, pp. 225–41; 1991, pp. 1–15). A consensus among scholars these days agrees on the integrity of Rom. 16:1–16 and 21–23 (Donfried 1991a, pp. 44–52; 1991b, p. lxx).¹⁷ Arguments against the older perspective included, for example, the overwhelming archaic manuscript support for the relevant portions of Rom. 16, as well as it hardly making any sense that a letter this long would not include standard epistolary features found in Paul’s letters such as commendations, greetings, holy kiss, final instructions, and a signature benediction (Gamble 1979, pp. 47–55, 89–95; Ollrog 1980, pp. 221–44; Jewett and Kotansky 2007, pp. 8–9; Mathew 2013, pp. 3–4).

More recently, Peter Bolt suggests that the many names in Rom. 16:1–15 are an entire missionary team sent to Rome from Paul along with the letter (Bolt 2019, pp. 391–427). The Romans are to greet this entourage of individuals who have come with their leader, Phoebe, to Rome. If so, then they are not part of the letter’s recipients. There are difficulties, however, with this view despite its novelty. First, there are too many missionaries on this team. Not only must we count Phoebe and 28 other persons whom Paul identifies, but just as many, if not more, who belong to the five households he mentions. Are we to assume that when Phoebe arrived in Rome, she showed up at the door of a house or tenement with 55 to 175 other individuals? How would they all be accommodated? Where would they stay? We could imagine the overwhelming burden this might cause Roman believers to feed and house all these extra guests. Surely, this would not give them a good impression of Paul, who was attempting to build rapport with them. Second, if this viewpoint were correct, then it hardly makes sense that Paul requests the Romans to assist Phoebe, a wealthy and self-sufficient benefactor, but does *not* request assistance for all of the non-wealthy companions who traveled with her. Third, Paul’s language does not fit

well with this situation. We might expect Paul to request that the Romans “welcome” these people, which is what he requests for Phoebe (προσδέξῃσθε: 16:1–2), rather than request that the Romans “greet” (ἀσπάζασθε) them. Colossians 4:10 provides a good example of this distinction—Aristarchus, who is not present with the recipients of the letter, relays a greeting to them, whereas if Mark comes and visits them, the recipients are to “welcome” (δέξασθε) him. Finally, there do not appear to be parallel examples of this type of greeting in other letters of antiquity (so [Head 2024](#), p. 281 n. 29).¹⁸ These are some of the reasons why I do not find this interpretation of Rom. 16 convincing.

A standard argument supporting that those who are greeted in Rom. 16 actually live in Rome depends on the author of Acts correctly claiming that Prisca and Aquila came from Rome to Corinth due to Claudius’s decree that reportedly banished them as Jews from Rome (Acts 18:1–3). They had now returned to Rome after the emperor died in 54 CE, and Paul writes to the Romans a few years after this (c. 57 CE). If this view is accepted, this would explain the couple’s presence in Rome again (Rom. 16:3–5), and it suggests that the others greeted along with them are likewise in Rome. There remains a controversy, however, regarding Claudius’s expulsion. Early in his reign, he reportedly disallowed Jewish meetings (Cassius Dio *Hist. Rom.* 60.6.6), and then, apparently, he banished Jews from Rome on account of a disturbance instigated by one named “Chrestus,” a name that, as a number of interpreters suggest, may refer to Christ (Suetonius, *Claud.* 25).¹⁹ According to Paulus Orosius’s interpretation of Suetonius (and Josephus, though no extant reference for the latter has been found), this disturbance involved Christ’s followers during Claudius’s ninth year (49 CE) (*Historiarum Adversum Paganos* 7.6.15–16). The reliability of this source is often questioned, *inter alia*, because Orosius is claiming these things centuries after the event (early 5th century). Even so, the narrative in Acts 18:1–17 independently corroborates a compatible date with 49 CE based on the recent expulsion of Prisca and Aquila together with mention of the proconsul Gallio, who held office in Achaia 51–52 CE (based on the discovery of the Gallio inscription). The author of Acts, however, complicates the matter by not specifying Jewish Christ-followers but claiming instead that “all the Jews” were banished from Rome (Acts 18:2). Are we to assume that tens of thousands of Jews living in Rome at the time were all expelled?²⁰ Many would suggest instead that this is hyperbole and that only the ring-leaders or Jewish groups causing the problem were expelled. Given the controversies surrounding these sources, it may be a good idea for us to find further confirmation elsewhere regarding the location of those greeted in Rom. 16.

Romans 16:6, routinely overlooked in these discussions, provides such confirmation. Paul requests to greet Mary, “who labored hard for you.” This woman seems to be either a missionary among the Romans ([Mathew 2013](#), p. 109) or she is simply devoted to the tasks she does for them ([Dunn 1988](#), p. 2:893). Either way, she worked hard at ministering to and building up other believers, comparable with the sense of κοπιᾶω Paul uses in 1 Cor 15:10; Gal 4:11; Phil 2:16; 1 Thess 5:12; and Col 1:29 (cf. κόπος: 1 Cor 15:58; 1 Thess 1:3). Eckhard Schnabel suggests Rom. 16:6 refers to Mary’s work among the Romans prior to her expulsion by Claudius. Paul had met her during that time, whether in Achaia, Macedonia, or the province of Asia ([Schnabel 2016](#), p. 869). Since then, she returned to Rome. Differently, Lampe suggests that Paul “has heard stories of her activities,” her service to the Romans ([Lampe 2003](#), p. 168; cf. 166). Regardless of who is right here, Mary’s service is for the Roman community in Christ—the “you” (ὁμᾶς) in this verse.²¹ Paul uses the same second-person plural pronoun to address the recipients of the letter in Rom. 15:15, 22–24, 26, 30, 32–33; 16:1–2, 16, and also in the opening letter frame at 1:6, 9, 11–13, 15, as well as 11:13. In other words, Mary is to be greeted and honorably recognized on Paul’s behalf as a laborer from among the *same* Christ community of believers in Jesus in Rome that reads this letter.

Given the commonality of her name in both Jewish and Roman contexts, one might expect that Paul would give more information about her so that his recipients would not confuse her with other women among them who might happen to have the same name. The problem would be alleviated somewhat if her name happened to be the Jewish Μαριαμ, given that this nuance was not as frequently used in Rome (see Section 2 above). All the same, those in Rome could more readily know which Mary Paul is referring to by virtue of her description as a hard worker among them, and to know this, they must already know her very well. Also, when hearing the letter being read, she could identify herself as the Mary to whom Paul refers. Hence, she is almost surely expected to be hearing this letter read in Rome. That is because Paul very likely imagines her to be among the “all” whom he addresses in Rom 1:7. Paul also describes other women who labor as Mary does—Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis (Rom. 16:12). The auditors would assume that, similar to Mary’s work, these women also labor among them. For Tryphaena and Tryphosa, the present participle plural accusative τὰς κοπιώσας suggests that their work is ongoing in Rome. How does Paul know about the dedicated efforts of these women in Rome? It is perhaps an assumption he makes due to knowing their character personally, or he has heard about their present work from third persons, or both.

Important corollaries follow from these observations. First, since Paul assumes Mary is among the recipients of this letter, it follows from this that the others who are to be greeted in 16:3–16 are likewise in Rome and expected to be among the recipients, those whom Paul addresses in this letter. Second, although Mary may be Jewish, it matters little whether this is actually the case or not—some others on this greeting list definitely are Jewish, and they, too, like Mary, are then expected to be among those in Rome who hear this letter.

6. Romans 16:3–16 and the Letter’s Purposes

Confirmation of those on the greeting list as members of the Roman community in Christ underscores the importance of Rom. 16 for this letter. We can now suggest with some confidence that the command to greet the named individuals helped ensure that this letter would circulate throughout the city until all those who were named at the various gatherings had a chance to be greeted and hear the letter.²² Also, it could now be suggested that Prisca and Aquila and their assembly were expected by Paul to be its first auditors since they are mentioned first among those to be greeted.²³ Perhaps mutual friends of the couple and Paul informed Phoebe, the letter carrier, of the location of this couple’s workshop in Rome so that she could visit them first. Alternatively, if the couple’s location was not known, Phoebe may have had business associates in Rome that might connect her to a different Jesus-believing assembly. Phoebe herself appears to be unknown to the Roman congregations; she needs Paul’s recommendation (16:1). Once the first assembly had read the letter, Prisca and Aquila’s congregation would logically be the next to read it as the first ones Paul requests to greet. From there, it appears that he expected his former colleagues would ensure that every other group in Rome that believed in Jesus had a chance to hear the letter, too.

It is clear enough based on Rom. 1:7 that Paul wanted his letter read to “all” believers in Jesus in Rome.²⁴ The recipients in this verse are those “who are beloved of God, called to be holy ones.” This seems to include not just gentiles but also Jews, whom Paul elsewhere in the letter designates as “beloved” (11:28), “called” (11:29), and “holy ones” (15:25–26) (see Theissen and Gemünden 2016, p. 96). Jason Staples seems correct to suggest that in Rom. 1:5–7, Jews, not only gentiles, are “among” (ἐν) the nations. Paul could have specified gentiles exclusively if he wanted to in 1:7: “Paul could easily have encoded an exclusively gentile audience by referring to ‘all from the gentiles’ (ἐξ [τῶν] ἐθνῶν) in Rome, beloved

of God' or by leaving out the 'all' in the adscription, but he did neither, instead explicitly addressing the letter to *everyone* in Rome who is beloved of God" (Staples 2024, p. 21). It should also be pointed out that Paul speaks of his apostleship as "we" in Rom 1:5.²⁵ This likely refers to both he and other apostles before him bringing about the obedience of trust "among all the nations" (ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν), which was not meant to exclude the Jewish people, similar to the way εἰς ὑπακοὴν ἔθνῶν in 15:18–19 seems to reflect his gospel to people not only in Illyricum but starting in Jerusalem.²⁶ These texts are in keeping not only with Paul wanting to stress his apostolic authority to Rome but also that the gospel goes out to the "Jew first" (Rom. 1:16). His gospel, though targeting the uncircumcised, does not exclude Jews (Rom. 11:14–15; 1 Cor 1:22–24; 9:19–23; 2 Cor 3:14–16; 11:24).²⁷

The more believers and assemblies Paul could reach in Rome, the better chance he would have of receiving a warm welcome and support once he arrived in Rome, despite any negative rumors his recipients might have heard about him (Rom. 15:22–32; cf. 3:8). The greetings underscore Paul's desire to be supported by the Romans for his upcoming mission to Spain, a primary reason why he wrote this letter (Rom. 15:24, 28).²⁸ It would seem to be essential, then, for him to recognize and honor all his friends and acquaintances in Rome by name; they would be foremost among those who might support his mission and rally others to do so. In fact, for his future mission to succeed, it makes no sense that he would request support in this letter from only the assemblies whose members he did *not* know while neglecting the assemblies whose members he did know. He would seem to want every Jesus believer in the city, Jew and non-Jew alike, to hear his letter and support his mission. We could surmise that his Jewish companions would feel dishonored, even insulted, if their beloved friend, whom they had not heard from for many months, only greeted them but did not invite them to hear his letter that included his plans relevant to visiting them. His travel plans to visit the addressees, and the request for them to pray for him (Rom. 15:30–34), could hardly fail to include those in Rome whom he personally knows.

Related to his upcoming visit to Rome and mission to Spain, one of this letter's purposes is to serve as Paul's self-introduction to believers in Jesus he has never met before. The multiple salutes, along with a sampling of his gospel to the Jew and the Greek in the letter body, helped establish Paul as a legitimate and authoritative apostle in the recipients' estimation. In agreement with Weima, then, the apostle's greetings and laudations serve to win over the Romans' trust and highlight a relationship between Paul and the believers he knows in Rome, which in turn underscores his own authority: "Paul marshals support for himself at Rome by praising specific individuals located there, but also by associating himself so closely with these individuals that he himself indirectly shares the commendations that they receive" (Weima 1994, p. 116 cf. 117).²⁹

In addition, the imperatival holy kiss and relayed greetings compelled their assemblies to communicate with one another on affectionate terms, thus eliciting unity among the various gatherings. Such would seem to be needed in a community assumed to have "strong" and "weak" participants at odds with each other over matters of table fellowship (Rom. 14:1–15:7). The greetings in Rom. 16 are thus expressly connected with the main reasons why Paul wrote this letter.³⁰

7. Epistolary Auditors in the Letter Frame

Stanley Stowers distinguishes between the empirical reader, the encoded explicit reader, and the encoded implicit reader in Romans. Those who read the actual letter in Rome are the empirical readers, but the encoded readers are those who are inscribed in the text, whether explicitly in verses such as Rom. 1:5 and 11:13 or implicitly as the ideal reader derived from the knowledge, assumptions, and expectations of the text (Stowers

1994, pp. 21–22).³¹ For him, the encoded readers are gentiles. Although Stowers expects overlap between the explicit and implicit encoded reader, he insists that the empirical reader be “sharply distinguished” from the encoded reader. He writes, “I can know with certainty that the audience in the text is gentiles at Rome who know something about Jewish scripture and Jesus Christ, but I can only speculate about who actually read the letter, their assumptions, knowledge, and reactions to the letter” (Stowers 1994, p. 22; cf. 33). Stowers does not deny that encoded and empirical readers “associated with Jews and had Jewish followers of Christ among them”: he points out Prisca, Aquila, and three others as Jews in Rom. 16. He claims nonetheless: “Ancient letters frequently send salutations to individuals who are not encoded readers” (Stowers 1994, p. 33).

However, the letters of Paul and early Christ-communities, as we already observed, do not always conform to other ancient letters. Salutations in second-person plurals include those who are expected to be among the audience of the letter, such that it is difficult to maintain a “sharp” distinction between “empirical” and “encoded” readers. I am not alone when it comes to seeing problems with this approach. Philip Esler opines that Stowers’s encoded and empirical distinction is unhelpful for Romans: “For Paul to have written a letter that did not address his intended audience would have represented a catastrophic failure of communication on his part ... the people to whom the argument of the letter is addressed ... are the same as those whom Paul intended would, and most probably did, read it” (Esler 2003, pp. 110–11). Perhaps a better approach to reading Romans comes by way of Luther Stirewalt’s study of ancient epistolary theory. He stresses that Romans is non-fictional and that “Paul’s letters are ‘real’ letters, written communication between identifiable parties, in an historical context, on subjects that arise out of their relationships” (Stirewalt 1991, p. 163; cf. 2003, p. 108).³² If so, then it would seem that the “readers” in Romans cannot be easily divorced from a “real” or actual, historical setting and purpose for the letter. Put differently, the “empirical” reader *matters* in a letter like Romans, not just the encoded reader, and that is because Romans is a real letter from a real author to a real audience. This audience stands out most prominently in the epistolary frame of 1:1–17 + 15:14–16:27 since this is where the undisputed first-century author identifies himself as an apostle and addresses an actual community of believers in Jesus in Rome that was expected to hear this letter and greet others among themselves, some of whom were Jews.

The conventional features of the frame in Romans that communicated information about the sender, recipients, greetings, travel plans, and so forth, helped condition its original recipients, the auditors, to hear this portion of the letter without making distinctions between encoded and empirical readers. The letter frame is not accented with the type of diatribe, interlocutors, and prosopopoeia that one finds in the letter’s body.³³ For these recipients, then, those addressed as “all” in Rom. 1:7 included the people greeted in 16:3–16. This is why we should not adduce from Paul’s mention of gentiles in the letter frame (1:13–14) that Paul is *exclusively* addressing gentiles throughout this letter. William Campbell does not think the “all” in Rom 1:7 includes the group in 16:3–16: “otherwise this would be needless duplication (to specifically greet some separately after all had been addressed, and subsequently greeted directly at the end of the letter, would be strange)” (Campbell 2023, p. 414). On the contrary, as we have already discussed, those to be greeted are vitally important to name if they are to establish Paul’s credibility in Rome, encourage support for his mission to Spain, and circulate this letter to the various gatherings in the city. Moreover, they are the ones who can vouch for Paul’s gospel that he communicates in between the letter frames.

We also should not conclude that the apostle writes to an exclusively gentile audience based on Rom. 11:13. When Paul in this verse addresses gentiles, his words are not merely stressing direct address and gaining the attention of his gentile audience for the exhortation

that follows (as suggested by [Stowers 1994](#), p. 288).³⁴ Rather, Paul is clarifying that his exhortation against arrogance towards Jews in 11:13–32 does not pertain to the Jews among his auditors listening to this message, but to the gentiles only. He directly narrows down his audience for a similar reason in Rom. 7:1; however, in that case, he addresses another subset among them—he singles out those who know Mosaic law (probably both Jews and certain gentiles) from those who do not (other gentiles). The most intuitive reason, then, for his wanting to identify gentile auditors in 11:13 is because Paul expects that Jewish auditors, inclusive of, but not limited to, those he names in Rom. 16:3–16, will also hear this letter.

8. Conclusion: Jewish Auditors Not Excluded

This study confirms that those who are to be greeted in Rom. 16:3–16 are among the letter’s recipients, and these recipients include Jewish believers in Jesus. This remains an acute problem for interpreters who want to assert that Romans is addressed only to gentiles. From this text, we learned that the second-person plural greetings to a third party do not correspond well with the second-person singular greetings from ancient private letters. Rather, they correspond well with other ancient community-in-Christ letters that similarly use second-person plural greetings. The comparisons suggest that this precise type of greeting is relayed to those among the same community of believers as those who hear the letter. In Romans, those who are greeted belong to the same community in Christ as the addressees, the “all” in 1:7, and this is made explicit by the example of Mary in Rom. 16:6, as already pointed out. Also, we can stress that both Rom. 1:1–17 and 16:3–16 function as part of the letter’s frame. Both texts are equally important for determining the letter’s recipients. Beyond the encoded reader, Romans is a non-fictional letter written by an undisputed author who sent this letter to a real community in Rome in the first century. As such, the historical audience matters, especially to Paul. This study additionally shows the importance of the greeting list in relation to the purposes of why Paul wrote Romans, including apostolic self-introduction, appeal to congregational unity, and especially support for Paul’s upcoming visit to Rome and mission to Spain. Although gentile auditors are surely present in Romans, even the majority, this study concludes that the letter was not only written for them but also for the Jews among them.

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Notes

- ¹ Confirming a gentile interpretation of Rom. 1:13–14 is ([Stark 2022](#), pp. 45–69).
- ² In favor of the view, see also ([Fredriksen 2017](#), pp. 156–57; [Thiessen 2014](#), pp. 373–91; [2016](#), pp. 54–59; [2023](#), p. 102; [Campbell 2023](#), pp. 97–103; [Novenson 2024](#), p. 98). Against the view, see also ([Windsor 2021](#), pp. 235–37; [Öhler 2021](#); [Westerholm 2022](#), pp. 59–64; [Staples 2024](#), pp. 23–24).
- ³ Rom 4:1 is difficult to translate. Compare NRSV: “What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh?” with ([Hays 1985](#)): “Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?” and then ([Stowers 1994](#), p. 242) who attempts to remove *σάρξ* from Jewish ancestry: “...Have we found Abraham to be our forefather by his own human efforts?” Rather, I translate it as follows: “What then shall we say we have found of Abraham, our father according to the flesh?” The question expects the answer, “Abraham was *found faithful*.” This is how he seems to be characterized in Second Temple literature (1 Macc. 2:52; *Jub.* 17:18; 19:9; Sir. 44:19–20; Neh. 9:7–8).

- ⁴ For example, (Hays 1996, pp. 36–37), granting Stowers’s encoded-reader language in 2:17 and 4:1, nonetheless raises the point that since a Jew is being addressed, Jews are then included as such readers. A similar problem arises in Rom. 14:1–15:13. Regardless of whether the weak and strong are real or imagined characters, it seems reasonable to suggest that the weak group is not identified as exclusively gentile given that Paul ends this section with Christ as the servant to both Jews and non-Jews (Middendorf 2013, p. 14). There seems to be a mutuality encouraged for all believers in Rome, Jews included, and both gentiles and Jews are depicted in the catena of Scripture quotations in 15:7–12 as worshipping the Lord together (see, e.g., Shohe 2017, esp. 227). If so, then Jewish believers in the Lord Jesus (included in the “we” in Rom. 14:6–9), even if “encoded,” are among those addressed by Paul—he directs his imperatives and exhortations not only to the “strong” but sometimes to the “weak” (Rom. 14:3–5, 10). On the weak being addressed in some of these verses, see (Watson 2007, p. 178).
- ⁵ In this work, unless otherwise specified, I consider the *recipients* of this letter and the *addressees* as generally the same persons. These addressees I regard as “all those who are in Rome” whom Paul addresses in Rom 1:7. Moreover, I consider *auditors* (or audience) as also these same persons. They are the ones who on this occasion of Phoebe bringing the letter to Rome, heard this letter read to them. This is the case regardless of whether these auditors were the first, second, third, or subsequent gathering of believers in Rome who happened to hear the letter that was brought to them on this occasion. I assume the letter needed to be circulated to the various gatherings of Jesus believers in Rome, as discussed in the main text. Together, these various gatherings of believers I regard as the *community* in Christ in Rome. I seriously doubt that Paul, who wanted to encourage unity among believers in Rome, intended to make a distinction between those who heard the letter, and the addressees of the letter, let alone that his auditors would make such distinctions.
- ⁶ Notice BDAG, 194, 950. See also (Ehrensperger 2013, pp. 17–32).
- ⁷ (Lampe 2003, pp. 181–82) finds 374 examples in *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* VI. In regions mostly from Asia Minor, I found 318 examples in the first century, using the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* database (www.lgpn.ox.ac.uk) (accessed on 15 October 2025).
- ⁸ But if so, this does not necessarily mean that everyone in Rome who was exiled was Jewish. (Thorsteinsson 2003, p. 96) may be right to suggest that we cannot take for granted that Roman authorities easily distinguished between gentile and Jewish “Christians,” so that none of the former were exiled with the latter.
- ⁹ I say “conservatively” because the amount of Jesus believers had to be large enough to be a recognizable threat in Rome: Nero persecuted them just several years after this letter was written. Their number as a “great multitude” at that time (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.5; 1 *Clem.* 6.1) may suggest far more than a few hundred when Paul wrote to them. On this point, see (Chapple 2011, pp. 205–6).
- ¹⁰ I was pleased to discover that, independent of my own research over the last few years, Head in this recent article also finds problems with Mullins’s greetings.
- ¹¹ On social differentiations, see further, e.g., (Malherbe 2004, pp. 344–45); on idlers, see (Weima 2014, p. 430).
- ¹² They also must relay Paul’s personal exhortation to Archippus, who is either in Colossae or Laodicea (Col. 4:17).
- ¹³ Incidentally, comparing this reading with the multiple house churches in Rome is (Koester, p. 74; cf. 583).
- ¹⁴ Although Tertius, Paul’s amanuensis, greets in the first person (“I, Tertius, greet you”) using ἀσπάζομαι ὑμᾶς (Rom. 16:22), we should not infer from this that Paul should have done likewise, or that Tertius should have followed Paul’s form. First, Tertius is not Paul. Second, we do not know with any confidence his relationship with the Romans (is he one himself, and if not, does he know the same people Paul does?). Third, at the end of his letters, when Paul gives a personal greeting (i.e., he is not greeting on behalf of someone else), he never greets in the first person with this verb but always uses the second person. We should not expect him to do otherwise here.
- ¹⁵ I concur, then, with scholars like (Gaventa 2024, p. 432; Longenecker 2011, p. 84; Jewett and Kotansky 2007, p. 113) who find various Jesus-believing groups in Rome. This is a more satisfying reading than my assuming that since Paul mentions only one *ekklesia* in the letter (in Prisca and Aquila’s home: 16:5), there is therefore only one *ekklesia* of Jesus believers in the entire city of Rome. Paul seems to know of five gatherings in Rom 16:3–16 even though he does not call them all by *ekklesia*. (Schnabel 2016, pp. 867, 878–79) suggest at least seven congregations—the five gatherings named in 16:5, 10, 11, 14, 15, and two more to account for the other people Paul mentions but does not attach to a specific gathering. All the same, we should not make too much of the point that Paul mentions no “church” or *ekklesia* in the prescript of Romans. This may be accidental or casual; three other Pauline letters also do not include the term in the opening (Phil. 1:1; cf. Col. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Schreiner 2018, p. 50).
- ¹⁶ On the second point, see especially (Du Toit 2004, p. 154).
- ¹⁷ However, the opponents in Rom. 16:17–20 and the doxology in 16:25–27 are still debated. Most scholars these days consider the blessings-wish in 16:24 a later addition; few modern translations still retain it.
- ¹⁸ This last point alone I adopt from Head; the other points I already previously argued prior to the publication of Head’s article. For Head’s own list of problems with Bolt’s view (again independent from my own), see *ad. loc.*

- 19 Interpreters who address the controversy, along with its sources, and the date(s), are many. (Das 2007, pp. 149–202) has a good treatment of the issues and generally favors their use in relation to Romans. Alternatively, (Thorsteinsson 2003, pp. 92–96) approaches the connections with skepticism.
- 20 Estimates for that time extend to about 50,000 Jews (e.g., Leon 1960, pp. 135–36).
- 21 (Lampe 1991, p. 220) translates the relevant phrase in Rom. 16:6 as “she has worked hard among you,” but he provides no reason for “among” as the proper translation of εἰς. We assume that he adopts the Western witnesses here (εν υμιν: D F G). Other texts have “for us” (εἰς ημας: C2 L 33 m, Armagh, Vulgate, etc.). But “for you,” εἰς υμας, is clearly the strongest reading with the oldest witnesses: B46 B118 x A B C P Ψ 6, 81, etc. Moreover, the second person plural is the harder reading: one could surmise that a copyist who wrote ημας probably thought it implausible that Paul would know how hard Mary worked for another *ekklesia* that did not belong to him, and this is perhaps how the alteration from υμας to ημας came about. Mary is thus with the recipients of the letter, not with Paul, a point that the Western witnesses probably sought to clarify by using εν rather than εἰς.
- 22 Differently, (Mustakallio 2008, pp. 236–37), suggests from 1 Thess. 5:26–27 and Phil. 4:21 that Romans had a two-staged delivery process, with the “first audience” comprised on “church leaders,” and a much larger “second audience” of “ordinary believers in the church.” The leaders read the letter first and then had the responsibility to transmit the message to the second audience, among whom may have been those greeted in Rom. 16. But if so, I wonder why Paul did not think of including apostles like Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7), not to mention missionaries and workers like Prisca, Aquila, and perhaps Mary, Persis, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, among the first-round “leaders.”
- 23 If so, then it is not simply because Paul knows them best that they are first mentioned.
- 24 Notice also the “all” in Rom. 15:33.
- 25 (Moo 2018, pp. 11–12) affirms that Rom. 1:5–6 (and 13) do not “so much identify the national complexion of the community as to locate it within the scope of his [Paul’s] commission to the Gentiles.” I would alter Moo’s “Gentiles” to “nations” in 1:5 and add that if Paul is an apostle to the nations, affirmed so by Jerusalem’s apostles (Gal. 2:7–9; see also note 27) whom the Roman believers highly respect as the original proclaimers of Jesus Messiah (Brown and Meier 1983, pp. 89–127), then his stress on his own apostleship here strongly implicates that his authority extends to Rome.
- 26 In Rom. 15:15–16, 18, τὰ ἔθνη and [τῶν] ἐθνῶν, along with Rom. 1:5–6 (τοῖς ἔθνεσιν), can be translated as “the gentiles” or “the nations.” I lean towards the latter given its good contextual fit with the locations of “Rome” (1:7) and “Jerusalem” and “Illyricum” (15:19) (though cities and a province, technically speaking). Paul is normally understood as an apostle to the *nations* given that his calling echoes that of Jeremiah 1:5–10 and the servant of Isa 49:1–8 (Gal 1:15–16; 2:2; 2 Cor 5:18–6:2; see also Scott 1995, pp. 124–28). This calling, incidentally, does not preclude Jews, especially among the nations, even as Jeremiah’s call to the nations did not prevent him from preaching to his own people (see Staples 2024, pp. 21–27).
- 27 Although recognized as an apostle to the uncircumcised (Gal. 2:7–9), this should not be interpreted as though Paul were now *prohibited* from reaching the circumcised, anymore than Peter would now be prohibited from reaching the uncircumcised. On Paul’s gospel to Jews, see (Bird 2016, pp. 85–102; Oropeza 2026, chapters 4–6).
- 28 Among scholars who support this as the purpose for Romans (Jewett and Kotansky 2007, pp. 80–91, 941–48) have some of the most developed arguments, though one does not need to agree with all their particulars (e.g., that Phoebe in Rome will be organizing the mission for Paul) to recognize the importance of Paul’s upcoming trip to Spain.
- 29 Similarly, see also (Toney 2008, pp. 38–39). (Chapple 2011, pp. 209–10) would add that naming the individuals in Rom. 16 assists *Phoebe*, pointing out the persons she could rely on over there.
- 30 On the multiple purposes of Romans approach, see (Oropeza Forthcoming).
- 31 On p. 334 n. 56 (cf. p. 21) Stowers (1994) references for his theory the collected work edited by (Suleiman and Crosman 1980). I noticed that none of the essays in this collection focus on ancient epistolary theory, which would be more suitable for Romans.
- 32 As such, we may rightly suggest that Paul’s letters function within a social network of actual communities. On social networks, see (Dingeldein 2022, p. 286; Doering 2013, pp. 385, 428).
- 33 On the complexity of “readers” in the letter-body of Rom 1:18–15:13, see (Oropeza 2021a, esp. pp. 7–9).
- 34 (Stowers, *Rereading*, 287–88) responds that this verse addresses the whole audience, not a portion of it. He paraphrases the text of Rom. 11:13–14 as follows: “Yes, I am addressing you gentiles in this letter *but* you should understand that my very ministry to the gentiles has direct relevance to the salvation of my fellow Jews and their salvation to your own” (288). However, a non-paraphrased reading brings out the addressees at this point better: “Now to you, the gentiles, I speak: indeed then, inasmuch as I am an apostle of gentiles I will honor my ministry if somehow I might provoke to zeal-jealousy my flesh (Israel) and save some of them.” (Gaventa 2024, p. 9) is right to suggest that the “sharp turn” to gentile auditors in 11:13 “undermines the notion that Paul addresses only gentiles, since, if the entirety of the letter addresses gentiles and only gentiles, then the shift at 11:13 becomes superfluous.” It should not be surmised, however, that Jews had to cover their ears to avoid hearing what Paul writes in 11:13–32; (Wagner 2002, p. 268) is probably correct when suggesting that Paul still wanted Jews to overhear these words.

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